



High Road developer claims to be improving East Finchley

By Daphne Chamberlain

The controversial proposal to build 21 flats on the former GLH site opposite the tube station was finally approved by Barnet Council at the end of July, although hedged around with well over 30 conditions.

Developer Safeland's managing director Larry Lipman was quoted as saying: "The redevelopment brings high quality residential investment in the area and the removal of the blight of a mini-cab office. We're pleased because it gives us a chance to bring improvements to the neighbourhood."

GLH not a 'blight'

Mr Lipman might be interested to learn that mini-cab GLH, who have relocated to Bounds Green after the termination of their lease with Safeland, are a long-standing and highly regarded business with strong links to East Finchley.

GLH House, once called Valona House and also The Shrubbery, is one of the oldest buildings in Finchley, certainly there before 1841. It has been associated with car hire since 1953, when Cyril Wilds bought it. GLH took over in 1968. It will now be demolished and lost forever.

The development replacing it has been criticised by local residents and councillors, The Finchley Society, English Heritage and independent architects as inappropriate, cramped, intrusive and possibly dangerous.

How does any of this improve East Finchley? *The Archer* contacted Mr Lipman, but he has not replied.

Sprinkler installation

It will be some time before formal planning permission can be granted, as so many details need to be agreed with Safeland plc.

Just before the last Committee meeting, it emerged that the Fire Brigade were concerned about how they would gain access to the site. They advised installing sprinklers. Safeland said they would do this, but the Council has no way of ensuring this will be done and refused to impose a planning condition.

There is also concern about how sprinkler installation will affect the height of the

buildings. On block B, in particular, the floor to ceiling height is already below that recommended by the Mayor's London Plan. This is the block which is the closest to neighbouring houses, and which already towers above them.

The Archer understands that if alterations are made to comply with Building Regulations, then another planning application should be made.



Fenced off: Valona House as it looked in August

Demolition of an historic landmark

By Ruth Brown

The Archer has previously reported on the planned development of 21 flats and two parking spaces opposite the tube station, which has been approved by Barnet Council in the face of a petition signed by more than 1,000 people.

What has been somewhat overlooked in the controversy over the size and layout of the new development is that the scheme involves the demolition of Valona House, until recently used as GLH offices.

It's an elegant Georgian villa about 200 years old, and probably the oldest house in East Finchley, because it's shown on a map from 1841 when most of East Finchley was just fields.

Very little survives from that time. Valona House's restrained Georgian style and its prominent site at the gateway to East Finchley are also a sign of its age. If you know of an older East Finchley house, let us know!

In the 1940s Valona House and neighbouring Park House were a prominent landmark because Park House had a Spitfire plane on the lawn belonging to the Royal Airforce Association which was based in a building in the grounds of Park House.

The old Park House was demolished in the 1960s. At the time of going to press, Valona House was behind a builder's hoarding, and is soon to disappear as well.

Valona House: a survivor from our elegant past

Here we reprint an article by Kathryn Scorza, first published in *The Archer*, August 2005, which explores the history of Valona House.

In the first half of the 19th century, East Finchley had several elegant houses with grounds, many of them along Fortis Green and East End Road. Most are now known only from photographs, having been demolished many years ago.

One remains, however, at 12-18 High Road, now 'GLH House', which stood opposite the site where the station would be built, long before the railway came to East Finchley.

The parish map of 1841, compiled to show the annual tithes due from landowners, shows a house on the GLH House site of the same shape as today's building. Parish records show it was registered as 'house and garden' to Thomas Wood, who lived there. He paid a tithe of one shilling and three pennies a year. On a map of the late 1860s it was called Valona House but by the 1880s, it had been renamed The Shrubbery. It was home to a succession of families recorded on the electoral roll. A deed of around 1900 for a nearby prop-



Historic: A map from the 1860s centred upon Valona House, opposite the White Lion pub before the arrival of the railway line. Courtesy of Ordnance Survey and LB Barnet.

erty shows The Shrubbery and labels the rear part of the building as stables.

By 1937, when the current High Road numbering had been adopted, it had become No.14. In the 1950s the occupant was a dentist, Sydney Puckey. In 1953, Cyril Wilds bought the house, which he let out as flats, and his Car Hire Service moved to the yard.

The adjoining shop was occupied by a succession of bakers from before the turn of the century. Cyril's son Nigel can remember the smell of baking bread as a child, and bought cakes at Percy Stokes, the baker, after school.

In 1968, GLH took over the newly established minicab business, working from Portacabins in the yard until earlier this year, when it took over the house.

The rear extension was destroyed by fire in the 1980s

and rebuilt. The front part of the house was unaffected. The recently-added portico at the front, therefore, masks what is one of the few surviving buildings from the earliest days of East Finchley.

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