



Your Waitrose letters

Residents' Opinion Mixed

By Kevin Finn

Following ARCHER reports on two key local development proposals for East Finchley, the Waitrose supermarket and library complex, and the relocation of the adult education institute, THE ARCHER has received a number of letters, faxes, telephone calls and, email messages voicing many and varied concerns, such that there is insufficient space available to print them all. What follows is therefore a summary of these concerns, and I should stress that these are the opinions of our readers, not the paper, which aims to report on opinion, rather than to form or influence it.

Most correspondents are opposed to the schemes, but a few have come out in favour, particularly of the new supermarket. (It should be born in mind that people who wish to oppose such schemes will tend to be more vocal than those in favour, so the proportions may or may not represent East Finchley residents as a whole.)

Winners and losers

Many readers feel that a new supermarket would benefit commuters and those living in the vicinity, and provide more choice for their general shopping. It is felt however that although the HGS Institute and its users would benefit from new premises, ultimately local residents may not.

Traffic concern

Traffic is a major concern: The spectre of juggernauts making their way down the High Road to the supermarket is a worry for many, as is the expectation that residents of adjoining areas will be using the already heavily congested roads of East Finchley to come shopping. Similar fears surround the new Institute and a worry about where the many students attending the facility will park is a common theme, with the realisation that the resident parking spaces, which operate for only one hour per day, could be clogged with shoppers' and students' vehicles when weary residents arrive home from work.

Environ-mental

With the additional traffic comes a secondary effect of pollution, noise and a threat to the environment. There is a general fear that the loss of green space and trees caused by both these projects will damage the look and feel of the area, and may ultimately destroy the 'village' atmosphere.

Jobs for the boys?

With the potential destruction of existing businesses and homes that the Waitrose project would involve comes another worry: the effect on our local businesses. Whilst the supermarket may bring more jobs to the area, it will also threaten and destroy some of our local businesses. One reader considers that far from bringing additional trade to the area, the result is likely to be a net loss of jobs and a loss of the diversity and quality of local shops. THE ARCHER has been promised research showing how developments in similar areas around North London have impacted local communities. On the same theme, demolition of period buildings and the loss of the parade leading up to Baronsmere Road is cited as a good reason for opposing the scheme.

Blight

There is a perceived planning blight (which one reader claims to have had confirmed by a local estate agent) that is adversely affecting the value of homes in the immediate vicinity of both proposed projects. The effect on

the immediate residents' quality of life is of major concern.

A question of trust

Other correspondents fear the disposal of the existing library and, perhaps, the school playing field, and most would prefer the existing library to be upgraded, rather than being replaced.

Throughout there is fear and scepticism about the role or motivation of local government in both schemes. Demands for an open, public consultation are common.

One reader points out that there are over 20 supermarkets within 4 miles of the proposed site, half being 2 1/2 miles or less away. This reader poses the question 'Do we need another supermarket?'

On the other hand

Not everybody of course is opposed. Some people would welcome a supermarket (though many would prefer a much smaller store than that which has been proposed) and point out that Waitrose would represent a high quality, convenient store with a wide choice of goods, which is currently lacking in East Finchley. Another positive point is that a modern library may serve the general population better, especially in respect to access and parking, which the current library lacks. Far from being a threat to the town centre, this project could ensure its future by acting as a focus for shoppers in and around East Finchley. As always, we await your response.

Any reader who feels strongly about any matter is invited to use this "Soapbox" column.



Please note that opinions expressed are those of the writer alone.

Old school for new students?

By Helen Bennett

I'm tired of hearing how wonderful the Hampstead Garden Suburb Institute is. Yes, it's the 'Village Institute' for residents of the Hampstead Garden Suburb, but only one-third - at the most - of its students live there. The Institute has transformed itself into the largest provider of adult education in the Borough. It's a commercial organisation! And it needs to be, if it's to survive in these hard times. It makes a lot of money by teaching English to young, overseas students, but it's getting ever more difficult to attract them.

Imagine you're a student and you're coming to London to learn English. Language schools are falling over each other to attract you. Which one do you choose? I have a suggestion for Hampstead Garden Suburb Institute to grab a commercial advantage over its competitors.

1. Barnet Council are selling off the former Finchley School.
2. Many local people would hate to see that building demolished.
3. It's right opposite the Finchley Leisure Park, with its many attractions for the young.
4. Why not convert Finchley School into an Adult Education Institute and watch the students roll in?

Instead of the Institute frittering their millions on a new building with virtually zero parking, they can modernise the Finchley School buildings to the highest standards, knowing that, just across the High Road, in addition to cinema, bowling and leisure pool, a free car park awaits. Think about it.

And what's to be done with the National Hospital site adjoining East Finchley station? Well, if lack of disabled access is the REAL reason why the local Library has to close down, why not move East Finchley Library into the building which was designed specifically to provide wheelchair access for people with disabilities - over 100 years ago!

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