



Royal Mail

Letters submitted for publication should reach the Ham & High, 100a Avenue Road, Hampstead NW3 3HF, no later than first post on Wednesday. Names and addresses can be withheld but must be supplied to the editor.

Labour's tunnel vision

THE situation at Highgate Tube station has me deeply concerned.

It seems no time at all since the down escalator, now condemned, had a major overhaul and was out of action for the best part of a year. Was the work done then incompetent?

We are told that the escalator is beyond repair and there is no money to replace it. The station may be dead!

Can the Government avoid responsibility for public transport in London? A massive injection of cash is needed into public transport if we want to get cars off the road.

Was this mentioned in the Budget? If so, I missed it.

JILL BARNETT
31 Talbot Road, N6 4QS

SHEILAH MEIKLE (Letters, July 4) is right about the crisis facing Highgate Tube station – its closure would be a disaster for the residents of Highgate and Muswell Hill.

However, we must not allow London Underground to shoulder all the blame: it generally does a good job. But with so little funding from the Government it has been forced to abandon vital repairs. Money is only available for patching up dilapidated and ageing equipment. Already an escalator has been out of use for many weeks at Highgate as no money was available to fix it.

The Labour Government likes claiming it has a commitment to public transport. It is time for it to put its money where its mouth is. We need more resources to ensure that Highgate station can keep going, and is not permanently in danger of being shut. In the long term I hope that something as vital as investment in our Tube system is given priority.

LYNNE FEATHERSTONE
Hornsey & Wood Green
Liberal Democrat
Parliamentary spokeswoman
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The past is another matter

IT IS regrettable that in criticising the work of the Heath and Old Hampstead Society (Letters, July 4) Peter Berkeley should indulge in a gratuitous personal attack on its vice-chairman Martin Humphery. Mr Berkeley is of course entitled to his opinions and the society is not afraid of criticism, but it is contemptible to use that as an excuse to impugn one person in that way. It does not help the cause of informed debate.

Mr Berkeley's letter is a muddle of ignorance, self-contradiction and misinformation and there is not a shred of truth in his denigratory remarks about the society. I trust you will allow me the necessary column inches to correct them all as they are slurs on our reputation.

The Heath and Old Hampstead Society celebrates its centenary this year. It could not have survived that long if it did not have the support of the community at large. We consult closely with other groups in the area and we hold public meetings to which anyone can come and express their views. We publish regular newsletters to keep members informed of what we do on their behalf and these are also on sale to the public at local bookshops. Anyone can join, as could Mr Berkeley if he was prepared to devote some time to the community rather than just snipe from the sidelines.

We are part of a nationwide network of such civic and amenity societies, whose work has contributed to protecting the heritage of this country so that the tourist industry – the "new market" referred to by Mr Berkeley – has become one of the nation's biggest income earners. Civic societies are run by public-spirited local volunteers like Mr Humphery, who are prepared to actually devote their time to these matters.

We are fully aware of the many problems for places like Hampstead in coping with the necessary changes of the modern world. We certainly do not resist every change and we have always taken into account the fact that Hampstead is a popular place for visitors. Refurbishing pubs to improve their facilities are necessary and welcome developments; pointless changes of name that disregard historic links to the community that they serve are not, and we are not alone in opposing it. There is concern nationwide at this trend: newspapers such as The Times have published articles deploring it and there is now a move to introduce a Bill in Parliament to stop it happening.

The society has most certainly not been ineffectual. Without its work the "unique characteristics" of Hampstead that Mr

Berkeley wants to retain would have been destroyed decades ago by unthinking planners and developers. It was members of the society who saved the "wild countryside" of the Heath from being tamed into a park by the LCC; who succeeded through various campaigns and with other committees to get another 600 acres added to it over the years. It was this society that saved Heath Street and The Mount from road widening that would have destroyed them; stopped proposals for the wholesale destruction of the area by the building of a bypass involving a viaduct along Willow Road in 1938, and again in 1966 when a four-lane highway involving the straightening and widening of East Heath Road was proposed. Of course Mr Berkeley may well think that these changes would have been "essential and beneficial" but I don't think many others would, and certainly not the hordes of visitors who have always flocked to Hampstead.

It is not clear from his torrent of abuse

whether Mr Berkeley approves of small convenience shops or not. One minute they are "tatty", "dull" and "grim"; in the next he seems to lament their demise. He castigates us for destroying them but also for trying to save them. If he belonged to the HOHS he would know from our reports that it is steep rent rises and failure by Camden Council to adhere to its policies that have contributed to the closure of many of them. Most recently the last greengrocer in Hampstead was threatened with closure because Camden Council decided to sell off the freehold. Supported by the many local residents who shop there, we were able to persuade them not to. Lack of custom was not the problem.

We did not try to save Woolworths – only tried to prevent the premises from being turned into yet another restaurant. We do not put bow windows into Victorian houses – that is what developers do and we try to stop them. We do not campaign for red telephone boxes: we simply restored one to the spot in the High Street where there was one before; his ignorance on this matter discredits the rest of his diatribe. We do not ask for antiquated shop signs, only that they should be of good quality design and appropriate to the architecture of the buildings. Old lampposts were

restored because the new ones that Camden had put in, one of Mr Berkeley's "essential and beneficial" changes, were rusting away. We do not "claim to have saved the Coffee Cup", only to have stopped the developer enlarging the restaurant unnecessarily to three times the size and obliterating another two shops in the process.

We didn't try to "stop the redevelopments" at Mount Vernon and New End Hospital, we simply tried to ensure that the proposals were the best that could be got for the sites and for the community. As for the Blue Star site, our AGM reports speak for themselves, the first in 1968: "The society welcomes these proposals... and is watching the architectural side closely"; and then in 1976: "The new proposals for development of the Blue Star site seem to

be sensitive to the needs both of the local environment and of the people who live, shop and work in Hampstead... [and] are the most acceptable we have

seen so far." In the end the results in all three are a compromise with the greed of market forces taking precedence over everything else and working to the detriment of the community. The country just gave its verdict on that way of doing things.

Hampstead has always "embraced and reflected the world that is rapidly evolving round it", as has the HOHS, and Hampstead contains many examples of good modern architecture.

So do your homework Mr Berkeley. We are not frightened of the new world but we do our research and base our arguments on accurate facts.

HELEN MARCUS
The Heath & Old Hampstead Society
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Ingratitude grates

I AM astonished at the bitterness in Peter Berkeley's letter. I can't help wondering where his angst comes from. His very first complaint seemed to be that the HOHS is removing the word old from its title. Is that what sparked off his spleen? My goodness it doesn't take much, does it!



● It pays to campaign: the High Street phone box.

Eruv makes world of difference Brand stand

IT IS clear from views expressed in your letters column, in Monday's BBC Omnibus programme and elsewhere that certain opposition to the eruv is deeply felt.

While, of course, I acknowledge this and do not question the sincerity of opponents' views, some of the opposition appears to be based on a misunderstanding of what an eruv is – and what it is not.

A number of opponents condemn the eruv as an attempt to establish a sectarian boundary, or as a sinister institution. If it were, I too would oppose it. But it isn't, and I don't.

The boundary of an eruv is of significance only to those Sabbath (Shabbat) observant Jews who utilise it. It is of no significance to others. The establishment of an eruv will confer a real benefit on many thousands of Shabbat observant residents of North-West London without detriment to other residents.

The eruv is a perfect example of an institution whose establishment will benefit many and harm no-one.

The fact that eruvs are non-threatening and positive is evident from the dozens of eruvs already established all over the world. Every

major city in North America has one – Toronto, Phoenix, Memphis, Los Angeles, Boston, Chicago, Providence, Miami and Washington DC to name but a few. Outside North America there are eruvs in Johannesburg, Melbourne, Gibraltar, Antwerp and Strasbourg. The Washington DC eruv includes the White House. The Strasbourg eruv includes the European Court of Human Rights. None of these eruvs has in any way caused the sort of harm feared by London eruv opponents.

The simple fact is that Jewish law permits carrying and pushing prams and wheelchairs on Shabbat in a private home and in an area surrounded by an eruv.

Under Jewish law there are limits on the size of the area that an eruv may cover. It is, therefore, impossible to implement proposals made in earlier letters printed in these columns that the M25 or the shores of the British Isles should be the boundary of the eruv. Similarly, there is no mechanism in Jewish law that permits religious authorities to grant dispensations declaring carrying to be permissible – nor to change any other centuries-old laws.

It is a shame that much opposition to the eruv is based on misunderstandings. I hope this letter goes some way towards clarifying matters.

EDWARD B. BLACK
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IN THE light of discussions around the BBC Omnibus programme about the Suburb, I feel that it might be of use for me to clarify the trust's current position on the issue of an eruv.

During my chairmanship and that of my predecessor, the trust council has accepted that there is a wide range of views among the trust's membership and local residents.

Our council members, therefore, do not see the matter of the eruv as a trust issue, except insofar as relating to any planning aspects that may arise.

EDWARD CAPLIN
Chairman
Hampstead Garden Suburb Trust
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SURELY the most important issue brought up by the renaming of the George as the Rat and Parrot is the unrestrained ability of marketing executives to brand-name pubs.

It is doubtful if local exasperation with their limited vision that is based on the bottom-line calculations of the effect of the standardisation of consumption on profit-margins will have an effect. But standardisation of consumption in this case also

leads to standardisation of place and place names. There is therefore clearly a need to devise local planning regulations that govern the renaming of public houses in recognition of their broader social significance and the importance of names for specifying particular places.

These regulations should be flexible in the question of renaming but should discourage brand-naming.

DR ROD BURGESS
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Can you be of jury service?

I AM writing a book about the jury system. I would like to hear from Ham & High readers who have sat as jurors in any high-profile trial, libel case or inquest. This book will not break the law protecting jury delibera-

tions, so I hope anyone with strong views will call me on 0171-435 7351 or fax 0171-794 6575. Thank you.

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For all your postcode enquiries call 0345 111 222