

Summary of Research Findings into Local Issues in New Barnet

(13 August 07)

Background

This summary of findings can be read in conjunction with a fuller report of the research, which was conducted in June-August 2007 with over 170 people in the New Barnet area by Denis Robb of The Research Practice, a long-established market and social research company.

Main Findings

Local people seem to like New Barnet's greenery, relative quiet and relaxed pace by comparison with inner London, ready pedestrian access to shops and even its 'village' feel.

However many are concerned about the number of high-density flats being built in the area and the resultant increase in population, traffic, and parking problems on New Barnet's narrow Victorian streets. Over-development was also said to be resulting in a loss of green space and of the area's architectural heritage.

Amongst parents there was concern about the difficulty of finding a suitable secondary school for their children. There was also quite widespread concern about a lack of leisure facilities for youngsters, and the groups of youngsters hanging around outside Sainsbury's and on adjacent roads.

Some felt that the centre of New Barnet looked a bit run down, and there was some suspicion that the area was somewhat neglected by a Council that seemed to be more likely to place desirable facilities elsewhere in the Borough.

It is understood that **Asda** has bought the old **gas works site** on Albert Road (i.e., behind the Railway Bell pub) and is likely to make a planning application to develop the site. It is not known what sort of development the owners of the site may be planning (e.g., superstore or delivery depot).

Concerns about a potential Asda or other similar store emerged spontaneously, and were also specifically probed by the researcher. A majority of the sample opposed the construction of an Asda or similar retail development on the old gas works site, mainly for two salient reasons, namely:

1. Most felt that there was adequate (grocery) shopping in the immediate area or nearby.
2. It was also widely considered that such a development would attract more traffic into the area and compound traffic congestion in the area.

There were also concerns that an Asda-style store would put other local retailers out of business and so reduce retail choice in the area. Hence some felt it would undermine the current shopping area on East Barnet Road/Lytton Road. In addition some felt that an Asda-style retail outlet would further erode the traditional character of the area and its sense of community.

Mention of the old gas works site often gave rise to spontaneous suggestions that it should be developed for community-oriented uses. Hence many wanted to see youth and/or sports facilities on the site. This can be seen to reflect a very widespread belief that New Barnet lacked such facilities. Some noted that the site's proximity to public transport links made it ideal for pedestrian and youth access, and that its proximity to the local current shops and pubs meant that the right development on the site (e.g., an educational facility open to all) could help to regenerate the local area.

Most local people were uncomfortable about the idea of creating new faith schools in the sense of schools that were predominantly for one religious faith (e.g., Catholic, Muslim, Anglican, Jewish, etc). This viewpoint reflected a commitment to inclusive multi-culturalism and a desire for social integration and harmony. Here there was concern that faith schools might promote

cultural division and tensions between different communities. Hence some now question the future viability of long-established faith schools. Those who favoured faith schools often tended to have personal experience of them and liked the ethos of the faith schools they knew. The issue of faith schools is clearly a complex one and the researcher intends to do more research on this subject.

The majority appeared to oppose the building of the proposed new Jewish faith school on the Westbrook Crescent site in New Barnet. This reflected concern about faith schools in general. There was also widespread opposition to it on environmental grounds. The evidence indicates that local people would oppose any school of that size, and with similar road traffic and environmental implications, on that particular site. Further reasons for concern are cited in the full report.

In relation to major development projects there was some suspicion that Barnet Council was more influenced by the power of corporate money and influence than in taking heed of ordinary local people.

The vast majority of participants in the survey believed that local people should have more say about the future of their area. Most felt that local residents should organise themselves to be better informed about new developments in their area and better able to influence them. It was suggested that it would be useful to have a website that allowed local people to suggest ideas and share information.