



Festival faced cancellation in clash of dates

By David Melsome

Organisers of East Finchley's community festival faced the prospect of cancelling the massively popular event and disappointing thousands of visitors after an admin error by a Barnet Council contractor resulted in the festival's regular date being reserved for another event.

Plans for the 50th anniversary festival in its regular midsummer Sunday slot, this year falling on 23 June, were well under way when the volunteer team were invited by Kent-based company The Event Umbrella, who are contracted to handle Barnet's parks bookings, to submit their repeat event booking.

However, despite submitting their booking well before the 27 October deadline, they were dismayed to find that the date had already been reserved for East Finchley's other big summer event, the Race the Neighbours 10km run, where 300 runners from East Finchley, Highgate and Muswell Hill come together in friendly rivalry.

Entirely innocently, the race team had decided to move their event from its previous date on the first Sunday of June to later in the month. When they requested Sunday 23 June from The Event Umbrella several months ago, before the bookings process had officially opened, they were given the go-ahead with no questions asked.

Unfortunately, the Event Umbrella had not realised that Race the Neighbours were requesting a change of date and

approved the booking before the call had gone out to Barnet's regular events to secure their repeat dates. The festival team had no prospect of moving the festival by even one week as they'd already got sponsors, suppliers and facilities committed and their premises licence was only valid for that weekend.

Fortunately, East Finchley councillor Alison Moore stepped in and escalated the matter to the area's Executive Director, citing the festival's long history and importance within the borough as reasons that it should not be disrupted.

Festival director Alison Roberts said: "It was ironic that, having been acknowledged as Barnet's longest-running festival and invited to consult on the upcoming Barnet Borough of Culture bid, we found ourselves faced with the possibility of having to cancel the 50th East Finchley Festival."

Co-organiser Mike Hughes added, "We're very grateful to Race the Neighbours for being so accommodating and realise that none of this was their fault."

The Archer attempted to reach the Race team and the Event Umbrella for comment.



Long drop: Fire crews make safe the broken masonry and brickwork above the Amazing Grates shop.
Photo Mike Coles

Masonry collapses on High Road

By Janet Maitland

A chunk of masonry fell from the top of the Amazing Grates fireplace shop on the High Road at about 9am on Sunday 12 November. Fortunately, no one was hurt.

"I felt sick with the shock of what might have happened," said owner Liz Tew, who called the Fire Brigade soon after it happened.

Fire fighters evacuated the building, put a cordon around it and closed off the bus lane. As soon as their 32-metre turntable ladder arrived, officers were

then able to climb up to ensure the remaining brickwork on both sides of the building was safe.

A surveyor from Barnet Council also came to inspect the damage. "He said he was called out to falling masonry about twice a month in this area," said Liz Tew.

"Our building was put up in about 1905, so wear and tear over time is obviously a factor, but lots of rain doesn't help of course. After our experience, I would advise everyone to check for signs of crumbling bricks and mortar and to call the council surveyor if you're not sure."



Court concerns: Catherine West MP, third from right, meets members at Fortis Green Tennis Club

MP hears views on tennis club housing

By Diana Cormack

Catherine West MP visited Fortis Green Tennis Club to hear views from members about the proposed redevelopment of the club's grounds, off Southern Road, N2. As we reported last month, site owner Muswell Hill United Reformed Church and developers Capstone Group have put forward plans to build eight homes and a new clubhouse, while reducing the number of tennis courts from four to three.

The MP for Hornsey and Wood Green, in whose constituency the club sits, heard many members express their opposition to the proposals. Like the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) on a previous visit, she also commented on the provision for children. The site as it is laid out now is particularly safe with its single entrance and total lack of traffic.

In its own inspection, the LTA recognised the club's unique features with its spacious tree-lined setting. Mrs West said the venue brought "an extra pair of lungs" to the vicinity.

The tennis club itself had

told neighbouring residents that it had been asked to get involved in the redevelopment discussions but was not supporting the plans as they currently stood.

At the time of writing there were hopes among those who opposed the proposals that a bordering ransom strip of land might play a part in thwarting them.

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