

# HIGHBURY COMMUNITY NEWS

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## Christ Church spire - a beloved landmark re-emerges

‘It will be a proud day for Highbury when the restoration is complete’



One of the stonemasons working on the restoration

By JANET GILBERT

Since the start of 2016 the spire of Christ Church at the top of Highbury Hill has been enveloped in scaffolding as a team of specialist stonemasons has undertaken an extensive effort to repair the crumbling fabric of the tower. After almost ten months under wraps, the beauty of the fully restored spire is at last set to be unveiled during October.

The deterioration of the stonework was first discovered following a survey in 2014, which revealed that the original Victorian iron cramps dating from the spire’s construction in 1848 had rusted badly, leading to severe water and weather damage that threatened the stability of the spire. Faced with the stark choice of

demolition or repair, the church managed to secure a grant of £206,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for its Spire and Heritage Project, covering about two-thirds of the estimated costs of £312,000, which thus enabled the emergency work to go ahead.

Christ Church’s Nick Weedon of HMDW Architects is impressed with the refurbishment by experienced London firm DBR. “They’ve taken enormous care and the craftsmanship is first class,” he commented. “It will be a proud day for Highbury when the restoration is complete.”

But unfortunately the stonemasons also exposed even more previously hidden decay, and consequently the church has encountered significantly higher repair costs. It has raised over

half of the increase through further grants and private donations, but it’s still urgently seeking £25,000 to cover the final bill. Many residents and visitors have chosen to donate to the ‘Sponsor A Stone’ appeal, through which people can help to pay for one or more of the hundreds of stones which are being carved for the spire: for more information see [www.virginmoneygiving.com/fund/ChristChurchHighburySpireAppeal](http://www.virginmoneygiving.com/fund/ChristChurchHighburySpireAppeal).

The HLF grant included funding for the Highbury Heritage project, which will make the history of Highbury available to the whole community via a touchscreen sited in the church early in 2017. Residents, businesses, schools and community groups will be asked to contribute.

At a recent fundraising auction Highbury resident Gum Newnham won the opportunity to climb the scaffolding in the company of the stonemasons. “The view from the top is stunning,” Gum said. “You can really appreciate how the community fits together around certain landmarks, like the churches, the Fields, Highbury Barn, the Emirates. I can’t wait to learn a bit more about the history of the area when the heritage project is unveiled!”

Watch out for the imminent return of the spire, and keep a particular eye on the beautifully re-gilded weathervane, which will once more serve as a gleaming symbol of Highbury and its rich heritage at the spot where the Fields, the Barn and Highbury Hill all converge.

# The troubled future and noble past of our public parks

By SARAH POTTER

In 1994, when our urban parks had become severely run down from lack of expenditure, the think tank Demos created a report: "Park Life: Urban Parks and Social Renewal." This showed that parks were much more frequently used than researchers had expected, with 40% of respondents to a survey visiting their park daily. Parks also attracted "a much wider cross-section in terms of age, ethnicity and income than users of most other public leisure facilities", especially indoor sports centres, according to the research, as reported in Travis

Elborough's recent book "A Walk in the Park: the Life and Times of a People's Institution" (2016, p. 318).

A year later the government decided to spend money from the newly introduced National Lottery on parks to implement the report's conclusions, which were based on the good value for money parks represented. A period of restoration, new facilities and the employment of skilled staff was the outcome.

By 2014, however, the Heritage Lottery Fund itself reported that public parks were experiencing a fall in funding "potentially greater and more rapid than that faced during the

late 1970s to early 1990s" (Elborough, p. 326). Funding from private events is now being used to compensate for the fall. Conflict between public users of parks and private uses has clearly been the result in our locality, with residents finding their green space fenced off without proper consultation and left damaged by excessive private use in Finsbury Park and Paradise Park. The recent Wireless Festival stands out as particularly harmful.

A parliamentary inquiry will begin in September on the impact of spending cuts on parks, and will "consider concerns that their existence is under threat" once more (<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/communities-and-local-government-committee/inquiries/parliament-2015/public-parks-16-17/>). At the London Parks and Gardens Trust's Annual Summer Lecture this year, David Lambert, director of the Parks Agency, argued forcefully that while parks have always received some income from events, franchises and donations, keeping them free and open requires public funding by local authorities.

Given the pressure for massive housing development, the absolute cost of our parks seems to currently be the main issue for local authorities. The relative good value for money of parks in leisure provision, as established in the 1994 report, has not



A funfair in Finsbury Park

Continued on page 3...



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figured in the debate, though it seems very likely that it still holds true. Nor has a costed estimate of the ecological services provided by parks been made, though the recent i-Tree Eco survey of London's trees clearly shows that a methodology for valuing ecological services such as removing pollutants from the air (<https://www.forestry.gov.uk/london-itree>) now exists.

Perhaps the most persuasive idea to surface recently is that urban nature is no less valuable now than rural nature "in terms of quality, diversity, recreation, access and inclusion", according to the guerrilla geographer Daniel Raven-Ellison (<http://www.londongardenstrust.org/features/nationalpark.htm>). Raven-Ellison is the originator of the proposal for a Greater London National Park City initiated at ward level, which would link London parks in a National Park City Partnership with time, expertise and resources. If the case can indeed be made, our current park troubles might be approached with greater direction, balance and perspective in this matter of urban space and wellbeing.

The origin of our present urban parks can be found in 1833 when a parliamentary committee looked into the provision of open spaces in populous towns for public walks. The rapid rise of the urban population and the intensification of work had prompted concern that the poor

should have access to the outdoors and beneficial leisure. The committee recommended that, as with church building in expanding towns, government funding to match local donations should be made available. Between 1840 and 1852, about 12 parks were laid out in London.



A vision of the order and contentment of rural society seemed to inspire this expression of the distrust of urbanism which may be characteristic of our society (Elborough, p. 74). Nevertheless, in this area, a plan of 1844 for a park of

800 acres extending east from Highbury to Stoke Newington failed, according to Mary Cosh's History of Islington (2005, p. 282).

Another period of rapid urban growth occurred at the end of the 19th century. The designs of the landscape architects of the period reflected revived English rural influences, with Old English Gardens built in no fewer than five London parks, including Battersea Park (pictured left).

A final historical influence on public parks has been the idea of urban regeneration, which formed the background to the Demos report of 1994, the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park and smaller projects tackling dereliction, including Gillespie Park. City populations had resumed growth in the 1980s, including an influx of new professional groups for whom, according to Elborough (pp. 315-316), green space and community were matters of concern.

The **Highbury Community Association (HCA)** represents local residents and businesses on all aspects of living and working in Highbury, Lower Holloway and Finsbury Park.

**Membership is free.** Members receive bi-monthly newsletters like this one. New members will receive the newsletter by email (unless you don't have email). To join or talk to us about anything Highbury-related, visit our website, or email [hcanews@hotmail.com](mailto:hcanews@hotmail.com). The HCA can also be contacted on Facebook and Twitter.

The opinions expressed in Highbury Community News are not necessarily those of the HCA and/or its committee members.

**Please let us know if you move, so we can keep our membership list up to date.**

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# An update on planning from the HCA

By JOHN EGAN

Over the past few weeks the Highbury Community Association (HCA) has taken action on numerous matters concerning planning in the Highbury area.

As well as raising further objections to Sainsbury's plans for using the Old Police Station on Blackstock Road for retail use (see previous newsletters), we have opposed plans to open a cooked food market in St Mary Magdalene Gardens on Arsenal match days. We believe the latter proposal would deprive Holloway Road of one of its most picturesque spots.

We have also supported the council's decisions to refuse consent for change of use in respect of the laundrette at 140 Blackstock Road and to seek Article 4 direction powers. These powers prevent change of use from retail to financial services without a planning application.

**Do you have a local news story you would like to see in a future edition of Highbury Community News?**

**Please contact us at [hcanews@hotmail.com](mailto:hcanews@hotmail.com)**

# Highbury Corner proposals - feedback from the consultation



By DIANE BURRIDGE

Transport for London (TfL) received 2,823 responses to their consultation on a new road layout for Highbury Corner (pictured above and below) which was carried out earlier in the year. The results showed that the majority of respondents believed the new road layout proposals for Highbury Corner would:

- Improve conditions for pedestrians (71 per cent)
- Improve conditions for cyclists (67 per cent)
- Improve conditions for tube/rail passengers (59 per cent)
- Make conditions worse for motorists (35 per cent), and
- Make conditions worse for bus passengers (33 per cent)

When asked to select a preference for the proposed new public space:

- 14 per cent chose to keep the arboretum closed to the public
- 56 per cent chose to open up the arboretum for public use

For a summary of the consultation responses visit the TfL website at: <https://consultations.tfl.gov.uk/roads/highbury-corner-roundabout/>. The points raised during the consultation will now be reviewed. A second report, to be published this autumn, will set out TfL's responses to these issues, and explain the next steps for the project.



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# Cut-through traffic conflicts in Highbury: the bigger picture

By CAROLINE RUSSELL AM

The ongoing saga of traffic cutting through Highbury, coming into conflict near Arsenal station (pictured below) and causing noise and disturbance for local residents, is part of something far bigger than Gillespie Road.

Currently there are only two main routes that take cars from Blackstock Road/Highbury Grove across to Holloway Road, constrained by the few places where roads cross northbound railway lines. One goes via Gillespie Road and Drayton Park, the other cuts across Highbury Fields via Baalbec Road, Highbury Place, Highbury Crescent and Fieldway Crescent. People living on both these routes suffer from the volume of cut-through traffic, and the inevitable snarl-ups and anger when vehicles obstruct one another.

Congestion is not peculiar to Highbury, and the wider picture is important. The whole of London - especially Inner London - is suffering from excess levels of motorised traffic. We are living in a growing city and every form of transport is increasingly congested.

The London Assembly is currently conducting an investigation into

congestion and how best to use the limited road space available. At the same time, one of the biggest issues facing the new Mayor is air pollution. Levels of nitrogen dioxide are higher than EU limits on all of Highbury's roads, and much higher on Blackstock and Holloway Roads.



More seriously, levels of PM2.5s are soaring. There is no safe exposure level to these tiny particles, which enter our bloodstream when we breathe them in, and are produced from tyre and brake pad wear as vehicles drive through the city. Recent studies show PM2.5s' links to both lung cancer and dementia.

If the Mayor of London delivers on his election promises to clean up our air, we will see strong measures to reduce car use. Hopefully he will be reducing traffic by investing in our streets, to make walking and cycling or public transport the most convenient choice for local trips. This

could be a moment of transformation. There is an opportunity for our streets to become more sociable spaces where cycling and walking are easy and safe.

We could have expanded car share schemes for those that have journeys to make to places less connected to public transport, and even a bank of cargo bikes for hire as well.

If we are going to play our part in improving public health and cleaning up the air then we also need to look at solutions that design out short car trips and protect residential roads from the health risks of through traffic. Neighbouring boroughs are making their streets more people-friendly - and better places to live - by filtering roads so that every street can be accessed from the main road network while ensuring that cut-through routes through residential areas are closed off. These schemes can be trialled easily with temporary concrete blocks and planters before being made permanent.

Car ownership and use has been promoted for many years but we've reached the point where there is no more space for new parking or roads in our city. We need to start talking about how we can best use this precious public space to enable everyone to get around safely and conveniently, and to protect our health.

Caroline Russell is a Green Party Councillor in Highbury East Ward and a London Assembly Member



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# Development trouble on Legard Road

By GILL SHEPHERD

Residents of Legard Road have been campaigning against development in the area for three years now. The closing date for objections was August 4<sup>th</sup> but the HCA thought that all local residents should be aware of the plans in case the opportunity for future action comes up. Susanna Longley, Chair of the Legard Quadrant Residents Association explains the issue here:

“The site was (for 20/30 years) the headquarters of Peter Bedford - a housing charity that provides homes and training for people with special needs and mental health issues. The training was in their cafe and wood workshop (the rest of the site was used as offices). Several of their training sessions were open to the local community too - so it was a valuable and worthwhile local resource.

Three years ago Peter Bedford decided they wanted a

‘higher profile’ head office. They sold the site to a developer without planning permission. The developer managed eventually to get Prior Approval permission to convert the office part of the site into residential units. He is now trying to get permission to convert the workshop space into more residential units; making a total of 15 units on the site. We would like to keep this workshop space e.g. for rent as low-cost artist studio spaces.

The entrance and exit (there is no ‘back door’) to the site is just 9ft wide and on a corner and on a hill. The frontage is narrower than the frontage of the houses on the street. Also vehicles are excluded from the site under the current plan. It is highly likely therefore that every one of these households will have grocery and shopping deliveries as well as taxi drop offs and pick ups at the entrance many times a week. This will result in real congestion and noise problems for the neighbouring houses and the consequent potential for neighbourhood disharmony! Also there are 2 primary schools and a nursery near to the site. Every morning and evening there are many children and buggies processing across the entranceway to the site - delivery vans and children are not a safe mix.”



## A special thank you to Highbury Roundhouse



The HCA would like to send a special thank you to Highbury Roundhouse, one of the area’s most beloved institutions, for hosting our printer and PC for many years. This small favour to us reflects the good spirit and usefulness that the institution has always offered to the wider community.

## Information on street cleaning in Highbury

By DIANE BURRIDGE

On behalf of the HCA, I raised the issue of the state of street cleaning in the area at a recent Highbury West Ward Partnership meeting.

Dean Herbert, Street Environmental Manager, from the Environment & Regeneration Department at Islington Council reported to the meeting.

We were assured that these schedules are still in place:

**Tuesdays** - all streets have a thorough sweep by broom and street bins are emptied.

**Thursdays and Saturdays** - litter is picked up and street bins are emptied.

Unfortunately, on occasions, although the thorough sweep on Tuesdays is of a good standard normally, litter has remained and street bins have not been emptied during the rest of the week. Some residents have reported that they have resorted to cleaning their street themselves.

If you need to complain, please contact:  
<http://www.islington.gov.uk/www.islington.gov.uk/>  
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**Islington Ecology Centre**  
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# Clay Time comes to Blackstock Road

By CHARLIE ROBERSON

Highbury residents looking for a new activity to try out will be pleased by a recent addition to Blackstock Road. Clay Time, described as a 'not for profit community interest company', puts a trendy spin on the arts & crafts class.

It may look like a new upmarket coffee shop at a glance but Clay Time is in fact a pottery studio with a range of activities to appeal to people of all ages and abilities. If the mere mention of pottery is enough to bring back bad memories of fumbling through primary school art classes, don't be put off.

When I stopped by on a Tuesday night to see a beginners' course the atmosphere was welcoming and friendly, with The Beatles on the radio and the smell of coffee in the air. The décor is bright and clean (especially impressive given the amount of clay and paint that must pass through) and the walls are lined with dozens of examples of the kind of pottery that can be created there.



The shop's most distinctive feature is the collection of impressive-looking pottery wheels where the ceramics are shaped. They are fired on-site in a kiln that is (perhaps wisely) hidden away for health and safety reasons.

The number of activities on offer is striking. The adult beginner's course provides a comprehensive introduction to all things pottery-related, including coil building, using a potter's wheel, throwing, and decorating. Unfortunately you'll have to ask the experts to find out more about what these terms mean.

For those not interested in doing a full course, Clay Time offer drop-in sessions and run one-off events, often themed around events like Christmas decoration-making. For children, there are regular after school pottery clubs and more comprehensive activity courses during school holidays.

The HCA is thrilled to see something as creative and exciting as Clay Time open in the heart of Highbury. We wish them the best of luck and would encourage everyone to take a chance on this exciting endeavour.

Clay Time is located at 168 Blackstock Road.

You can find out more about them at their website: <http://www.claytime.london/>.

# Apple Day at the Ecology Centre

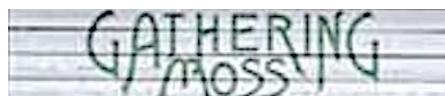
Gillespie Park - 12-4pm, Sunday 16 October

This event will feature music by Rachel Stott and her violin pupils in association with Gillespie School, folk groups, as well as garden 'classroom' activities, food, stalls and apple pressing.

Run by the Ecology Centre staff with the Friends of Gillespie Park, the event aims to celebrate apples and have fun in our lovely Ecology Centre and Park, which local people years ago fought to save from development!



The Ecology Centre in Gillespie Park



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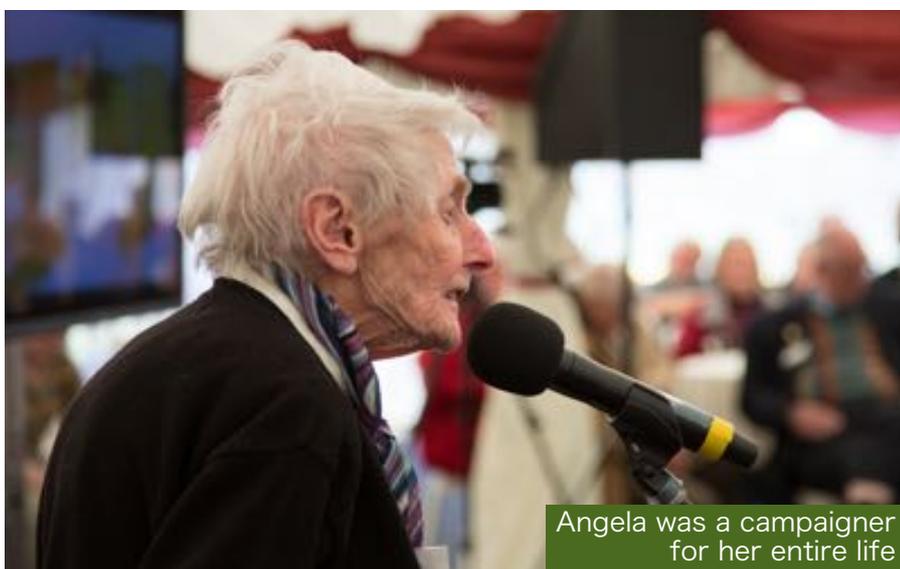
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## Angela Sinclair-Loutit, local activist, dies aged 95



By CHARLIE ROBERSON

Highbury lost one of its most cherished residents over the summer. Angela Sinclair-Loutit, a committed activist and Islington local of nearly 40 years, died in August. Given the effect she had on our community and its people, we thought it would only be fitting to commemorate her in the HCA newsletter.

Born in Kensington in 1921 to a military family, Angela was studying politics, philosophy and economics at Oxford when the Second World War broke out. In 1940 she left her studies to dedicate her time to helping others affected by the conflict.

During the Blitz she worked with the Quaker Friends Ambulance Unit

(FAU) to help victims of bombings in the East End. Later in the war she worked at the headquarters of the FAU before going to Egypt to help 6,000 Yugoslavs who had been evacuated from the Dalmatian Islands.

It was in Egypt that she met Kenneth Sinclair-Loutit, a doctor working in the Middle East Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. The couple would go on to be married in 1946 and have three children over the course of their marriage.

Before the end of the War, Angela would find herself driving medical supplies 800km from American ships to Belgrade, often on poorly maintained roads with little support. She also worked in the UN health division in Belgrade.

While Angela returned to the UK with Kenneth after 1945 she showed no signs of abandoning her enthusiasm for helping others. She worked for the British Red Cross Tracing Service before accompanying her husband to Thailand when he became World Health Organisation adviser to UNICEF in the Far East.

Returning to England in the 1970s, Angela became a resident of Islington and never left. She campaigned for many causes, wrote for the *Islington Gazette* and became secretary of the Islington Pensioners Forum. She was even one of the community members who worked to transform Gillespie Park from a disused stretch of land to the local treasure that it is today.

Even in her old age, Angela was still campaigning fiercely for the issues that mattered to her. At 84, she lay down at the Mall for an hour in opposition to the arms trade. At 92, she protested cuts to NHS services outside Whittington Hospital. For her dedication and enthusiasm she was received the respect of people in the Highbury community and beyond.

Angela died on 18 August 2016 aged 95 in France. She is survived by her three children and seven grandchildren.

Remarkable interviews with Angela about her early life and her experiences in the Second World War can be found on the Imperial War Museum’s website (<http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80009822>). Whether you knew Angela or not, these records will make for interesting listening and give you a great insight into her personality.

Jeremy Corbyn, MP for Islington North and Leader of the Labour Party, wrote a touching tribute to Angela in the *Islington Tribune*. He described her as a “true friend” and remarked on her commitment to peace, justice and community. The full piece can be read in the *Tribune’s* obituary, available online here: <http://www.islingtontribune.com/activist-angela-all>.

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