

Barnet



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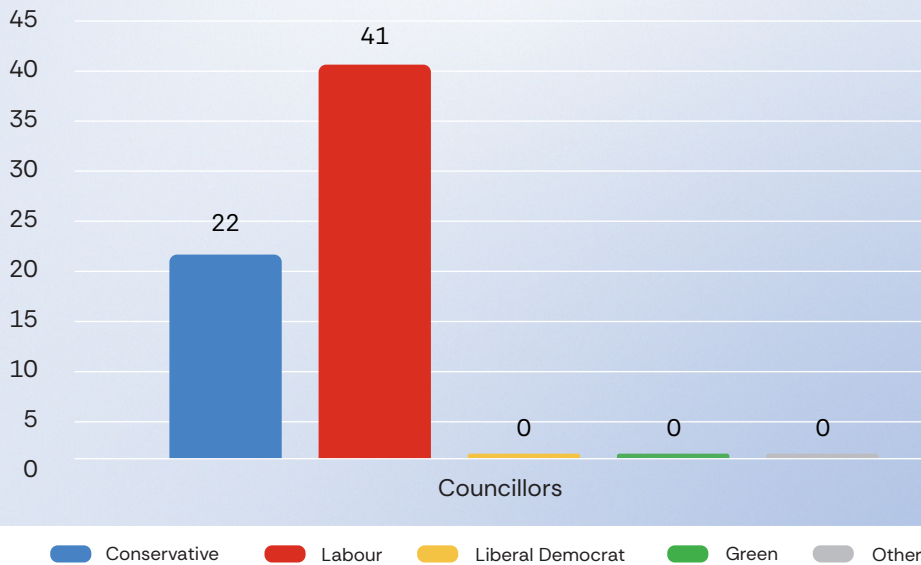
Since 2022

Labour Defence

Labour took sole control of Barnet for the first time in the borough’s history in 2022 and by a tidy margin, having come close to winning in 2018. The Conservatives will have big hopes of normal service resuming after 7 May.

However, as with most of the boroughs in 2026, no outcome can be taken for granted. By-elections since 2022 have revealed significant support for Reform UK, and this has mostly hampered the Tories. Moreover, Barnet produced London’s first Reform councillor when one of the Conservatives changed sides. Another, a former council leader, followed before resigning from the council, leaving his seat vacant. He was later appointed leader of Reform in Wales.

Barnet Council result May 2022 | Total seats: 63



By-elections since May 2022

16 FEBRUARY 2023	GOLDERS GREEN	CON HOLD
04 JULY 2024	BARNET VALE	LAB HOLD
13 FEBRUARY 2025	BURNT OAK	LAB HOLD
6 MARCH 2025	FINCHLEY CHURCH END	CON HOLD
15 MAY 2025	WHETSTONE	LAB HOLD
30 OCTOBER 2025	HENDON	CON HOLD

The number of Labour councillors has fallen only by one since 2022, from 41 of the borough’s 63 seats to 40. The councillor in question was suspended in early 2023 and has this year defected to the Greens. The Tories have dropped from 22 to 19, their third loss being a councillor who was ejected from the group for failing to attend meetings. Reform still has its solitary seat for now.

Not all of Reform’s support has come at the Tories’ expense, with Labour also losing out in some areas. This underlines still further that the old, two-party political pendulum no longer swings like it did. Labour will hope the local Reform vote will help them to survive a Tory comeback by splitting the Right vote, but its 19-seat margin of victory last time looks in some peril.

Local landscape

Barnet is large and varied borough, stretching from the northern edge of Hampstead Heath in the south where it meets Camden to its villagey and rural north, where it meets Hertfordshire. In between lie the towns of Hendon, Finchley, Chipping Barnet, Golders Green and Edgware, busy roads such as the North Circular and the A41, and the Brent Cross shopping centre.

As well as being one of the larger boroughs geographically, Barnet is London's second most populous, after Croydon. The 2021 Census found that its population had also been growing fast, up by a striking 9.2 per cent compared with 2011. London's as a whole had gone up by 7.7 per cent. By 2024, local estimates suggest that Barnet's had soared past 400,000.

The Census also found that much of the borough's growth had been among middle-aged people, especially in the 50 to 64 age group, where numbers had risen by 22.3 per cent. The percentage saying they had retired had gone up by nearly 15 per cent. By contrast, the number of Barnet residents aged between 25 and 34 had, despite the overall increase, actually fallen.

Barnet's people on the whole are a well-educated bunch in high status employment. Almost half have a degree or equivalent and 40-odd per cent are in senior job roles or professional occupations. Around one third of Barnet residents own their homes outright and a slightly smaller proportion have mortgages. Private renters far outnumber council or housing association tenants who account for only about 15 percent of Barnet residents.

Labour's big win four years ago had been coming for a while. In 2014, they won 30 of the 63 seats to the Conservatives' 32 and the Lib Dems' one, and by the end of that term Barnet had slipped into No Overall Control. But Labour lost ground in 2018 (Con 38, Lab 25) a slide widely attributed to Jeremy Corbyn being Labour's national leader. Corbyn's prominent support for Palestine and antipathy to Israel, together with the taint of antisemitism around Labour at that time, alienated many Jewish voters in particular.

Barnet is, like London as a whole, is religiously diverse, with over a third of its residents Christian according to the 2021 Census, followed by 14.5 per cent who

were Jewish, just over 12 per cent Muslim and small percentages of Hindus and Buddhists. About 20 per cent said they had no religion – a low figure in London terms. Barnet famously contains the largest number of Jews of any local authority in England and Wales – 56,616 as of 2021 – twice as many as in the runner-up, the whole of Greater Manchester.

A gauge of the mood of Jewish voters was provided in October, in Hendon ward, when a significant by-election took place. Shimon Ryde, making a Conservative comeback after leaving the group over a personal matter in 2021 when he represented Childs Hill ward, held the seat for the Tories by a comfortable margin.

Local landscape

But Reform UK's Yosef David, who finished second, took a substantial 30.2 per cent vote share. It was only the second time Reform had passed the 30 per cent mark in a London borough by-election. The swing from Labour to the Conservatives was only six per cent – barely enough to turn Barnet's most marginal wards their way on 7 May.

Earlier in the year, Labour held a seat in their stronghold Burnt Oak ward, the contest brought about by the ignominious resignation of the Barnet Labour group's cabinet member for finance. The party's vote share was down by a third, but a split on the Right saw them comfortably home. The Tory portion was reduced a tiny bit and Reform's candidate took 18.4, showing it can have an impact in some working-class Labour areas.

Soon after, in the safely Tory Finchley Church End, Labour did quite well in finishing second, but Reform won 11 per cent. Then, in May 2025, Labour was pleased to retain a seat in Whetstone, one of Barnet's marginals. Again, the Tories were hit by switchers to Reform, whose candidate took a 20.5 per cent vote share compared with the Conservatives' 28.4.

The traditionally biggest parties have been in contention to win Barnet for more than ten years, but must now overcome new problems. For the Tories must contend with competition from Reform, which has a candidate for

every seat. The Lib Dems and the Greens will be looking to chip away at Labour from below. It could be very close indeed.

Barnet Council elections since 2002						
Year	Con	Lab	LD	UKIP/Ref	Green	Other
2002	33	24	6	-	-	-
2006	37	20	6	-	-	-
2010	39	21	3	-	-	-
2014	32	30	1	-	-	-
2018	38	25	-	-	-	-
2022	22	41	-	-	-	-



 BARNET

Electoral prospects

Labour won all three Barnet parliamentary seats in 2024, a complete turnaround from the elections from 2010 to 2019 when all were won by Tories. But other than in Hornsey & Friern Barnet, which is dominated by wards from Haringey, the margins of victory were relatively small: in Hendon, Labour won by only 15 votes, the closest margin in the country.

The council's three-member wards have around 12,000 electors in each, with variety and complexity in all. Let us attempt a typology of Barnet wards based on their political and demographic characteristics.

‘Council estate’ wards

7 seats

Like other outer London boroughs, Barnet has several large council-built estates, some of which are big enough to be the predominant element in a ward. There are three where this applies, although in each of them the Right to Buy and private development since the estate was built mean that the social renting proportion is now below 50 per cent.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Burnt Oak	Lab	Lab	Lab	23.0	63.0	-	14.0	-
Colindale North	Lab	Lab	x	19.1	62.2	-	9.5	9.2
Underhill	Lab	Lab	x	30.0	52.4	5.6	8.5	3.5

Burnt Oak (33 per cent social renting in 2021) in the east of the borough is dominated by Watling, the daddy of Barnet’s estates. It was developed by the London County Council (LCC) next to a then-new Underground line in the 1920s as a cottage estate – a public sector version of the “Metro-land” sprouting across Middlesex at the time.

Colindale North, the creation of the boundary changes that took effect in 2022, is a two-seat ward next-door to Burnt Oak, but smaller and more concentrated (42 per cent social renting). It is largely filled by the 1970s Grahame Park estate built by Barnet and the Greater London Council (GLC) on the site of the Hendon airfield, next to the M1.

The third ward, Underhill, another two-seater (25 per cent social rent), mixes the south part of suburban High Barnet with the 1960s Dollis Valley estate developed by Barnet. Despite being a Conservative-dominated council, it has historically built a lot of council homes.

These three wards form the traditional core of the Labour vote in Barnet: the Watling area has voted Labour continuously since the 1920s, Colindale since 1971, if not always by large margins. Underhill (and its predecessor ward Arkley) has been more marginal, though it hasn’t elected Conservatives since 2010.

These are exactly the sort of wards where Labour might face a serious challenge from Reform. Farage’s party’s 18.4 per cent in the Burnt Oak by-election came before its surge in the national polls. However, both Burnt Oak and Colindale North are highly diverse (White British populations, 23 per cent and 19 per cent respectively) which may put a ceiling on Reform. Underhill is significantly whiter.

Labour’s vulnerability to Reform in hitherto strong wards complicates the battle for control of Barnet. It is quite possible that Labour might defend most of their marginal wards successfully but still lose control thanks to losses here.

South West Barnet

8 seats

South of the main council estates there is a band of territory between the borough's western boundary (running for the most part down the A5 road) and the A41 through Hendon. This is traditionally one of the more working-class and industrial parts of a mostly suburban borough, with Barnet's largest South Asian community. In most elections its wards have favoured Labour.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Colindale South	Lab	Lab	Lab	26.1	60.3	-	13.6	-
Cricklewood	Lab	Lab	x	20.2	63.5	6.2	10.1	-
West Hendon	Lab	Lab	Lab	24.5	47.3	16.9	11.3	-

West Hendon had been a solid Labour ward for many years until a Conservative gain was made in 2018 – the standout result of the Tory success in Barnet that year against the backdrop of Corbyn's Labour leadership. But this was short-lived, as boundary changes removed their best area, Shirehall Park, in advance of the 2022 elections.

A common feature of these wards is recent large-scale redevelopment and population growth: Colindale South is a mixture of the Colindale Gardens area on land released by rebuilding the Metropolitan Police's Peel Centre and older suburbia; West Hendon's estates have been

controversially redeveloped; and Cricklewood is changing rapidly thanks to the Brent Cross West development. These add ethnically diverse younger voters, meaning a bit of a shift to the Left.

On the other hand, Colindale South and West Hendon adjoin the Hindu block of north Brent (they were both nine per cent Hindu in 2021) and might feel the ripples of trends in the wider London Hindu vote, which has been moving towards the Tories.

The Conservatives might stand a chance in Colindale South if the Left vote splits, but the area should produce a Labour plurality even in a poor year for the party. Labour's formidable vote-getter Anne Clarke (also a London Assembly member since 2021) represents Cricklewood, a ward created in the 2022 boundary changes.

Jewish Barnet

21 seats

These wards are defined by the percentage of the population identifying its religion as Jewish accounting for 20 per cent or more of the total in the 2021 Census. The only non-Barnet wards in London to match it reflect the presence of the Ultra-Orthodox community in north Hackney and adjoining parts of Haringey. The measure is a low-end number for Jewish identification as the community is larger than religious belief, and some Jews are reluctant to declare it on a Census form.

The wards with large Jewish populations are the foundation for the Conservatives in Barnet, with 18 of their 22-strong council delegation elected in 2022 representing such areas (and three more from Totteridge & Woodside ward, which falls just below the 20 per cent threshold). They have subsequently lost three: the one who didn't attend meetings became an Independent; another, Mark Shooter, is the one who became Reform's first London councillor; and the third, Dan Thomas, is the ex-leader turned Reformer who's moved to Wales.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Childs Hill	Lab	Lab	Lab	35.8	42.0	12.4	9.7	-
Edgware	Con	Con	Con	54.5	27.8	-	9.4	8.4
Edgwarebury	Con	Con	x	47.5	44.6	-	7.8	-
Finchley Church End	Con	Con	Con	41.8	24.8	25.5	8.6	-
Garden Suburb	Con	Con	x	46.1	23.6	13.7	9.0	7.6
Golders Green	Con	Con	x	65.8	19.2	5.3	6.2	3.4
Hendon	Con	Con	Con	50.2	24.9	5.2	8.5	11.2
Mill Hill	Con	Con	Con	39.9	30.5	14.8	9.3	5.5

Jewish Barnet

21 seats

Golders Green, Hendon and Edgware are the most loyally Conservative wards, and also tend to conservatism in religious terms. Although, for obvious reasons, populist right-wing politics is often a turn-off for British Jews, it may be that Reform has found a channel into conservative parts of the community, as shown by their 30 per cent in the Hendon by-election.

Garden Suburb is very high-status (65 per cent with degrees) and therefore unusual in still being a safe Conservative ward. One suspects that eventually it and Finchley Church End (where Labour did surprisingly

well in the March 2025 by-election) will leave the blue column, but that moment will be delayed by vote-splitting on the centre and Left and the Labour government's unpopularity.

There are three wards that were fairly close in 2022. Labour got within 42 votes in Edgwarebury and 218 in Mill Hill. Edgwarebury was a stretch target that contained parts of the old Hale ward, which could vote Labour for the right candidate in the right year, but Mill Hill was more of a surprise.

The other is Childs Hill, which includes a chunk of the town centre of Golders Green and some estates to the west (it is a transitional area between Jewish suburbia and working-class south west Barnet). Labour won there in 2022 despite losing their best area – and Clarke – to Cricklewood in the boundary changes. The ward has a Lib Dem history, though this appears dormant. It will surely be a Conservative target.

South East Barnet

11 seats

The south east of the borough is the most metropolitan corner of Barnet, similar to Highgate and Muswell Hill across the borough boundary in Haringey. Other than Church End, Finchley is now predominantly Labour and Friern Barnet has rapidly converged to this status.

The potential threat to Labour here is if the Greens or Lib Dems make a serious effort to target any of the wards. The latter had a go at West Finchley in 2022, but only achieved a distant second place. Labour's vote will be less solid in 2026, but even so the dynamics are different in a borough where politics is basically a two-party contest between Labour and the Conservatives than in liberal-left inner boroughs.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
East Finchley	Lab	Lab	Lab	12.8	59.4	16.1	11.7	-
Friern Barnet	Lab	Lab	Lab	21.7	59.7	7.3	11.3	-
West Finchley	Lab	Lab	Lab	18.3	46.9	19.0	10.4	5.4
Woodhouse	Lab	Lab	x	26.3	53.7	8.9	11.1	-

North East Barnet – Chipping Barnet

16 seats

The territory along the upper reaches of the Barnet branch of the Northern Line, and the main line out of King’s Cross, is where Barnet elections are won and lost. Labour’s breakthrough majority in Barnet was mostly achieved in these pleasant suburban wards. In the 2018 election the Tories won 12 seats to Labour’s 3, but in 2022 it swung round to 12 Labour and 4 Tories – the extra councillor arising from new boundaries.

This area comprises the bulk of the Chipping Barnet constituency (Underhill and Edgwarebury are also included in that seat). The housing is mostly owner-occupied Victorian and interwar suburbia, with very little social housing (only High Barnet ward scrapes above 10 per cent social renting). There are some pockets of considerable wealth in Totteridge in particular, but the general atmosphere is of relatively comfortably-off educated professional families.

Ward-level results (2022)	Councillors 2022			Vote share percentage 2022				
	1	2	3	Con	Lab	LD	Green	Other
Barnet Vale	Lab	Con	Lab	37.4	37.5	11.5	13.6	-
Brunswick Park	Lab	Lab	Lab	37.3	46.5	5.6	10.6	-
East Barnet	Lab	Lab	Lab	38.2	44.9	5.4	11.4	-
High Barnet	Lab	Lab	x	35.3	48.7	4.7	8.5	2.8
Totteridge & Woodside	Con	Con	Con	43.4	30.5	11.8	9.7	4.5
Whetstone	Lab	Lab	x	37.3	49.8	-	12.9	-

North East Barnet – Chipping Barnet

16 seats

In contemporary London this often means increasing diversity, and that is the case in Chipping Barnet. The White British population is still around half but falling: it dropped by more than 10 per cent over the 2011–21 period in Barnet Vale, East Barnet, High Barnet and Whetstone. The newcomers come from a wide range of ethnic and religious backgrounds, without any one community dominating.

Such change has certainly helped shift these wards to the Left, but that is far from the whole story – as in Southgate just across the borough boundary the sort of educated professional people who have always lived here

have been increasingly alienated from the Conservatives. Although the Jewish population is a lot smaller than it is in the centre of the borough, it is large by national standards and Corbyn's travails over anti-Semitism may have helped the Tories survive in 2018.

Totteridge & Woodside is the most Conservative of these wards, although the party's winning margin in 2022 was unimpressive for such an affluent place. As their rather similar election results in 2022 suggest, many of these wards are much of a muchness and more likely to move together (or not) as a clump than to split their favours.

Labour is probably in better shape to defend the Chipping Barnet marginals than many apparently safer wards. Demographically, these are places where Reform is unlikely to challenge for a seat, but where they will still take a crucial lump out of the Conservative vote, while Labour is less threatened from the left flank than in more metropolitan wards. This is how it played out in the Whetstone by-election.



BARNET

What to watch for

The Conservatives will work hard to reassert the status quo in what had been one of their flagship London boroughs, but Reform seems likely to make their comeback harder. Labour looks sure to sustain losses, but stands a chance of surviving.