

## “Our Barnet” residents’ forums

Barnet Alliance encourages residents to attend Barnet Council’s official residents’ forums. But we also run our own “Our Barnet” forums. **Julian Silverman** explains why.



**WHO WE ARE:** Barnet Alliance for Public Services is a coalition of residents, campaign groups and trade unions in the London Borough of Barnet. We welcome involvement from groups and individuals defending public services. Website: <http://barnetalliance.org> Email: [barnetalliance@gmail.com](mailto:barnetalliance@gmail.com) Twitter: [@barnetalliance](https://twitter.com/barnetalliance)

**T**he super-rich are getting richer by the minute. They gamble away £2 trillion of our money every day. Everywhere they have used their powers to destroy or buy governments, and make us pay. The rulers of every country and every council have declared war on their own citizens. Italy and Greece are now under the direct rule of international bankers.

Here in Barnet, attacks by the government and the council mean more people face having no proper jobs, homes, education, social care, health care, child care, libraries, etc. Our community is in danger of destruction.

Like citizens in 1,000 cities across the world, through the Occupy movement, demanding a direct say in how they are ruled, the people of Barnet need a council accountable to and run for and by the residents themselves.

On 4 October the Barnet Alliance for Public Services (BAPS) held its first OUR BARNET Residents’ Forum. This first “experiment in community democracy” attracted a larger and happier crowd than the fraught and aimless confrontations mounted by the council, which go under the misnomer “Residents’ Forums”.

Our forum gave a voice to council workers and university staff, fighting for their jobs and our services; carers facing catastrophic cuts; disabled people demanding to be treated with respect; library users, and many more. At the end, the 60 people present were asked if they wanted more such forums – there was a unanimous vote in favour.

This greatly upset some Conservative councillors. At the next council meeting, one asked: “What is the Cabinet’s view on the so-called alternative residents’ forum staged recently by the ‘Barnet Alliance’?”

Answer: “The aims of the Barnet Alliance – no reduction or change in delivery of services by the Local Authority, the NHS and the Education Department – will make us bankrupt. The Barnet Alliance’s few members want political influence, but without having any responsibility or accountability to the electorate.”

They are wrong! It is the council which is making us bankrupt. Without the slightest sense of responsibility or accountability to the electorate, it is they who hand out contracts to known fraudsters; £27 million on unwanted changes of light bulbs; who refuse to spend the £27 million they are getting back from Iceland on services; who shut out citizens from their meetings; and, against the wishes of the citizens, are making expensive preparations – the One Barnet Programme – to hand over all council services to a profiteering, inefficient, tax-evading multinational. They refuse to discuss putting the matter to the voters, or even to consider the council workers’ money-saving, in-house alternative!

OUR BARNET Residents’ Forums are a chance for the community to speak for itself. We are the 99%. Everybody, young and old, is welcome to raise any issues they like and seek active and practical support from others.

**To begin to turn suggestions into viable schemes we need to get together, think and act.**

**The next OUR BARNET residents’ forum is on Tuesday 29 November, 7-9pm, at Larches House, 1 Rectory Lane, Edgware HA8 7LF. More details: [barnetalliance@gmail.com](mailto:barnetalliance@gmail.com).**

## Young people demand a future!

by **Erin Lawrence**

**W**ith youth unemployment passing one million, the Jarrow March reached Barnet on 2 November.

Arriving a little before schedule, waiting to greet their own welcoming committee, the marchers rested outside Costa, under the tree in the Spires shopping centre, in the cold, light hearted even after all the walking they’d done.

Still singing songs and chanting, they were very happy to share their experiences and the achievements they hope to gain from the last month.

“There is no future being offered to young people,” Sean Figg, organiser of the campaign, told me. “The aim of the campaign is to push the interests of youths up the agenda.” Youth unemployment being the main focus of the march, they understand that it won’t force change straightaway but they want it to be “a rallying point for young people who don’t have a political voice.”

Figg explained: “The Jarrow Crusade is popular mythology, it’s in the popular consciousness. We don’t want to return to the 1930s, having improved and then to have it wiped out.”

The original march left an incredible legacy, the aim of this march is to do the same but to avoid having to repeat it again in the future. And, just like the original march, there were many anecdotes that the marchers shared: the 90-year-old woman who waved the march off after waving out the first; the elderly man who was crying with joy that something was being done, but also with sadness that something *had* to be done; a woman in Yorkshire who followed in the footsteps of her grandmother, making tea for the marchers



Barnet trade unions join Jarrow marchers at the Spires, 2 November 2011. Photo: © Bahir Laattoe

just as she had. “It has been an emotional roller-coaster,” commented the organiser.

The marchers don’t expect an immediate change, they want the government to listen; but, most important, they want young people to get involved in anti-cuts movements

such as the Barnet Alliance so that the Government is forced to listen.

**As the marchers set off to North Finchley for a welcoming rally, they walked with enthusiasm, chanting: “Bring back EMA, take it out the bankers’ pay!”**