

RA gains significant improvements to Suburb street scene

After nearly three years of difficult negotiations and endless nagging, the Residents Association, in partnership with the London Borough of Barnet, has achieved significant improvements to the Suburb street scene.

Some thirty signs and posts are being removed, a dozen concrete bollards have been replaced by oak posts and another 12 entirely removed. In Edmunds Walk, for example, four tall posts and signs are being removed, including three that disfigured the beautiful green with its willow trees; outside Meadway Court, two ugly concrete bollards have been replaced with oak posts and the appearance of Willifield Green (pictured) has been much improved by the removal of the ten ugly concrete bollards.

In January 2006 the Residents Association proposed to LB Barnet an initiative to rid the Suburb of some of its unnecessary street clutter in time for the Suburb's Centenary beginning in May 2007. This was to be accompanied by the acceptance of new guidelines by officers, so that new inappropriate works do not need to be rectified at public expense later.

The Centenary year came and went. Progress is now being made

but the whole process has been excruciatingly slow.

Although, the Design Guidelines proposal was welcomed by Highways and Heritage officers and by the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport in July 2006, Barnet initially refused to progress it. So the RA eventually took on the job of preparing a draft which was submitted to Barnet in May 2007.

It took eight months for the Council's initial feedback to be received and then until October 2008 for the negotiation of the detailed provisions to be concluded. The majority of matters were agreed and the remaining issues, on which it is hoped that agreement can be reached in subsequent discussion, are documented in an appended RA Position Paper.

The Design Guidelines, which can now be found on the RA web site at www.hgs.org.uk/ra/consam, cover such matters as signs, posts, road markings, street lighting, street furniture and street trees; and standards for maintaining pavements, verges, carriageways, and footpaths. Although LB Barnet has agreed to use its best endeavours to comply with the Guidelines, mistakes can occur and residents are encouraged to

assist the RA and LBB by reporting any breaches of these standards and deficiencies in maintenance of public spaces by emailing consam@hgs.org.uk

Progress on the de-cluttering works has been equally slow. In September 2006, Barnet refused to fund the work or even to discuss it further until third-party funding had been provided. In August 2007, when the RA had established that there would be no call on its ordinary funds to pay for its Centenary celebrations, a deal was agreed with Barnet for a budget of £20,000, to be funded 50/50 by the RA and Barnet. The then Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport, Matthew Offord, instructed officers to work with the RA to define the precise scope of the works. Despite pressure from the RA, this process did not begin until January 2008 and full feedback on a joint survey, promised for the end of February 2008, was not received until October. Finally, a schedule of works was agreed in November, the works orders placed in December and the work (or most of it) carried out in January 2009 – three years from the date of the original agreement.

Progressing these works with Barnet's Highways department



Willifield Green without its row of ugly concrete bollards

has been a constant battle as it showed endless creativity (of the Yes Minister variety) in finding new excuses for delays. While this initiative to reduce the visual intrusion of highways clutter has been proceeding, the Highways team at Barnet has put forward proposals which would make matters worse, for example the painting of double yellow lines and flashes on the pavements in residential streets, using tall rather than short posts to indicate

parking bays or restrictions and other intrusive traffic measures, without consulting the RA. When the RA intervenes as a result of hearing about these proposals from residents, the Council often concedes that its proposals were inappropriate. It is hoped that RA's offer (see front page) to provide a mediation service may obviate some of these problems.

Recently, there have been changes in personnel at the top at Barnet and the RA is hoping that, under new management, the Highways department will work more cooperatively with

the RA. The RA is now trying to persuade Barnet to move forward without further delay on some remaining de-cluttering issues, of which the most significant is (with Transport for London) the 'pruning' of the ridiculous forest of signs on and immediately off the A1. Finally, with the support of our ward councillors, the RA is lobbying the Council to make provision in future budgets for the reinstatement of pavements and verges which have, in the past, been inappropriately repaired.

DEREK EPSTEIN, CHAIRMAN OF THE CONSERVATION & AMENITIES COMMITTEE.

Letters to the Editor

1 North Square, NW11

Sir,
The controversial design of the new wings for Lutyens' Institute building on Central Square has excited much critical comment. The modern plate glass windowed structures will not follow the themes of the neighbouring buildings by Lutyens, Sutcliffe or Soutar in either design or brick colouring, will fill in 100 year old spaces, will dominate the tops of Northway and Southway and alter the appearance of Central Square for ever. In the years to come it will be ordinary Suburb residents – not the architectural experts – who will be facing either an architectural masterpiece, a missed opportunity or a disaster.

It is unsurprising that Barnet has passed the plans but astonishing that the HGS Trust, paid by the residents to be the real guardians of the Suburb's existence, has also nodded them through. There has only been the most cursory of public

consultations with incomplete plans for an unusually short period last August when many were away on holiday. New permanent buildings affecting the internationally renowned architecture at the Suburb's heart have been treated by the Trust in a bizarrely hands off way. There seems to have been little attempt at prolonged consultation, publicising of plans, calling public meetings or expressing any criticism of the architects. In what is arguably the Suburb's most significant single building project in nearly 100 years, the Trust should have been particularly proactive.

Many have cited the School's need to obtain permission quickly so available funding is not lost. Whilst everyone would support the School's efforts to improve its facilities, these improvements have to be balanced with the fact that the School, as a selective school drawing in pupils from all over north London and beyond can hardly be defined as a Suburb

amenity. I see no evidence that the Trust has prioritised the Suburb, its architecture and amenities in this affair.

Most worrying of all is how, after this, the Trust will seek to retain its authority in regard to private planning matters in the future. The Trust is not entitled by law to withhold unreasonably permission for residents' plans to extend and alter their houses. How much longer will someone living for example in a far corner of the Suburb accept the Trust's rulings on the design or placing of their small kitchen or loft extension when large modern buildings in a totally different style adjoined to an architectural masterpiece at the centre have been nodded through with unseemly baste and minimal public consultation?

The four Resident Trustees on the Trust Council will certainly have arguments to demonstrate how their actions in this matter have served the long term interests of the Suburb. It would be good to hear them.

Yours
Andrew Botterill

Hampstead Garden
Suburb Trust
862 Finchley Road
NW11

Sir
I understand that you are unable to find space for more than a brief note on Andrew Botterill's letter.

Andrew Botterill's concerns are misplaced.

The designs for the new wings have not been "nodded through" by the Trust. The Trust Council first had contact with the School's architects in August 2007 and have considered proposals as the design was developed, in discussion with the Trust,

culminating in an approval, subject to detail, in September 2008. Consultation with residents was wider than for most applications and for the normal period. Readers may remember that two members of the Residents Association attend all meetings and see all the papers of the Trust's Property and Plans Committee, which considers all applications for alterations, demolitions and new construction on the Suburb. Outside the Suburb the School's application is subject to approval by the local authority while both the Twentieth Century Society and the Lutyens Society support the proposed design.

The proposals for the school are based on extensive re-organisation of the existing buildings to make best use of the space already available within them. Consequently the new buildings are modest in scale compared with previous schemes for the site. The approved plans are largely set back from the Square, screened by trees and are a modern complement to Lutyens' building, whilst making a distinct contribution to the site. They are sympathetic in form and materials (Andrew Botterill should note that brick type has not yet been agreed).

Yours
Jane Blackburn
Trust Manager

As we go to press revised plans are expected following representations made to Henrietta Barnett School and their architects by concerned residents, a number of whom, together with RA representatives, attended a presentation and discussion about the plans in December. Approvals given by Barnet and the Trust were subject to detail. Ed

Any ideas for spending Centenary money?

It could be said that Suburb residents have never lacked ideas on how to spend the money collected or raised on their behalf by the Residents Association. Now is a chance to put forward your proposal on how the RA should spend some of the money raised for and during the Centenary Celebrations.

The RA Council invites you to put forward any proposal/idea you might have for the Suburb to commemorate in a permanent way the 100 years of its existence.

You will know from the annual accounts that most of the money was spent on funding celebratory and commemorative events during the Suburb's Centenary, some of which you will have taken part in and we hope enjoyed, but £20,000 or more could be devoted to suitable proposals.

Before you submit your idea/proposal it is important that you take into consideration the fact that the total available is too small to fund any grand project, such as a new building, and too small even to seed the beginning of such a big project. In hand already

are the centenary committee's Central Square project which hopes to get lottery funding for it. The RA is in no position itself to raise such funds or even to find big-time sponsors – but if you can do either or would even be able to provide the Suburb with a permanent memorial of the centenary in your name, please do not hesitate to come forward!

In drawing up your proposal, you will need to state clearly:

- i) what it is, eg. an annual or one off event, lecture, exhibition or a series of these, book, painting, sculpture, etc;
- ii) what would need to be done to set it up;
- iii) how it might be organised;
- iv) what its cost is likely to be (based on your recent research);
- v) whether you wish to be involved in the arranging/setting up.

Please send in your proposal to: RA Chairman, 4 Wildwood Rise, NW116SX.

All proposals will be discussed by the RA Council, and you might be invited to speak about yours at a council meeting.

CAROL BOULTER

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