

Ham&High

Hampstead & Highgate Express
100A Avenue Road NW3 3HF

EDITORIAL

Phone: 020-7433 0000

Newsdesk: 020-7433 6217/6214

Fax: 020-7433 6229

ADVERTISING

Phone: 020-7433 6200 (display)

020-7433 6250 (classified)

Fax: 020-7433 6259

e-mail: advertising@hamhigh.co.uk

COMMENT

These feet were made for walking

THE school run: don't you just love it? Its traffic-clogging, fume-filled effects are noticed most after a school break. During holidays, the roads in north London are invitingly quiet for motorists, cyclists and public transport users alike. But in term time, some of them become linear car parks.

Well done then to the schoolchildren and parents of Camden who have reacted so positively to the walk-to-school projects pioneered a decade or so ago when soon-to-be-a-Dame Jane Roberts led the council. Many were sceptical as to whether it would have any impact but a recent comprehensive survey by the Department for Transport shows that a whopping 90 per cent of children in the borough now walk to school or take the bus, with the vast majority using their own two feet.

There are no reliable figures through which valid comparisons can be made with earlier years, but the figures are really encouraging, though the question remains: why are there so many extra vehicles on the street at school opening and closing times?

Is there just a chance that some parents and their offspring are too ashamed to admit that they use less environmentally-friendly means? Does a guilty secret situation exist where parents tell little Toby or Tabatha: "I know we do the quarter-mile trip in our 4x4 but if anyone ever asks you how you get to school, make sure you tell them that you walk..."?

Poetry in motion

A SIMPLE yet inspired idea by Hampstead poetry lover Judith Chernaik has become one of the more enjoyable parts of going underground in London. Her Poems on the Underground have survived for 25 years, and long may they continue.

Congratulations to Judith for brightening the lives of commuters across the capital, and congratulations also to the Transport for London bosses who saw the potential in her idea and continue too support this edifying and entertaining initiative.

Editor Geoff Martin

Publishing Director Simon Taylorson
Publishers Archant Regional Ltd

The Ham&High, incorporating the High&I, is the quality paper for Hampstead, Highgate, Camden Town, Kentish Town, West Hampstead, Hampstead Garden Suburb, Golders Green, Crouch End, Muswell Hill and Alexandra Palace.

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Research superlab safety concerns

People who would be overshadowed by the gigantic 'superlab' registered overwhelming opposition to it at Camden's development control hearing on December 16 when 500 dwellings in the immediate area registered opposition. The council had sent a total of 700 letters to Somers Town addresses.

Eight councillors voted in favour of the UK Centre for Medical Research and Innovation and four against, with one abstention.

Others groups objecting were Winston Tenants' Association, St Pancras and Somers Town Plan-

ning Action, King's Cross Conservation Area Advisory Committee, Camden Town Urban Design Improvement Society, RMT (offices locally) PCS Trade Union, British Library Branch, Camden Friends of the Earth, the 20th Century Society, Action for Our Planet and the Animal Protection Party.

Opposition was generally in relation to implications of safety and architectural inappropriateness of the building which would house 1,500 scientists and staff, and be taller than St Pancras Station.

We objected because the construction on land zoned for mixed

use including valuable housing amounts to abuse of the democratic process, and a waste of £220million of government funds which should go to research and education, not a costly building.

In her objection Cllr Leyland said that she had been a fundraiser for cancer charities, who might consider the costly building a waste, and that good research could be done in modest surroundings. Cllr Paul Braithwaite asked whether the precautionary principle could be invoked in regards to the safety of the project. The planning officer said the precautionary

principle did not apply.

Threats from terrorists or possible biochemical spillages could not be contained by narrow interpretation of planning laws and the precautionary principle should apply for the safety of the local area and for all who travel via St Pancras International, beside which the 3.6 acres site for the superlab would replace the existing 47 acres at National Medical Research Centre, Mill Hill.

ROB INGLIS

St Pancras and Somers Town Planning Action

Vanity at a price in council magazines

YOUR correspondent David Reed (*Council right to have own voice, H&H January 6*) makes an unsatisfying defence of the phenomenon of council PR magazines.

He claims to share my concern about the need for council mags, but my earlier comments were either misinterpreted or misrepresented. The thrust of my letter was about the misuse of a council publication for subtle party political purposes; that aspect was strangely ignored. If Mr Reed is not currently employed by Haringey People, the council's magazine, he should be!

Mr Reed and I must be two of the tiny number of sad people who actually read some of this unsolicited material: for the majority it goes in the bin or is recycled. It is never purchased by a willing buyer but paid for, in effect, by taxpayers who have no say.

I drew attention to the item about Haringey's (excellent) library service mainly as an example, not of an unnecessary story (which it was), but as an example of a council service that might be covered by the remarkable HP promise: "100 per cent committed to protecting and improving front-line services".

And this is notable, because the item on libraries also appeared in the March issue, perhaps better described as a pre-election special. Mr Reed misses the point about the nature of the Haringey promise/slogan in an electioneering context.

He says: "In truth, the council magazine publish much more than the item [I] picked on." Of course council magazines do, and its partly the sheer quantity of 'items' that is the problem. Some 'stories' feature photos of beaming members of the "cabinet

executive", but many items have little or nothing to do with the council or council services. And yet Haringey People, the example I used, is at least as remarkable for what it does not cover, such as anything remotely embarrassing.

In respect of the merits of the library service, I said: "...the public already knew this". The wider point is that the council/majority group is too much concerned with PR, presentation and telling us what a marvellous job they're doing - rather than concentrating solely on the job in hand.

Ideally, council services should be so smooth-running that the public hardly notices them.

The public ought to be able to take for granted these services, rather than having to celebrate them. And much less, being forced to pay to watch the council regularly pleasure themselves in their own feel-good mag.

These vanity publications give councils an inflated sense of their own importance and like Narcissus, they fall in love with the (unrepresentative) beauty of their own reflection.

Councils do have a legitimate interest in providing facts and information to residents, but not sloganeering ahead of an election with the intention of influencing the result: i.e. the cover story of the Haringey People March issue.

Council magazines do not need to be 32 pages in full colour, every four weeks (or even every eight weeks). HP is an extravagance that should be scrapped - certainly in its present form.

If some council service is not featured in the real press then it does not mean it should be featured in the council press.

Real newspapers report real news, including real threats from the council to our library services. Your correspondent asserts that

the H&H has a news 'agenda'. Newspapers have faced more serious charges than that. Haringey Pravda certainly doesn't have a normal news agenda: its agenda is rather less attractive.

Harangue-you People is a proselytising publication comparable with the Jehovah's Witness's Watchtower. At least Watchtower is paid for by their own supporters, whereas Haringey residents are forced to pay for PR aimed at themselves! Like Pravda and The Watchtower, it is largely good news stories that are printed.

In the long run the council would serve the public better by improving services rather than telling us about how wonderful the services are.

With Mr Reed's sole offered alternative to HP (placing notices in real papers), he underestimates the savings in printing and ignores the savings of the cost of distribution that scrapping HP would create.

He suggests that the cost of Haringey Propaganda is relatively small: "£200,000 sounds a lot ... [but] it is almost insignificant [compared with the total budget]." But waste is waste. Lots of small amounts of waste add up to a lot of waste. As other council apologists are wont to do, the relativity argument is used to excuse spend-thrift.

The £200,000 is indeed a tiny proportion of total Haringey spending (ditto for the £10,000 spent on new chamber chairs). The trouble with this is that if the same excuse is used in a hundred different cases of cash-waste, then pretty soon, those mere 'peanuts' start adding up to real money. Our money. That could be spent on better things, like care for the elderly.

CLIVE CARTER
Stapleton Hall Road, N4

£6million bill to communicate

It is often said that the mark of a civilised society is how it looks after its older people.

Looking at the first tranche of Labour's budget cuts in Haringey, once again, older people seem to be their first target.

Let's be clear, it is not the Coalition Government that is proposing to close down drop-in centres, day centres and luncheon clubs. It is Haringey's Labour council.

The government will provide £182million funding to the council next year - the cuts to drop-in centres, day centres and luncheon clubs represents 0.2 per cent of that budget - a fifth of one per cent.

However, the Labour council has proposed to continue to prioritise £6million on communications and policy instead of keeping these services for the elderly open.

Yes, the financial situation is a

tough one but the tough choices that the council makes need to be fair. These are not fair to older people and I agree that they need to be opposed. It must be possible to make economies in other areas instead - after all, there is still 99.8 per cent of the budget to look at.

CLLR DAVID WINSKILL,
Liberal Democrat health and adult social services spokesperson



VICTIM: Jo Konrad was issued with two incorrect tickets.

Camden's parking laws are draconian

I AGREE with Jo Konrad that Camden's parking is enforced like terrorism (*Calls for change of attitude after parking ticket farce, H&H January 6*).

An elderly visitor recently confused 14.45 with 02.45 (which would be in the early hours of the morning!) on his 'scratch card' visitors' permit and despite two letters of appeal, Camden refused to cancel this ticket.

My friend, who is on a small pension, paid the £40, fearing the fine would revert to £80. When I phoned parking solutions on his behalf, I was told the matter was closed as by paying the fine he had admitted liability.

This is outrageous. No wonder visitors are terrified by Camden's draconian laws.

SARAH DUNCAN
Well Road, NW3

It is clear that there is something amiss with Camden's parking systems generally. On 31 August last year I sent them my application and cheque for parking vouchers. About six weeks later, when I had not received the vouchers, I phoned the parking office to be told that they had not received my application, so I cancelled my cheque.

Imagine my surprise when on December 30 I received my original form, plus cheque, from Camden, and on the form was printed: "received 3 September". There was no explanation and no apology for this incompetence. Where had these documents been for four months?

A MARTIN
Wedderburn Road, NW3