

Letters to The Editor

Unfair?

Dear Editor

Re: Waitrose Development, High Road, East Finchley
Your coverage of this development seems to be very biased towards the Waitrose proposal.

Here are some examples: In both the March and April issues, you included one letter against and two in favour of the development. This is in spite of the fact that the Labour Questionnaire Results printed on page 10 of the March issue show that 60% of the local population oppose the scheme. This reflects neither local opinion, nor can it result from a lack of letters received opposing the scheme.

Both my husband and I, and several acquaintances, have expressed our objections to the Waitrose development, and our letters have not been published. I also notice that those supporting the Waitrose development do not live anywhere near the site (pro-Waitrose letters in March and April issues of THE ARCHER live in Leopold Road, Trinity Road, Sedgemere Avenue, Howard Walk). If these local residents are in favour of the scheme, perhaps they could find a brownfield site at the ends of their roads where a Waitrose could be built. It looks like a case of reverse NIMBY: they're for it as long as it's not in their backyard.

I'd like to take the opportunity to restate my objections to the Waitrose proposal, which would destroy local shops and the character of the area, demolishing both period buildings and an open area of grass with several mature birch trees, a yew tree and many flowerbeds, which provides important protection and a buffer zone to the adjacent Cherry Tree Woods.

How many of us now step off the tube and breathe more deeply as we pass this open refreshing space, one which perhaps we barely notice until suddenly it is gone - covered by concrete, building, tarmac, car

parks and a service road for vast delivery lorries? How many of us enjoy the diversity of shops along the area that would be demolished? All would be replaced by the homogenous noise and glare of yet another supermarket, where conviviality is squeezed out in the check-out queues and the endless aisles and trollies.

Just as the march towards paved front gardens for car parks is gradually destroying the diversity of living gardens that once brought life to streets, so the march towards supermarkets represents further destruction of diversity, as well as a centralization of profits. Supermarkets also inevitably bring further traffic and pollution in their wake. THE ARCHER, as a local paper run by volunteers, surely needs to have a remit for a promoting of people power and local diversity, instead of siding with big business, who already have power on their side.

Yours sincerely

K Goaman (address supplied)

The Editor replies: "I am responding to this letter as a means of addressing for the readership some criticisms levelled at THE ARCHER team for so-called 'biased coverage of this and other 'burning issues' over the years.

"THE ARCHER has been accused of 'biased reporting' of this sensitive issue by readers on both sides of the argument. This in itself is testimony to the fact that our reporting has been balanced. We do try to keep the number of letters published (one measure raised here) as balanced as we can. A problem I face as editor is that I may receive several letters on a subject, all repeating the same points. It would not serve our readership to repeat endlessly these same points simply by virtue of them being made by different individuals.

"In February I published a précis of comments we had received, outlining a large number of the concerns raised with us about the Waitrose development. In March we printed four letters in favour (not two) and

five against (not one). April showed one letter against and two letters for. Six letters on each side over a two-month period is, I suggest, as balanced as a newspaper could reasonably be expected to be.

"Whilst it is true that the survey shows 60% of those who replied are against the development (note where you read this, and consider on which side of the 'balance equation' this should be placed) it is also true that in issues such as the Waitrose scheme, those opposing tend to be much more vocal than those who are either for or neutral. The survey, though useful, does not claim to be scientific.

"Finally, having restated your own reasons for opposition to the scheme (all of which have been aired over the past few months), you conclude by accusing THE ARCHER team (many of whom are against the proposed development) of 'siding with big business'. THE ARCHER reports what is happening in East Finchley in a balanced and, we hope, entertaining way. Our loyalty, if there is one to be declared, surely lies with the many small businesses that, through their advertising, have funded THE ARCHER read by so many for over a decade."

I want Waitrose

Dear Editor

Now at last I can come out of the closet and admit those dark feelings which I have secretly harboured since the very first time I heard of the Waitrose proposition. I WANT WAITROSE. My heart leapt as I thought of being able to pop down for fruit and vegetables which do not need dusting when purchased and which do not decompose within seconds; I thought of purple sprouting broccoli, sushi and affordable fresh ciabatta.

My mind even sank as low as being excited at the thought that the type of people who live in our rich surrounding villages - Highgate,

Muswell Hill, Crouch End and, even, Hampstead - coming to East Finchley. (Of course, I do not admit to living in East Finchley, I rather pompously say "Fortis Green" and then enquire if the person knows Muswell Hill and hope the subject ends there.) I have often envied the vibrant atmosphere of the above villages; smartly dressed young families pushing children in buggies around the streets of a weekend, stopping to chat, filling the restaurants at lunchtimes, shopping and smiling. I also should point out that some of these people are 'celebrities'.

So you see, being the depraved and twisted individual that I am, I thought that if they came to shop at Waitrose, which, have no doubt they will as there is no more 'celeb' supermarket, they may spend their time and money in other shops.

But then I am stopped dead in my tracks. THE LIBRARY! Evil, nasty Waitrose is stealing the library from the children, I remind myself. Isn't it? No, actually, the Barnet Council is refusing to comply with legal requirements, which cost money, to update it and so is closing it completely without replacement.

Am I missing something? Why are the placard wearers not campaigning against the council? As a barrister, I question whether the closure is in fact legal, given the legitimate expectation of the users that it continue to be there. Many issues could be explored in an attempt to force the council to spend the money on the library. What has it got to do with Waitrose, save to say that it has offered to provide one? Would they be in favour of it more if it had not done so?

It is OK, you can all admit it; you know you WANT WAITROSE!
Victoria Doran
Fortis Green, N2

Rush hour all day

Dear Sir

Those who are in favour of the East Finchley Waitrose (Michael Brown, David Bradbury, Leon Simmons) are deluded if they think it will somehow transform the High Road. It will inevitably lead to the closure of local convenience stores, grocers, fishmongers and butchers - adding to an already large number of empty properties. Evidence from other similar developments suggests that people do not stop off after their weekly supermarket shop to use other local stores - they load up and go home.

As for the suggestion that it "may even encourage people out of their cars" (Tony Roberts), why are Waitrose planning to build a car park with 150 spaces, enough for 2,000 cars per day? Take a look at the High Road in the rush hour - if the Waitrose scheme goes ahead this is what it will be like from morning to early evening, every day, including Saturday and Sunday. Is that really what you want? I agree that the High Road is "shabby". But the way to redevelop it is for Barnet Council to encourage existing businesses and residents to look after the environment, and improve it and attract new stores which will provide "atmosphere" - like pavement cafes and restaurants.

I have nothing against Waitrose and, yes, their food is "high-quality", but the shop they're planning to build in East Finchley is a huge superstore - more suited to a retail park than a high street.

Yours sincerely
Danny Shaw
Ingram Road, N2

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