

THE SAGA OF THE WHEELED BINS

The first intimation the Residents Association had that the "wheeled bins were coming" was in April 1987, when Councillor Malcolm Davis alerted my predecessor, Tony Mandelson, to an LBB Public Work Committee document which examined the feasibility of replacing the back-door dustbin collection service with a wheeled bin front gate collection system.

Because we believed that, on both practical and environmental grounds, the Suburb would have unique problems in the implementation of such a scheme, we asked the Borough to give us more information and to consult with us on the matter.

During the summer of 1987 the New Hampstead Garden Suburb Trust sent several letters to the then Director of Technical Services seeking an assurance that wheeled bins would not be introduced until the Suburb had been consulted and the matter properly researched. Throughout the whole wheeled bin saga there has been the closest co-operation between the New Hampstead Garden Suburb Trust and the Residents Association - and all the expenses incurred in the campaign have been shared equally between the two organisations.

During the winter of 1987/88 arrangements were made on several occasions for an officer of the Borough to attend an RA Council meeting to describe the scheme, but each time, at the last moment, he was prevented from attending. At the RA AGM in March 1988, therefore, considerable disquiet was expressed both at the lack of information and consultation on the issue and on the environmental effect the bins would have. Accordingly, the June 1988 RA Council meeting passed a resolution requesting the Borough to carry out a pilot scheme in the Suburb before there was any suggestion of introducing the new system: we even identified a suitable area of varied housing for a pilot scheme - but the Borough ignored our requests. The only pilot scheme, in the whole Bor-

ough, was located in the North Finchley, Woodside Park and Whetstone area - and from the results of that pilot the Public Works Committee decided that the scheme should be applied Borough-wide.

We decided to undertake our own research: the Wardens were asked to make a visual inspection of their "patches" and to report on the number of properties likely to have problems; and a questionnaire, sent to all Suburb households with the Winter 1989 "Suburb News", elicited a massive response - 1,527 residents took the trouble to complete and return the questionnaire. When these replies were analysed on Patrick Gaskell-Taylor's computer they showed that 91% of respondents preferred the existing arrangements and 89% were totally against wheeled bins. Most replies emphasised the points that the RA and the Trust had been making repeatedly to the Borough: that it was not the bins to which such objection was being taken as the front gate collection. Had the Borough introduced small wheeled bins as replacements for dustbins, and continued with the "collect and return" service which had obtained hitherto, none of the furore would have arisen. But the Borough insisted that it was perfectly acceptable - where the householders could not move the bins - for them to be permanently



stored in front gardens - in an internationally renowned Conservation Area where front hedges have to be no more than 3' or so high!

So, the "anti-wheeled bin" campaign on the Suburb gathered momentum and, at an acrimonious public meeting in the Institute Hall in November 1988 attended by Councillor Usher and Mr M. Caller (then LBB Director of Technical Services), residents made clear their objections to the scheme and expressed their fears over the difficulty of manhandling wheeled bins through terraced houses, and up and down steps and steep garden paths. In response Councillor Usher gave an undertaking that all residents who needed assistance due to age or disability would receive it. He also proposed - at long last - a joint survey of Suburb properties to ascertain what the

physical problems were.

The joint (two representatives of LBB, one from the New Hampstead Garden Suburb Trust, and one from the RA) survey took place during the late spring/early summer of 1989. As we anticipated, a high proportion of the properties surveyed were found to be totally unsuitable for wheeled bins, and the Borough has agreed that 452 houses in 16 roads and squares are exempted from having bins and the householders are being given black bags. In addition, a further 281 properties have been agreed as being suitable for wheeled bins only if the collection point is not the front gate, and the owners of these properties are being written to. In the case of a further 171 properties no suitable collection point could be agreed, and the owners of the houses are being visited again

by Borough officials. There was also "failure to agree" as to the suitability of wheeled bins for 153 further properties, and these are still the subject of discussion. We have been promised that the whole system of wheeled bin refuse collection in the Suburb will be reviewed after it has been in operation for three months or so.

While all these discussions were going on, the RA and the Trust asked their legal advisers as to the possibility of legal action against the Borough; we were advised that we had only a slim chance of success, and this course of action was abandoned.

So, has it all been worth it? A lot of people put a lot of time and energy into the "anti-wheeled bin campaign" and some, we know, are disappointed at our lack of total success.

But, looked at in the wider context, we can, perhaps take a little credit for the Borough's recent conversion to "green" policies. Early on in our discussions with Borough officials we said that, by introducing these large bins the Borough was adopting obsolete technology, and that - had they followed the example of Richmond-upon-Thames and made it easy for residents to dispose of recyclable waste - Suburb residents would have been right behind them. Instead, they had opted for one large wheeled bin which meant that reclaimable waste was mixed up with non-reclaimable waste and thus lost for ever.

Somewhat belatedly (and probably because of the Government's recent recognition of the importance of re-cycling) the local authority has now established a number of bottle and paper banks throughout the Borough, including a bottle bank at the bottom of Hamp-

stead Way, shortly to be followed by a paper bank in Temple Fortune.

This does not alter the fact that we believe the "collect and return" service should not have been discontinued, especially in an area where there is a very high proportion of elderly residents and many terraced houses; nor does it mitigate the arbitrary way in which the Borough introduced the scheme, with the minimum of consultation and with scant consideration for its environmental effects: bearing in mind the Borough's responsibilities towards an outstanding Conservation Area which is also covered by an Article 4 Direction, it seemed to us throughout our discussions that Councillors and the Chief Executive were listening only to their Department of Technical Services and ignoring their own planners and the Conservation Area Advisory Committee.

We are, however, not unaware of the financial constraints on local government these days, and we must, I believe, endeavour to start a new relationship with our Borough: a relationship in which early consultation is offered and in which dialogue takes precedent over confrontation.

In the meantime we urge all Suburb residents to minimise the visual impact of these unsightly bins by ensuring that they are not left in front gardens except on collection days.

EW

Ahem. Perhaps we could also point out that the RA via the Suburb News has published pages of comment and photographs of the dreaded wheeled bins in the blighted experimental areas. Thus, one would hope, alerting residents to the danger to the Suburb.

Ed

Ask not for whom the bin rolls

I should not have come to Hampstead Garden Suburb by car. I should have come by Lysander. Parachute, even. Landed in the field behind Institute Hall last Monday night, lain in the sodden grass, waited for the local *maquisards* to scuttle, crouching, out of the chilly fog, shaken hands silently, mouthed the password.

Wheelbin.
It is a long way from Cricklewood to Hampstead Garden Suburb. It is halfway across Occupied Barnet. Could be another country: Cricklewood is mean, raunchy, cynical, urban, tough. Cricklewood ducks and dives. Hampstead Garden Suburb is gentle, demure, idealistic, suburban, mild. Hampstead Garden Suburb nods and smiles. But common enemies bring common cause. When, three weeks ago, this column ful-

minated against the decision by Barnet Waffen SS to impose, willy-nilly, the Wheeled Dustbin Scheme, it little realized it was not alone in its determination to resist. It did not know about The Hampstead Garden Suburb Residents' Association. Cricklewood does not have such things. When a Cricklewood Resident suspects that a fast one is being pulled, his recourse consists of slipping a horseshoe into his glove.

The moment the letter from the HGSRA Chairman arrived, I could tell I was dealing with a different class of person. That Mrs Whelan did not refer to herself as Person, indeed, indicated much. Nor did the en-

closed pamphlet exactly threaten a reign of revolutionary terror - PUBLIC MEETING: HOW TO MITIGATE THE IMPACT OF WHEELIE BINS ON THE SUBURB.

Hope slowed in mid-ascent. Note "wheelie"; could anything bespeak gentility more? With one coy syllable, a trash can had been anthropomorphized. It would have its own TV series next. Rod Hull and Wheelie. Note "mitigate the impact"; what a hostage to fortune that is! Do we not hear them hooting in the Barnet Führerbunker? Be sure that if Cricklewood had a Residents' Association, it would have rejected HANG THE BASTARDS



ALAN COREN

NOW! as weak-kneed compromise.

Nevertheless, I went. But it was as I had feared. A huge audience of nice people. Reasonable people. Fairly elderly people, too,

since a quarter of Garden Suburbanites, as the speakers constantly pled, are pensioners. In vain I scrutinized the ranks of overcoating for a gleam of leather, a flash of stud. But the sticks they carried did not have big nails on the end; they had big rubber caps. What, with such forces at her shoulder, could the chairman do except go not for the council's jugular, but its heart? So that my own, as her eloquence directed itself at the plight of the aged and infirm and the aesthetic doom trundling towards each honeysucked porch, sank. Rebellions cannot be built on paths, nor tyrannies overturned by reason.

I took a last look round, in the fond hope that a few stubbled psychopaths, held up perhaps by the need to oil their Brens, had come in behind me, but there was no one save a frail cove poking a Fisherman's Friend through a gap in his muffler, so I left. As I closed the door, a voice from the dais was murmuring, gently, that time for protest was running out.

It little knew how fast. The morning dawn, the fog not yet lifted, I was woken by a drear clanking. I did not need to bother the curtains; the rising gooseflesh told me all. It remembered Prague. The Barnet bins were rolling in. We had been caught napping. When I did look out, the

street was deserted. No weeping women pressed flowers into the invaders' hands, no shouting students chucked themselves beneath their wheels; it was all too late for that. At every gate, a wheelbin stood, grey as the fog.

I ran downstairs, in time to catch the emptied lorry at the corner. It had *Plastic Omnium* stencilled on its flank. What was *Plastic Omnium*? Some remote star? But four seeming-human beings stared from the cab.

"What's going on?" I cried. "These aren't due till December 11."

"Don't ask me, cock," said the driver. "We're from Telford."

Not like Prague, then; like Peking. To do their dirty work, Barnet had drummed up mercenaries from a remote and alien province. Not for Barnet, Europe's way of change. I may move to Leipzig.

With thanks to the Times.

*Estate Agents
And a Little More*

Hotblack & Co. 01458 8411 Estate Agents

17 Market Place
Hampstead Garden Suburb
London NW11 6JY

OFFICES ALSO AT REGENTS PARK & ISLINGTON

Legal Problems?

Consult
DAVID DE SAXE
Solicitor

Telephone: 458 6309

Accidents Wills and Probate
Conveyancing
Landlord and Tenant problems

*Legal Aid work undertaken
Home visits arranged*