

“The Suburb is the jewel in Barnet’s crown,” says Cllr Andrew Harper



RA committee chairmen often express their frustrations with Barnet council for apparently not doing enough to protect the Suburb and its residents from the attentions of Highways and other departments. So it seemed a good time to ask one of our ward councillors how he felt they were doing on our behalf.

Andrew Harper, one of our three Garden Suburb Ward councillors, retired early after 26 years with BP. “I had spent a great deal of my time travelling and wanted to get involved with the

local community where my wife and I have lived since 1984 without my spending much time here.” An opportunity arose to stand for election to Barnet Council in 2005 when Vanessa Gearson moved on. Andrew won a bye election and was re-elected the following year.

The Council works on a cabinet system, part of the local government reforms introduced by Labour in 2000, with each department the responsibility of a cabinet member. Andrew is responsible for the departments looking after Environment and Transport which between them cover much of what affects the Suburb. “We have clearly defined portfolios and it makes the authority more directly accountable.”

Asked how important the Suburb is in the broader scheme of things, Andrew said, “It is the jewel in the crown. There are other conservation areas in the borough but Hampstead Garden Suburb is internationally renowned.”

One would have thought then that a special case should be

made for making sure the actions of his departments don’t damage the Suburb environment.

“It’s usually a question of resources and how much to spend in different wards. Politically it is not easy to argue for funds for the Suburb which might otherwise go to a more needy part of the borough. Labour members cannot see why the Suburb should get preferential treatment and at the same time, as a cabinet member, it can be politically difficult for me to be seen to favour my ward.”

But does it cost much to make sure that road signs, road markings etc measure up to conservation standards? Why should the most recent CPZ signs have to be on tall posts at front of the pavement instead of, as was agreed originally, discreetly placed against the hedge?

“Those tall signs frustrate me, apparently they are a legal requirement, but I hope we will get round that one. As to road signs. I would love to have one set at each end of Falloden Way /

Lyttelton Road instead of the forest of signs the RA complains about. I hope that some good will come of the Design Guidelines agreed recently. But keep in mind this is a very large borough and officers are working to plans that leave little scope for flexibility in work programmes.

What is happening about the CPZs on the Suburb?

“There have been calls from a number of Hampstead Way residents for the scheme to be extended to stop commuter parking but when we carried out the statutory consultation residents there voted not to have the CPZ. It’s frustrating that these things take so long but it does take months. There is a rolling programme of reviews of CPZs all over the borough. We will carry out another consultation but not for another two years.”

People in Willifield Way were ticketed recently for pavement parking where it has been ignored up to now by the parking attendants. It has been said that our councillors should be

representing us and helping to have the fines cancelled.

“We do take action when we get complaints and will take up certain cases but no elected member can get people off parking fines. The law is quite clear about cars on the pavement and complaints are received from pedestrians.”

What else do your constituents get worked up about?

“Not surprisingly many Suburb residents are mainly concerned about environmental issues, recycling, traffic speed, planning and crime. Recycling is a real success story – Barnet started rather late but we are catching up. The recent extra collections in blue boxes have seen a significant increase from 300 to 565 tons a week. This may come down as I suspect residents knew it was coming and were keeping plastics and cardboard back. There will soon be a new fleet of trucks making the collections facilitating sorting. We have a good record in supplying uncontaminated waste which is all sold to UK companies

so it’s not adding to the problem somewhere else in the world.

I take road safety seriously and am concerned that a lot of driving on the Suburb is dangerous. People are perhaps too familiar with the roads and in too much of a hurry. The police will be increasing the use of mobile speed guns and cameras.

I know the planning people work well with the Trust in conserving the Suburb and just wish the government inspectors would back us up. The Royal Oak, the Suburb’s pub, was a case in point. Barnet tried to save it but the government inspector said he couldn’t see any reason to.”

As well as being a councillor and cabinet member Andrew is a Trustee of Henrietta Barnett School, the Institute, the Akiva School and the Arts Depot. Why does he do it?

“Because it is all hugely enjoyable. I like being involved with the community and, especially on the Suburb, having to deal with people who are not afraid to say what they think.”

...but that’s not good enough for Barnet’s critics

We can all unite behind Andrew’s view that the Suburb is (or should be) the jewel in Barnet’s crown.

However, Andrew’s candid acknowledgement that as a Cabinet member he sometimes faces a conflict of interest over issues relating to the Suburb is a concern. Andrew and his colleagues are elected purely to represent their constituents some of whom will be alarmed that this relationship could be affected by a political appointment.

The style and size of modern local government has generated a feeling that residents’ needs are subordinated both to political interests and the imperative to raise vast sums of money. This is not a party point – all parties seem equally unable or unwilling to bring their Council organisations under control. It may well be, as Andrew’s comments suggest, that the use of the Cabinet system has driven a greater gulf between councillors and their constituents. Certainly within local government any

concept of public service has long been supplanted by a ‘do as you’re told’ attitude towards the public.

To see how this works in practice we need only look at Temple Fortune where a CPZ could be proposed on the basis of a tiny handful of requests and introduced with only minority local support. In the past we might have expected councillors to have supported the majority position but the Cabinet system appears to make this more difficult for them and in the process fuels the feeling that parking regulations in particular are often made with revenue in mind rather than traffic management.

Andrew talks about the future for that CPZ and he is right to say that residents in Hampstead Way opposed the zone when first consulted. If those residents are now changing their minds it is only because they are suffering traffic displacement caused by the Council’s scheme. They are angry and frustrated about a problem which did not exist

before the CPZ was introduced. As the RA warned at the time these adverse effects are inevitable in a CPZ programme which fails to take all local interests into account. Golders Green Road has suffered dreadfully for that area’s large, long-established CPZ and councillors would bear a heavy responsibility for any future such decline in Temple Fortune. Other Residents Associations are just as worried about the effects of this misguided policy including the Barnet Residents Association whose excellent report, Parking Recommendations 2008 can be read at www.barnetresidentsassociation.org.uk.

Andrew talks about residents contacting him over parking ticket matters and how he cannot “get people off parking fines” but the RA is not asking him to do that. The problem is the over-enthusiastic use of Council powers. The aggravation caused to residents can be intense and the Council has often been far too quick to use draconian measures

against the most vulnerable members of the community. We see too many cases of court orders being issued and bailiffs being used against elderly or disabled drivers in pursuit of fines that were imposed for largely technical offences. What is most needed is not the intervention of councillors in egregious individual cases but for some common sense to be injected into the Council’s parking department so that such cases never arise.

On a positive note, Andrew’s comments about the continuing use of short posts are encouraging and we are pleased to have his backing on this issue. Short posts at the back of pavements, which are used elsewhere – such as throughout North Finchley – must surely be appropriate for use within the Borough’s internationally renowned conservation area.

Working with local government must sometimes be

as frustrating for councillors as it is for residents but Andrew and his colleagues might pause to consider whether it is the nature of modern local government that is to blame for the hostility with which so many people view the local authorities today. They have a great opportunity to do something about that.

GARY SHAW – CHAIRMAN, ROADS & TRAFFIC COMMITTEE

DEREK EPSTEIN – CHAIRMAN, CONSERVATION & AMENITIES COMMITTEE

‘Breaking the Code’

The Hampstead Garden Theatre have, in Richard Kinder, a remarkable actor. He recently gave a tremendous performance as Salieri in ‘Amadeus’ and here he is again in the huge role of Alan Turing, the man who at Bletchley Park broke the Enigma Code and thus, according to Churchill, played a significant part in shortening the war.

He broke the code also in his private life since he was openly homosexual. This made him a criminal in the eyes of the law and because of the importance of his work he was constantly spied

on and his friendships with young men scrutinised. He committed suicide in 1954 at the age of 42. Hugh Whitmore’s play movingly tells Turing’s story.

Turing was rather naïve and unwordly and besotted with mathematics. Richard Kinder has the knack of inhabiting a role. His whole being is in the role; voice, face, body language are all in character – making him fascinating to watch.

The play, sensitively directed by Robert Jayes was strongly cast and there was not a false note. Paula Morris gave a touchy

portrayal as Sara Turing, Alan’s uncromprehending mother.

The law, in its various forms, was represented by Andy Farrer, Christian Rodredge and Rusty Ashman. Fred Greissen as Dilwyn Knox, portrayed a man able to hide his homosexuality convincingly.

The Gatehouse is not the most comfortable place, but this play somehow gained from the unconventional space.

The evening was a real treat and Robert Jayes and the cast can congratulate themselves on a great success.

LÉONIE STEPHEN

‘London Assurance’

Much as I admire Colin Gregory as an actor and director, I have to admit that I find the playwright Dion Boucicault tedious and unfunny, and Gregory’s up-dating to 1950 from 1840 did not work. The production was slow and further slowed down by musical interludes of Chopin which, though beautiful, went on too long.

The plot is quite complicated. Sir Harcourt Courtly-Max, played

with lovely pomposity by Tony Newton, is looking to marrying a hieress. His unworthy son, Charles (Geoff Prutton), has his eye on the same girl, Grace (Vanessa Williams). Sir Harcourt-Max has a servant called Cool, a very slippery customer to which Tim Solomon brought a nice sense of evil.

Lady Gay Spanker and her husband, Adolphus were given lively life by Diana Bromley and

Amos Witztum. I fear that I have never found these two characters funny, especially Lady Gay, but I thought Diana Bromley made a brave attempt.

Colin Gregory also designed the set and the use of film (organised by Rob Petit) was very effective.

At three hours it really was a long haul.

LÉONIE STEPHEN

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