

BARNETS ENVIRONMENT

38 Oakwood Road,
London NW11 6RL

Dear Sir,
May I pass on some observations about Barnet's Environmental Strategy?

General

The Council's audit is welcome but its approach to the environment seems timid and fragmentary. For the sake of cohesion it needs to set up an environmental monitoring group, setting targets and subsequently comparing these with actual achievements, and issuing an annual report to stimulate public awareness and involvement.

There are London boroughs - Sutton and Richmond are obvious examples - whose environmental performance is very impressive and generates a great deal of pride and enthusiasm among their residents. Is there any reason why their methods should not be studied and even adopted?

Recycling Waste

Collection points such as bottle banks are all right as far as they go (not very far in Barnet's case) but are no substitute for separation at the point of collection. The use of the all-consuming wheeled bins makes it all too easy for residents to neglect the possibilities of recycling (the audit itself makes the point about wastage of organic matter which should be returned to the soil) and the statement that "the Council will strive to recycle a larger proportion of the municipal waste stream" consequently appears somewhat unconvincing. Most of the borough's waste will remain unrecycled and its destination will continue to be landfill, which produces methane and contributes to global warming; could not Barnet at least co-operate with other boroughs in incineration? I would mention that the two boroughs I cite above have proved that recycling can be financially profitable!

Watercourses

The proposals on watercourses are vague and we have no reason to hope that Mutton Brook (for example) will be much better in 10 years' time than it was 10 years ago. Specific targets should be set with a progress report every six months.

Traffic

Pollution by exhaust emission is dealt with but there is virtually no mention of pollution by sheer volume and danger. The mistaken concept of "routes" causes speeding (Meadway is an obvious example) when what is needed is traffic-calming. Apart from officially-recognised main roads, all local roads should be treated as equal, with priority accorded to the right, which could be achieved by the installation of more mini-roundabouts. Finally, the law against parking on pavements should be strictly enforced.

Yours faithfully
Michael Pickering
Chairman,
Garden Suburb Liberal Democrats



Education for Change

The Government White Paper "Education and Training for the 21st Century" has united adult education students, staff and supporters throughout the country in a powerful, well organised lobby to fight the proposals relating to adult education which, if they become law, are likely to destroy the service.

Under the White Paper proposals Further Education and Sixth Form Colleges would be removed from the control of local authorities and placed in a new sector directly funded by Central Councils responsible to the Secretary of State. Funding would only be provided for adult education courses if they were "vocational courses leading to recognised qualifications, courses in Basic English for speakers of other languages or provision for those with special needs".

If these proposals were implemented the majority of courses for adults would be priced beyond the means of many sections of the population: "It is not intended that colleges should receive explicit funding for courses catering for adults' leisure interests". This statement shows a complete lack of understanding of the basic nature of adult education and its role in society. Adult students who enrol for a so-called "leisure" class frequently use the skills they develop to open businesses,

progress to further study or use the confidence they have acquired to succeed in other areas of life.

The six million adults who embark on some form of study each year include people of all ages, levels of education and cultural backgrounds. They study subjects as diverse as the sonnets of Shakespeare to DIY plumbing, united only by a desire to learn or improve their skills in a competitive and rapidly changing world. They are accepted into an open friendly atmosphere where no attempts are made to label their ability and potential or categorise them as failures or successes. Two thirds of them are women who at all levels in our society usually postpone their career aspirations to care for families and find that adult classes provide them with a challenge, companionship and the opportunity to improve their skills and qualifications. The Federation of Women's Institutes is taking a central role in the powerful lobby to local and national politicians which demands that these proposals are changed.

In my work at the Institute I am constantly impressed by the talent and enthusiasm of our students. It is precisely because Centres like the Institute put on a wide programme of courses, many of which would be described as "recreational" in the terms of the White Paper, that people can choose an activity which helps them to develop their own talents and interests. Adults who have not studied for many years frequently lack the confidence to go straight into examination courses and like to test the water by enrolling for a course which is flexible and allows them to progress at their own pace.

Some of our most enthusiastic students are retired people, many of whom held senior and responsible posts which did not leave enough time and energy to study subjects not connected with their work. "When I retired I did not know how to face the emptiness" commented Harold,

who attends several Institute and WEA classes and has discovered his talent for painting, writing and photography. He now feels completely fulfilled and is enthusiastically working with the WEA to organise a talk and exhibition on the theme of creative self expression. A substantial body of psychological research now indicates that adults can continue to learn successfully throughout life and that the opportunity to do so promotes physical and mental health and well-being.

It is sad that John Major, who had to overcome educational and economic disadvantage, has written the foreword to the paper which threatens to demolish the opportunities provided by adult education. An earlier Prime Minister who showed more acute perception of the value of this sector was Winston Churchill:

"There is perhaps no branch of our vast educational system which should attract within its particular sphere the aid and encouragement of the state more than adult education".

There are several indications this week that the Government is having second thoughts on its proposals affecting adult education. It is important that the powerful feeling now aroused is not allowed to dissipate until the education of adults, consistently undervalued and underfunded by Labour and Conservative administrations, occupies a central rather than a marginal place in national life - and becomes an entitlement not a luxury to be afforded by the few.

Fay Naylor,
Principal HGSI

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