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# How the Trust defends the Suburb

There has been a significant change in the Government's planning priorities in recent years. The news is full of stories about urban regeneration, sustainable development and building on brownfield sites. But few people realise just how much this could impact on areas like the Suburb.

Many residents take the high quality of the environment they enjoy for granted. Because of the internationally recognised importance of this area, we assume its future is safe.

Unfortunately, this is not true.

## The green revolution

When laying out the Suburb for Henrietta Barnett, the master planners, Barry Parker and Raymond Unwin, developed a new approach to the planning of residential areas.

It was the birth of modern Town Planning. To create this unique environment, Parker and Unwin employed the best architects of their day, and directed their work with a strong overall vision.

Roads were planned to curve gently around the landscape. The layout and grouping of houses was carefully considered so that each house relates to the wider picture. Mature trees were retained where possible and hedges planted to provide the houses with an attractive setting.

Most importantly, housing densities were kept low – an average of eight dwellings to the acre – leaving lots of open space, woods, allotments and generous gardens.

This is the inheritance the Trust was set up to protect.

## Changes in government planning policy

But there are very real threats to the Suburb. The low-density layout that characterises the Suburb is viewed as an opportunity by some. There are spaces that could be filled with new homes. Increasingly, there is pressure from speculative development.

Both central government policies and the Greater London Assembly encourage house builders to make use of brownfield sites. What many people do not realise is that these include any sites within existing residential areas – building on garden land, infilling between houses and replacing modest houses with larger ones and in ever greater numbers.

Our houses and gardens are at risk.

## The limitations of Barnet's conservation area powers

The same planning system that designates conservation areas like the Suburb also has to follow national planning guidance. Local authorities are subject to powerful political forces. If Barnet refuses a planning application because it would not preserve or enhance the character of

the conservation area, government planning inspectors can overrule that decision at appeal. Inspectors must take into account planning and economic policies that can override the requirements of conservation area protection. This can mean giving approval to potentially damaging development despite the best intentions of the local authority. So, in today's climate, Barnet's planning powers are not always sufficient to protect our conservation area from damaging development.

**The Trust, on the other hand, is an unusual organisation in that its *only* role is to protect the Suburb environment from harmful change. It derives its powers from the High Court and its decisions can only be challenged in the High Court. It is not subject to the political priorities imposed on local authority planning departments.**

## Some recent examples of Planning Inspectors' decisions

In the last few years, Planning Inspectors have made a number of worrying decisions that could have a damaging impact on the character of the Suburb.

The Trust asked 9 local estate agents whether they felt that property in the Suburb carried a higher value than elsewhere.

The responses suggested that a Suburb property was up to 20% more expensive than a similar property outside.

It was also estimated that the total value of all properties in the Suburb was between £3billion and £4 billion.