



Petrol crisis

The recent petrol crisis closed the local garages and brought quiet to the roads of East Finchley.

There was far less commuter parking, the air was cleaner and people rediscovered the delights of local shopping. For others, the crisis was a real crisis as journeys to work became a nightmare and many businesses suffered disastrous drops in trade.

No one likes paying taxes, but as we approach the halfway point in the protestors 60-day deadline we offer a few conflicting views.

A Greener World

As a long-standing supporter of environmental issues I have always felt that putting up fuel taxes to discourage car use was the only good thing the Conservatives ever did for the environment.

For a few days East Finchley was a nicer place without the cars. Fuel taxes should not be cut and green energy policies should be pursued.

Rather than moaning about high petrol prices, we should be embracing more environmentally friendly forms of transport like buses, trains, cycling and walking. We are using up far too many of the earth's natural resources and we need to stop doing it now or there will be nothing left for the next generation to enjoy.

Michael Harrison

Politics of Petrol

I am one of the 10% who does not think the government should lower petrol duty. This has nothing to do with the environment, but everything to do with politics.

Firstly, no government can allow itself to be seen to perform U-turns just because of protests. Once that starts to happen there is no end to it and mob rule by whichever special interest group gets its hands on a vital resource will follow.

Secondly, the government has worked out how much money it needs and how to collect it. Cutting petrol duty will leave a huge hole in the budget that will have to be filled. Initially it might come from reserves, but sooner or later hard questions are going to have to be asked: What do you want, higher income tax or cuts in spending on health and education?

Unless the government gives in to protesters, the choice will ultimately be ours at a general election. It's called democracy, you know.

Jon Ashton

GARDENING

Regeneration

By Zena Robson

October generally sees the demise of the herbaceous border and the tendency is to want to rush out to tidy up. You will have to make a decision here. I find a sort of 50:50 approach does well - things that degenerate into a soggy mush get tidied as and when they sog; things like Sedums and Achilleas are left for as long as possible so that birds can enjoy the seed-heads and some structure is left that can look stunning on a bright, frosty morning.

Splitting up

To regenerate some of your herbaceous bits by lifting and splitting them, throw away the central parts and replant newer outside growths. All the books tell you to lift and pull apart, or use a couple of digging forks back to back - mm, yes it works if your soil is nice and friable otherwise a great deal of foul language and terrible hacking sounds usually accompany such efforts. You could try dunking the plant in a bucket of water to separate it more easily or, if all else fails, an old kitchen knife and a lot of muscle will do the trick. It's probably a good idea to cut lacerated roots cleanly and sprinkle some sulphur dust on the wounds before replanting. Not all plants should be split now; things such as Kniphofia, Chrysanthemum, Hosta and Erigeron are best left until spring.

Scarifying

Prepare for autumn leaf drop if you have a pond by stretching an anchored net over it. This will help to avoid the build-up of toxic gases as leaves decompose on the bottom of the pond. Pumps can be taken out, cleaned and stored for the winter too.

In wet weather, try to keep off borders and lawns to prevent the soil becoming compacted. Scarify, spike and top-dress lawns - hard work but worth it.

In good weather, plant shrubs and herbaceous plants - leave deciduous trees until November.

Don't cut down late-flowering shrubs like Fuchsias and Caryopteris - leave it for the spring. Instead, plant up some containers with heathers and violas to cheer you up as nights draw in.

Car shares?

It takes a crisis like this to bring about a social change. The e-mails were flying around the offices with the offers of lifts and so the country did not come to a complete standstill.

I can remember a similar situation during a strike in the early 80s when I was driving to a course in Hackney and stopped at the bus stop to offer a lift. With alacrity two people accepted the offer.

Carry on caring

Surely, the value of making the effort to share far outweighs the rising cost of petrol. Communication lines are opened again and people are actually talking to each other. The school "runs" (necessary in some places, the office "runs", even the shopping "runs", have all taken on a different aspect in this last week.

It would be a shame to revert to traffic chaos when the pumps return to normal. Let us hope that car shares will stay at an all-time high.

Sonia Singham

Overtaxed on an essential

Like most people the petrol blockade caused me some considerable inconvenience, But I felt that it was about time real people were listened to and I supported it.

Tax on petrol has always been too high and this government just happens to be in power at the time when patience ran out. I would not mind paying a high tax on petrol if the money was spent on transport.

I do mind paying high taxes when the awful state of public transport means that I cannot get to work on public transport in under two hours, but can drive there in forty minutes.

Petrol taxes should be lowered to help ordinary people as well as businesses. Cars are not a luxury, for most of us they are an essential.

Frank Clapham.

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.



Foul behaviour

By Charles King

Nearly every day I go for a walk in Cherry Tree Woods. I enjoy the exercise and get great pleasure out of noticing the subtle changes which occur with the passing of time. But there is one thing which does not please me and the perpetrators of this have had plenty of time to change. It is those people who do not clean up after their dogs.

We trained our children to use the toilet. It took time and effort, but it was our responsibility and duty towards them as well as towards the rest of society. I do not expect dog walkers to take their dogs to the nearest public convenience, but I do expect them to come to a public place which they know their animals are going to use as a loo, prepared to remove the offensive heaps of faeces. The borough provided appropriate bins years ago.

Offensive

Thankfully, many dog owners do make use of them, but why is it that there are still these irresponsible, ignorant ones who care nothing for the health and welfare of all the other park users? Surely it isn't too much of a strain for them to remember to take a few bags to scoop the poop into?

It is actually an offence with a fine of up to £1000 if "a person in charge of a dog at the time fails to remove the faeces" but I haven't ever seen anyone being challenged. Perhaps we should all remind the offenders of that fact as they walk casually away from a heap of steaming dog dirt?

BARDO

Barnet Association of Responsible Dog Owners says "Do not let your pet offend and provide excuses for those who would like to ban dogs altogether from our parks". You can contact BARDO on 020 8449 5268 or 020 8959 0400.

LETTERS

Ticketing at East Finchley Station

Dear Sirs

Can you turn your team of hard-hitting investigative reporters onto the appalling situation at the station every morning. There are only two ticket machines at best. One or both are regularly out of action and the new touch screen machine is not only slow but requires a member of staff to stand by it to explain how it works (some economy!).

Then there are the ticket windows. Only two are ever open and the one shut is the one for travel card renewals - a process which seems to involve staff in 5 minutes paperwork per transaction. Hence congestion, frayed tempers and people late for work.

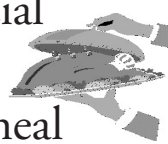
Instead of trying to make people pay penalty fares LT should be giving us free travel if they can't provide tickets within a reasonable time - say 5 minutes.

Why don't they at least let us pay the other end - or better still buy tickets the previous evening. Every other rail company allows you to purchase in advance and often gives a discount for doing so.

I fear that if something isn't done there will be no alternative to direct action. Come to think about it - can you let me have Ricky Savage's mobile number?

Bob Grove, Bedford Road, N2.

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