

A response to the second stage of consultation of the Barnet Local Plan – 2021 – 2036.

(with particular regard to the Proposals for Finchley Central)

The format for responding to the Barnet Draft Local Plan for 2021 – 2036 is cumbersome and bureaucratic. Part B does not allow individual residents to make specific representations about neighbourhoods included in the plan. We are responding as individuals but know that our views are shared by other local residents.

Under the terms of the Representation Form B and its restrictive format, we consider the plans for Finchley Central, as they are currently configured, to be unsound in terms of viability, manageability, their negative impact on the local environment and the future well being of current and future residents.

We have outlined our reasons for coming to this conclusion below.

Peter & Nargis Walker

Our representation

We have been homeowners in Finchley Church End, close to Finchley Central Station, for 21 years. We are very concerned about the proposed development plan for our neighbourhood in the Barnet Local Plan. We do not feel that it reflects the best interests of current and future residents in our neighbourhood. The proposal for 556 residential units, including 20 storey buildings, to be built on a small footprint, adjoining the Northern Line, and in a long-standing low-rise residential area, will have a devastating impact on the local environment and the preservation of the unique character of the area. The proposed changes in an already congested neighbourhood will neither enhance the quality of life for residents, nor will they address the existing needs of infrastructure, affordable housing or local independent businesses.

The impressive aspirational statements expressed in the summary, are totally contradicted by the changes proposed. It would be hard to argue against any of the vision statements, and it is true that Finchley Central needs urgent change to update and clean up the increasingly shabby town centre and build more homes.

Timetable for delivery:

The plan is to be delivered between 2022 and 2036. There is no breakdown of how and in what order change will be delivered. It is possible that as before, some of the headline changes – high density housing crammed into already crowded town centres - will be prioritised to meet central government requirements. Meanwhile, the improvements to infrastructure, green spaces and quality of life, could well be deferred and possibly even dropped altogether, for lack of funds at a later date. Before any works are begun it is important to publish a clear timeline for delivery of the plan. This must include the proposed management of the massive disruption to local lives and severe traffic congestion such a building programme will cause at an already congested junction, where traffic is often at a standstill during the day.

The fact that all of these changes are to be managed by CAPITA, a company to which so many of our current services have already been outsourced and have suffered as a result of being managed at distance from call centres elsewhere in the country, does not create confidence.

Below are some of the other headline points for discussion in the plan.

Policy for growth and development over the plan period

Includes the following:

Locations for housing and employment growth

Policies to ensure that housing and employment space meets need and is affordable

Policies to ensure that development is sustainable and built to a high quality of design

We agree that there is a clear need for new, affordable housing for rental and purchase as family homes in Finchley Central. However, what the current pandemic has demonstrated is that what people want and need is small scale, affordable family housing to rent or buy. This would include outdoor space, schools, communal spaces for play and recreation, and supporting services. Homes where it would be possible to build thriving local communities.

This plan will not deliver any of this.

Shortcomings of the proposed plan

- The plan proposes building densely packed high rise blocks, with no access to outside space and concentrated in town centres, near existing Underground access. This is land easily available from a cash strapped TFL, and will provide density of housing in a small space. Whether any of the housing will be genuinely affordable or desirable is a moot point.
- In Finchley Central in particular, erecting four 20 storey high rise blocks that loom over both the High Street and residential areas, is directly contradictory to other stated aims in the document; i.e. maintaining the character of the area (essentially that of a low rise suburb), and creating a cleaner, greener environment.
- It will place excessive strain on an already struggling infrastructure of roads, on parking and traffic, and have a negative impact on local businesses.
- Engaging Wimpey Taylor to develop housing that is sustainable and to a high quality standard, when they are known to have opposed plans to cut emissions in new homes, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/jul/05/housebuilder-taylor-wimpey-opposed-plans-cut-new-home-emissions> is highly questionable. In what way would this be high quality, sustainable, or environmentally friendly?
- The type of build that is being proposed, prefabricated units in high rise build is also worrying. These builds are unproven from the point of view of safety, in particular the fire risk as demonstrated by recent events in buildings in Shetland where this method was used <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-north-east-orkney-shetland-57942459>

Does Barnet really need a potential Grenfell?

Environment and infrastructure

Headline discussion points include:

Policies to maintain environmental quality

Policies to support a sustainable transport infrastructure network

Policies to maintain the vibrancy and vitality of our commercial centres

The proposed building works will take several years to complete and will create undeniable chaos and pollution in the heart of many of Barnet's town centres.

- In Finchley Central, the construction of four tower blocks at the corners of key arterial roads in the town centre, Regents Park Road, Ballards Lane, Station Road and Nether Street, will severely impact neighbouring residential streets and businesses. Main roads will be closed or severely restricted and traffic rerouted through residential areas for months at a time. It will create noise pollution, environmental pollution, and disruption to utilities as new pipelines etc are laid. It will restrict light in every direction. The impact on our town centre and businesses could be catastrophic, and residents will suffer.
- The Northern Line, which is the key link between all these housing plans, is already overcrowded. Sudden, very large population growth at key points of the route, in particular

at Mill Hill and Colindale, will overwhelm the services. There is nothing in the proposals to alleviate this.

- Given the substantial population increases, there are no plans included for additional schools, GP and health services, hospitals, public transport or any of the other services required to support such growth. Finchley Central already struggles to cope with the demand for services of its existing population.
- There is little in these plans to underpin the vision statements and scant evidence that it actively seeks to preserve the character of the town or borough.
- While the plan talks of responding to the challenges of growth in the 21st Century by creating innovative solutions, in reality it serves up the same old discredited solutions. This plan will deface our town centres, impact negatively on small independent businesses and provide temporary housing in vast tower blocks on noisy railway lines and roads that will encourage people to move out and on as soon as possible. In other words it will create an itinerant rather than a stable, rooted population.

The plan states somewhat grandly that the borough can draw upon the legacy of Raymond Unwin, the architect of Hampstead Garden Suburb, who along with Ebenezer Howard was one of the founders of the Garden City movement. Indeed it can - but it does not. Its proposals are the polar opposite of those early town planners who created such desirable, sustainable and rooted communities. It does not deliver any of the desperately needed changes that Finchley Central and its residents would hope for and deserve. To conclude, this plan is really not fit for purpose.