



**A community newspaper for East Finchley run entirely by volunteers.**

## Fire devastates nine sheds at allotments



Burnt out: Ruined tools and possessions lie among the charred remains of sheds on the Fuel Lands allotments. Photo Mike Coles.

## Fears for youth theatre as costs come under scrutiny

By Janet Maitland

**It is 80 years since Finchley Youth Theatre first became a centre for young people to meet socially and put on drama, music and dance performances. But now the future of one of the area's few remaining youth services could be in the balance.**

Barnet Council has proposed two options for the Finchley Youth Theatre's (FYT) home on the High Road, N2, which it owns. One is to recover the costs of running the old church building through 'paid use by other organisations'. The other option, if this does not work, is to 'explore the use of other buildings to host youth activities'.

A council spokesperson told us: "We do not have a legal duty to provide this service, but we do so because we believe it adds value. However, we must ensure it is a cost-efficient service."

### Local dismay

Lisa Bark, chair of Friends of FYT (FoFYT), told us that the centre is already used and funded by a mix of council, private and partnerships lettings. "It is more or less self-funded now, but the Youth Service budget has been cut so if the centre cannot sustain itself it



Under review: Finchley Youth Theatre

is more at risk of the council wanting to change its use."

Councillor Arjun Mittra said it was appalling that the council would even consider closing the "much-loved" youth theatre. "There are no other facilities owned by the council that would support the FYT activities, so they would be lost," he said.

"It is essential that FYT stays a creative space for young people," said Carolyn Pickles,

Patron of FoFYT. "Local people are really worried about this, especially because of what happened to the library."

### Consultation ends soon

Councillor Reuben Thompstone, Chairman for the Children, Education, Libraries and Safeguarding Committee, offered this assurance: "We will not be closing the FYT. We are carrying out a consultation to test people's views on a range of very broad ideas. I would like to encourage as many people as possible to get involved."

The consultation questionnaire, deadline 27 March, can be completed online by going to [engage.barnet.gov.uk](http://engage.barnet.gov.uk) and searching for Early Help Services Consultation. For a paper copy, call 020 8359 2724. If you want to support the FYT, visit [www.facebook.com/FinchleyYouthTheatre](http://www.facebook.com/FinchleyYouthTheatre) or to [www.fofyt.co.uk](http://www.fofyt.co.uk).

By Ann Bronkhorst

**Four fire engines and 41 firefighters were called to a fire that had started on the boundary between the two adjacent allotment sites at the end of Chandos Road, N2, in the early hours of Thursday 22 February.**

On the Fuel Lands site about six sheds were completely destroyed and the flames spread to another three sheds on the East Finchley Allotments site. Luckily there were no deaths or injuries but the loss of tools, equipment and shelters is costly and upsetting for the plotters.

The cause of the fire is unclear but both sites have suffered deliberate arson incidents in the past. Rough sleepers in sheltering sheds can cause fires unintentionally, too.

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