

HIGHBURY COMMUNITY NEWS

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Andrea Levy: an appreciation

By GILL SHEPHERD

Andrea Levy was born in London in 1956 to Jamaican parents. She died on February 14th, 2019. Her father came over on the Empire Windrush in 1948 and her mother arrived 6 months later. Andrea was the youngest of four children, with two sisters and a brother. They lived in a council flat in Twyford House in Elwood Street, Highbury.

She recalled, in a Guardian interview in 2000, “We were good citizens of this country. Never in trouble. Always polite. We lived in a council flat next to the Arsenal football ground. In the world outside our flat, I was a north London girl. I went to the local school. Spoke like a cockney. Offered to mind people’s parked cars on match days. Played rounders, skipping and two-balls. Could blow a great bubble-gum bubble”.

She went to Highbury Hill Girls’ School (still a grammar school then) and went on from there to Middlesex Polytechnic (which had incorporated the renowned Hornsey College of Art) and studied textile design. After college she worked first as a designer and then in the wardrobe departments of the BBC and the Royal Opera House.

She began to write in 1988, taking a writing course at the City Literary Institute, and produced her first book, *Every Light in the House Burnin’* in 1994. That book sketches life in the family flat (the title, her father’s regular complaint when electricity was being wasted), on the Twyford estate in 1960s Highbury.

As it goes on it focusses more and more intensely on her father and



mother. Her mother had been a teacher in Jamaica but her qualification was not recognised in the UK and she worked as a seamstress for years. “But she did go back to college” said Levy, “and got a degree with the Open University. One of the first. She was a plucky woman, my mother”. Levy’s father worked in the Post Office and began to lose his health as soon as he retired, afflicted first with a stroke and then with lung cancer. The book cuts between moving chapters on his decline and eventual death in 1987 only a year before she began writing, and episodes from the family’s earlier life with him, seen through Levy’s childhood eyes.

Levy’s second novel, *Never far from nowhere* (1996) is set in the 1970s and looks back on Highbury and Islington as Levy experienced them as a teenager. The book is less directly autobiographical than its predecessor in the contrasting stories of the two

sisters who are its main focus, but it draws profoundly on her experience of the neighbourhood and the period. ‘Vivian’ (the Levy character) describes embedding herself with her white grammar school girlfriends, beginning to go out to Islington pubs with them to meet boys, and having her first serious encounters with racism among her peers, and with racist police. Meanwhile her older sister ‘Olive’ gets pregnant unintentionally at seventeen, marries, has the baby and is abandoned by her husband a few months later. She stays on in the family flat with the baby, struggling to get a council flat of her own, while Vivian goes on into higher education. Alternating chapters are related by each sister in turn. Almost at the end of the book, Olive muses bitterly about her own situation and says of her sister, trying to pull her down, “Vivian, one day she’ll realise that in

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When everyone pulls together: looking out for trees in Avenell Road

By GILL SHEPHERD

Last Wednesday 3rd April, someone living in Avenell Road spotted signs on trees saying that ‘tree work’ would be taking place on 5th April. She took this to mean pruning, at a time of year when all the trees are in blossom or just coming into leaf. Horrified, she posted the news on ‘Nextdoor Highbury’, noting “when this happened once before at this time of year, many trees were butchered & took 2 years to recover. Avenell is not a beautiful road—it needs every leaf and petal it’s got.” in no time a couple of other Highbury inhabitants were able to supply her with the names and email addresses of the right people in Islington Council to write to and she emailed them, others also writing in support.

She received a reply on 4th from the head of Arboriculture in the Council, Jon Ryan “Thank you for your email and concern for the street trees on Avenell Road. I’ve asked my colleague Paul (cc’d) to check on any works scheduled and we’ll ensure the trees are not pruned in flower, he will get back to you tomorrow”. His colleague

Paul Zepler followed up on Friday morning, 5th : “ I talked to our contractors last night to reinforce our stance on not pruning trees whilst in bloom. This has unfortunately not been communicated to the teams



directly, and as such I have issued an instruction for them to leave site after they have attempted to undertake works on a flowering Sorbus this

morning”. This was received from Islington’s chief tree officer after the original writer and her husband managed to stop the contractors lopping huge limbs off a tree in blossom by getting Jon Ryan, head of Arboriculture, on the phone.

She commented afterwards, “I’m surprised at how simple & civilised the negotiations were, but also what chancers these outsourced tree companies are. They said they should have pruned in the winter, but were too busy because they had lots of contracts. The specialists in Islington told them at this season only to prune lime trees—because they can be pruned at any time of year. Seemingly the tree crew decide to prune (butcher) all the trees on the road beginning with a huge sorbus opposite 125, on the grounds that by the time Islington checked it would be a fait accompli and they would have got through a lot of work at a slack time of year”.

So this is to say how satisfying it is when citizens act and when local government responds positively, helpfully and fast. Congratulations to everyone.

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Andrea Levy

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England, people like her are never far from nowhere. Never”.

The third novel, 'Fruit of the Lemon' (1999) begins in Highbury, with the fictional parents horrifying their children by telling them they are thinking of retiring back to Jamaica. Faith, the daughter, is persuaded by her parents to make a first holiday trip to Jamaica to meet some of the family. That is the framework onto which Levy hung her own first experiences of Jamaica.

The real Levy said of this period, “I was gaining a fledgling sense of pride in having Jamaican heritage. Tentative at first - Bob Marley records, practising sucking my teeth in front of the bathroom mirror”. In due course she decided to visit Jamaica.

“In Kingston, they welcomed me like a prodigal daughter. When I left, I wanted to know more about the people who formed me. It is hard for anyone to research their genealogy, but it is even harder for someone with my background. So, I did the next best thing. I talked to my mum”.

“I learned about her grandfather - my great-grandfather - among many others. A man from Scotland who had flame-red hair. What was he doing so far from home in Jamaica? I had to look in the Scottish history books to find that many men left the hardships of the Highland life to chance their arm in the Caribbean. My father's

father fought in the first world war with the British West Indies Regiment. He was born Jewish but converted to Christianity. His family had been in Jamaica for generations and probably originated from North Africa. Further back, my "mother's, mother's, mother's" was born a slave. She had children by her white English master, who probably had several other children by his slave women and by his white English wife”.

The visit pulled together a new understanding of life at each end of the migration pathway, and enabled her to write her masterpiece, 'Small Island' (2004) about the experience of her parents' generation in migrating to England. It won three awards: the [Whitbread Book of the Year](#), the Orange Prize, and the [Commonwealth Writers' Prize](#), was serialized on television in 2009 and will be staged at the National Theatre later this year.

I greatly admire Levy for the sense that she was comfortable in her skin, and for her ease with the multiplex nature of British society into which she had found how to fit, most of the time.

In her Guardian 2000 interview she said, “there is a tendency to believe that the recent immigration into this country, started by my intrepid dad and others, was where our relationship began. But nothing could be further from the truth. Not only do black people have ancestors who are white, but also some ordinary British white people are connected to the estimated 20,000 black people who settled in Britain as a result of the trade. The history of Britain is

inextricably linked with that trade, and therefore with somewhere like Jamaica”.

“Any history book will show that England has never been an exclusive club, but rather a hybrid nation. The effects of the British Empire were personal as well as political. And as the sun has finally set on the Empire, we are now having to face up to all of these realities”. Those are inspiring insights in the age of Brexit.

Highbury Community Association and Highbury East Ward Councillor Sue Lukes will petition Islington Council for a blue plaque to be placed in Andrea Levy's memory on Twyford House where she lived as a child. There will also be a celebration of her work at our local Indie bookshop Ink@84, and the petition will be held there for signing.

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Finsbury Park reference group works on improving experience of local residents during Wireless concerts this summer

By SARAH POTTER

This group has been set up to discuss the plans to manage the impact of the Finsbury Park concerts on our area. This summer, the Community Festival takes place on the weekend 28th, 29th and 30th June, and Wireless on the weekend 5th, 6th and 7th July. At the meeting of the Reference Group on 4th April, plans for parking and traffic management and cleaning for these festivals were put

forward.

Present were Claire Armstrong from Festival Republic, the concert organisers, Cllr Una O'Halloran (Executive Member for Community Development), Cllr Roulin Khondoker (Highbury West) Cllr Gary Heather (Finsbury Park Ward), Cllr Michael O'Sullivan (Finsbury Park Ward), and officer Jan Hart. HCA members present were Diane Burrige, Saira Bano, Sarah Potter, and Katie Dawson, who is a member of the Friends of Finsbury Park Committee and reports back to HCA on their activities.

On parking and traffic management, barriers will be in place 5 pm to 12 midnight Fridays, 12 midday to 12 midnight Saturdays, and 11 am to 11 pm Sundays to prevent entry to the Blackstock triangle from Gillespie Road to Finsbury Park and along the Blackstock Road. Islington civil enforcement officers will allow through resident permit holders, residents with proof of residency in the zone, and vehicles visiting residents who have supplied their name and address to their visitor. A block will be placed on Uber traffic in the area during concert egress times. 999 calls for ambulances to the area will be routed through the Concert Event Control Room to ambulance staff there, to prevent ambulances being held up in traffic on Gillespie Road, as happened last year.

On street cleaning, the plan is for the Council to carry out the cleaning this year, funded by Festival Republic, and covering side roads if required. Deep cleaning of food waste will be undertaken as necessary, with feedback on local conditions.

Claire Armstrong of Festival Republic reported that communications at concerts this summer will include a drop of information to local residents, a residents' website which will be kept live, a residents' liaison officer with an email address on a 48 hour response time, and live feedback during the concerts. The street barriers will carry a festival phone number.

The Council has requested feedback on these plans from residents by Friday 19th April at licensing@islington.gov.uk.

This year's events in Finsbury Park

- ✦ Sat & Sun, 25 & 26 May – Steel Yard London – 15,000 capacity in special structure, 1-10pm.
- ✦ Sun 30 June – Community Festival – 11am-10pm
- ✦ Fri, Sat & Sun, 5, 6, 7 July - Wireless Festival – 1.30-10.30pm (Fri & Sat), & 1.30-10.00pm (Sun).
- ✦ Sat 21 Sept – Hospitality in the Park – 11am-10.30pm
- ✦ Sun 22 Sept - ABODE in the Park – 12pm-10pm

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Residents comment on 'point no entry' on Gillespie Road

By GILL SHEPHERD

The 'point no entry' has now been in place for seven weeks and new patterns of road use are beginning to emerge. These are being extensively discussed on the local 'Nextdoor Highbury' website. We have also interviewed individuals living in St Thomas' Road, Gillespie Road, Avenell Road and Aubert Park, and sent questions to Councillor Claudia Webbe, to which she has responded.

Reported impacts so far

Gillespie Road residents near to the point no entry are very satisfied with results. However, at the far end of Gillespie Road near its junction with Blackstock Road they are seeing vehicles going westwards at much increased speeds.

St Thomas' Rd residents have noticed a drop in both north and south-bound vehicles. However, those living in the Tannington Terrace block of flats at the southernmost point of St. Thomas' Rd now have to drive round three sides of a square to get to a point where they can go westwards.

Avenell Road has experienced major negative effects from the new arrangements. Vehicles now use this road, instead of St Thomas' Road, to drive south in preparation for a westward turn in order to reach the Holloway Road via Drayton Park. Instead of turning right onto Gillespie Road, they go the length of Avenell Road until it joins Aubert Park, and turn right there instead. Similarly some vehicles begin a journey along Gillespie Road, see that they will not be able to access Drayton Park that way, and so

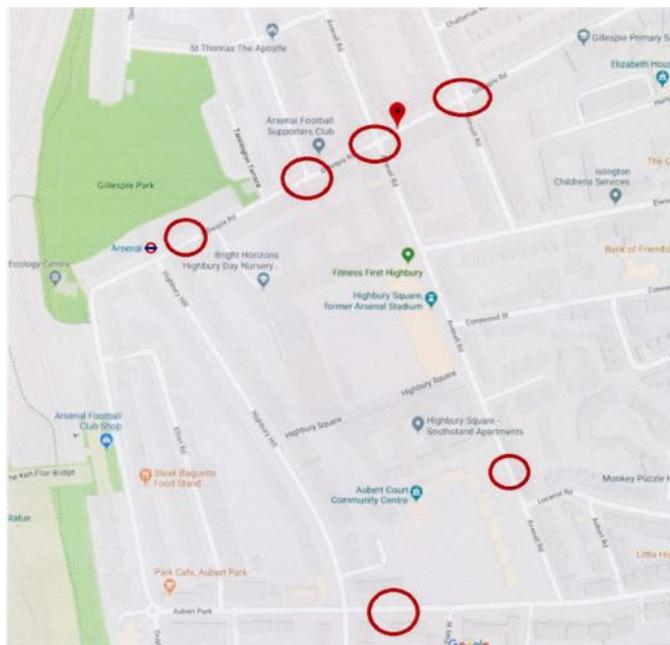
turn left onto Avenell Road and join Aubert Park at the top.

Traffic has also increased on Aubert Park. It is a wider road, with several chicanes intended to reduce speeding. There are reports on 'Nextdoor Highbury' of queues and altercations at the chicanes especially at busy times of day.

Two other junctions need watching for impact, from the evidence of commentators on Nextdoor Highbury. The point where Mountgrove Road meets Blackstock Road, close to a zebra crossing and to a queue of cars which now builds up to turn right into Gillespie Road, is one. The other is at the junction of Aubert Park and Highbury Park, opposite Joan of Arc school, where a queue of vehicles wanting to turn right into Aubert Park is causing problems.

Next steps and actions to take

- ♦ The monitoring points, chosen for the baseline without any local consultation, mean that new monitoring points cannot be added, though these two junctions and at least one point much further north towards Finsbury Park on Avenell Road would have been ideal additions. The existing monitoring points (see map) will be surveyed at three monthly intervals. The next will be in May.
- ♦ Cllr Webbe says the Council has received very few reports of increased traffic on Avenell Rd and Aubert Park. This suggests that, in addition to discussion on Next Door Highbury, those with experience of changes on these streets should make sure they write to Cllr Webbe and to Satbir Dhillon the Council's Principal Engineer. (Claudia.Webbe@islington.gov.uk and Satbir.Dhillon@islington.gov.uk). Letters/emails to these two should also be cc'd to the Council Media Officer Holly Townsend (Holly.Townsend@islington.gov.uk) As usual, the Council rates the gravity of problems by the numbers of letters/emails it receives on given subjects.
- ♦ It also makes sense to copy any such emails to our ward councillors, Andy.Hull@islington.gov.uk, Theresa.Debono@islington.gov.uk and Roulin.Khondoker@islington.gov.uk, so that they too build up a dossier on impacts.
- ♦ Join Nextdoor Highbury! It is a great way for us all to keep in touch.



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Highbury Community Association AGM 2019

By DIANE BURRIDGE

Sarah Potter, chairing the meeting, informed the 45 people present that:

Three new members to the **Committee** had been welcomed this year: Lesliann Jat, David Braine, and Saira Bano. As well, Roger Wright (membership), Katie Dawson (Finsbury Park Stakeholders Group), and Gill Shepherd (editor, HCA News) make very valuable contributions to HCA but are not Committee Members. Will Parkes is stepping down from the Committee but will continue to set HCA News, work on our website and social media, and attend key meetings relating to Finsbury Park Events.

Our activities during the year included:

1. Holding a very successful social evening in January 2019, and running a stall at the Apple Day in Gillespie Park in October 2018.

2. Opposing Sainsbury's new planning application to open a store in The Old Police Station on Blackstock Road which was rejected by the Council in August 2018. We took an active role in the local campaign against



Sainsbury's recent appeal to the Planning Inspector against this Council decision.

3. Attending Highbury West Ward Partnership meetings and supporting restrictions on lorries in Drayton Park. We will monitor the new one-way entry scheme in Gillespie Road. The scheme is experimental at this stage and our comments are sought by the Council (There is an article about this elsewhere in the newsletter.)

4. Submitting a comprehensive response to the Islington Draft Local Plan in January 2019, thanks to the work of our planning lead, John Egan. Our opposition to the Plan's change of policy on building towers in Islington in areas outside the City such as Finsbury Park, was highlighted on the front page of the Islington Tribune on 22nd February 2019.

5. Working to mitigate the effects on local residents of the noise, disorder and mess created by the Wireless Festival in July 2018. We monitored local views and Katie Dawson led on reporting these to the Council, while our evidence was sent to the Licensing Committee of the London Borough of Haringey, when it held a review of the Festival's Licence in October 2018. We submitted detailed comments on Islington's 'Conditions for Live Nation to have a Licence for Major Events in Finsbury Park'. We met the Leader of the Council, councillors and officers on 24th January, and heard that the Council will be working with Live Nation to improve the local impact of the Festival. A Reference Group has been set up, involving Highbury Community Association, and the first meeting is on Thursday 4th April 2019. If you are interested in being involved in this Group, please contact us.

John Egan, the Treasurer, presented the income and expenditure for the year to 31 December 2018, stating that there had been an excess of expenditure of £154; donations for our expenses are always welcomed. Total bank balances now stand at £4,576 compared with £4,730 on 31 December 2017.

Continued on page 7...

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Islington Ecology Centre
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Committee Members elected for the year from March 2019 were: Saira Bano; David Braine; Diane Burridge; Bahar Chowdhary; John Egan; David Fenton; Lesliann Jat; Beth Moir; Sarah Potter and Tom Rubens.

Our Guest Speaker was Gill Shepherd (visiting Professor at the LSE) who spoke on tropical forests, human rights and climate change. She explained how she plays a mediating role between customary forest owners and Government – the formal forest owners – when forest land comes under threat from logging companies and oil and gas exploration.

Often collecting telling data is a key part of defending local livelihoods. In north Ghana, for example, it was found that forests provided many sources of income of particular importance to the poorest people. Cash income was worked out at 72 cents per day and but non-cash consumption income from farm and forest added another \$1.88 per day to that.

International initiatives to pay people to protect forests, in order to mitigate against the impact of climate change globally, therefore, need to take the non-cash value of forests into account. Such programmes include Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD+) It is ironic that such programmes are asking people already living on less than \$1 a day to forego forest use in order to help the rich North deal with its emission problems. Government officials were shocked at how low this income was, which is informative in itself.

Gill has also worked with local people to map their localities, helping them to delineate and then set aside areas for biodiversity conservation, forest use or agriculture. Such mapping and data collection strategies are now being used in 25 countries.

Gill noted pioneering work in Ethiopia to combat climate change, and rebuild lost resources. Work by local groups has included tree planting, and protecting hillsides from grazing so trees can regrow. Climate change impacts are a driving force behind much emigration, especially of young people, from villages to cities nearby and to Europe. This is leaving many villages without a sufficient young workforce, causing even more poverty.

Verity Baldry and the Rev. Tania Witter spoke on behalf of **the Heart of Highbury Campaign** for the planned Christ Church Community Centre which will improve the facilities that the Church offers to many local groups.

The Raffle and Auction raised £454 for the AGM's Charity Appeal: **the Islington Foodbank**. A representative from the Foodbank stated that this had supported 6,000 people in 2018 compared with 300 in 2017. There are 150 volunteers and the Foodbank operates from a shipping container without electricity at Highbury Roundhouse in Ronalds Road, so only non-perishable items can be accepted.

During the **open discussion**, the audience raised:

- The need for more Sheffield Bicycle Stands, for example

outside the Library on Blackstock Road.

- One-way traffic changes in Gillespie Road. See the separate article about this matter.

- Highbury Fields: people queried whether the portion of Highbury Crescent bisecting the Fields will be permanently closed. Caroline Russell responded on this and comments briefly here in the newsletter.

Many people attending brought delicious food to share and the evening was as always great fun. Many local businesses and individuals donated prizes for the Raffle and Auction, and their generosity is greatly appreciated. We hope to see you at the 2020 AGM, next March!

Thank you to everyone who generously donated gifts for the raffle and auction!

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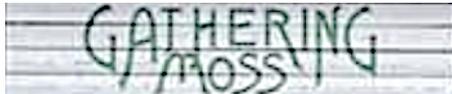


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ISLINGTON

Keeping Highbury Fields connected

By CLLR CAROLINE RUSSELL, Islington Council for Highbury East and Member of the London Assembly

We are approaching the end of several years of civil engineering at Highbury Corner during which time the road that bisects Highbury Fields has been closed to provide offices for the Highbury Corner workers. This closure has made it slightly less convenient for people to cut through from Highbury Grove to Holloway Rd by car and slightly nicer to walk from the Barn to the Corner, as you don't have to pause to cross a stream of traffic passing through the Fields.

All over London people people are trying to walk, cycle and catch the bus more and use cars less. This chimes with rising concerns about the pace of climate breakdown and the urgent need to decarbonise transport.

The inconvenience of driving a few

more turns before getting home is surely outweighed by the benefits of re-uniting the two halves of Islington's biggest green space?

If we listen to the children from local schools protesting for more action on climate change, the parents clamouring for clean air and all those enjoying Highbury Fields as an oasis

from the bustle of the nearby main roads, then there's no way we should split the Fields in half again with a road. Just imagine a view straight across the park, and the Fields connected as a traffic free oasis for everyone to enjoy.



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