

Where are the Highbury GPs?

By James Hood

HIGHBURY COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION was deeply disappointed when, some four years ago, the Primary Care Trust withdrew from its agreement to provide a new GP surgery in Highbury Square. Many residents struggled to understand how there could be no need for a new surgery in a part of the Borough where there were very few surgeries, and a substantial planned increase in population to come.



HIGHBURY SQUARE, AND NOT A SURGERY IN SIGHT

In an effort to understand the background to the decision, and to hear more about health care provision in this part of Islington, HCA spoke to Tony Hoolaghan. Tony is the PCT's locality director for central Islington, and was chief executive of North Islington Primary Care Group (the predecessor to the PCT). Tony has been closely involved with premises and with GP planning in this area for the past ten years.

Planning for GP services is, Tony says, a very complex business. National and local political requirements, the local property market, health service finances and the business plans of individual GPs (who are independent contractors rather than NHS employees) play as much of a part as the logic of numbers and geography. In the past ten years the national and local health care landscape has changed beyond recognition, and what seemed a welcome opportunity at the time was later no longer seen as necessary.

According to Tony, the North Islington Primary Care Group (PCG) was first approached to consider building a health centre in Highbury Square in 1998. The PCG had to act on the basis of what it

believed might be the case some six years hence. At that time North Islington was characterised by large numbers of small or single-handed GP practices, often working from very unsuitable premises. It appeared obvious that fewer and larger practices were needed. There was little finance available to develop existing practices, and the prospect of a new purpose-built health centre in Highbury was attractive.

While most of the existing practices were over-subscribed, the total practice lists were some 30% higher than the actual population of the area. Tony explained that this "list inflation" was a phenomenon common across the NHS at the time. GPs, being paid by head of patient population, had little incentive to invest time and energy in keeping their list up-to-date, and the mobility of the London population made it very hard for health authorities to keep track of numbers. In the late 90's and early 00's strenuous efforts were made to clear the lists of patients who had either died or moved away. The numbers on lists came down. Islington's practices now have real lists, with the welcome consequence that no practice has a closed list. Rather than

many more GPs in brand new premises, the over-riding need became more suitable premises for the existing GPs.

Two national developments have also had a bearing. Traditionally GP practices have been constructed and improved largely by investment by individual GPs, and also by capital investment from local health authorities.

In 1999 the health service introduced NHS LIFT, its own

version of Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contracts to build and run premises. Whatever one thinks of the politics of PFIs this was a previously unavailable source of funding. In 2004 new contractual arrangements for GPs were introduced, with targets for patient access which has more recently included 8-8 opening: an effective increase in capacity.

Instead of developing completely new practices, the PCT has concentrated on improving and enlarging the suitable existing practices. They in turn have expanded their catchment area. The scale of investment has been considerable. In the next two months the refurbishment of Highbury Grange Health Centre is expected to be complete, giving more clinical space for GPs, and more treatment rooms. Two large central Islington practices have expanded their catchment area to include the whole of Highbury and considerably increased their lists: The St Paul's Road practice has moved into purpose-built premises in Laycock Street, and is now the biggest practice in the Borough; River Place Health Centre is being completely refurbished. To the east the Miller

(continued on page 2)

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Practice in Highbury New Park has had some refurbishment work done, in the north The Village Practice (in Isledon Road) will expand its list following Dr Syed's retirement from her small single-handed practice on the same site, and in the west there are a number of smaller practices on Holloway Road all of which have space on their lists.

In a separate development, in 2009 the PCT will re-locate a number of its community services to purpose built accommodation in Hornsey Street: the large new centre will include podiatry services, physiotherapy, biomechanics and orthotics (physical aids to mobility) as well as the community dental service.

While the public dismay at the failure to build a new practice in Highbury Square is understandable, Tony is confident that the needs of Highbury's population will be met and will continue to be met from the existing GP practices. ■

Islington Boat Club

PAUL KILHAM, DIRECTOR of Islington Boat Club, talks below about Islington Boat Club's activities and its connections with Highbury.

Islington Boat Club caters for young people aged 9–18 from across Islington. Our members come from every ward in the borough. We work closely with over 70 school, youth and community groups, including some in Highbury. For example we have run a Duke of Edinburgh canoeing course for Highbury Fields School. We have taught canoeing leading to the British Canoe Union Paddlepower Awards for Drayton Park Primary School extended-school club. For Highbury Grove School, Gillespie Primary School and Highbury Roundhouse holiday playscheme, we have organised curriculum courses and holiday programmes. We also run a number of schemes for young people who are not in education, employment or training.

All our activities are delivered in a fun, friendly, and safe manner, although school sessions are more structured and formal than our youth club sessions. We encourage all we teach to return, to come to the Club to continue canoeing, kayaking, sailing or powerboat driving or just socialise and make new friends.

Young people gain accreditation for many of the activities they take part in at the Club. Over the years, through gaining these qualifications, club members have found employment at the Club and many are now sprinkled liberally around other watersport centres in London!

Adults can also take part by joining the Regents Canoe Club which meets on Monday and Thursday evenings. We try to set our fees and charges so as not to exclude anyone but this policy means that we are reliant on raising funds from the public. ■

*For more on the Islington Boat Club see www.islingtonboatclub.org.uk
For more on the fundraising event at Highbury Grove School: www.islingtonkidsafloat.org
Tel: 020 7253 0778*

Camidoc: I need to see a doctor but my surgery is closed

By Michael Golding (Chief Executive, and Highbury resident)

CAMIDOC, SET UP in May 1996, is a healthcare co-operative providing urgent primary care services to one million residents of Camden, Islington, Haringey, Hackney and the City of London. It now provides cover for more than 200 surgeries, and is the first port of call when GPs aren't there: at evenings, weekends and bank holidays.

First contact is made by telephone. A doctor (or nurse) then rings the patient back to discuss their symptoms and offer advice. If a face-to-face consultation is needed, the patient is invited to attend one of Camidoc's Primary Care Centres at St Pancras Hospital, the Royal Free Hospital, the Whittington Hospital, Laurels Healthy Living Centre or the Homerton Hospital. A fleet of four Camidoc cars takes doctors to visit those patients who can't make it to a centre. The Primary Care Centres

and the cars have much the same range of equipment as can be found in any GPs surgery, with an agreed formulary of necessary drugs (controlled drugs are not stocked). Camidoc aims to deal with urgent medical problems, to help relieve symptoms, and to assess whether hospital treatment is needed. Patients' own GPs receive a report of the consultation early the next working day.

At the heart of the operation is a sophisticated computer system which integrates with the NHS Direct helpline, and allows Camidoc to manage almost 100,000 calls per year and to predict exactly when most staff are needed. The number of doctors on site varies from two overnight to as many as fifteen at peak periods. Most of the doctors are local GPs. Camidoc employs over 90 people (call-handlers, drivers,

receptionists, often part-time), and has a policy of recruiting from within its Boroughs. As a 24-hour operation the number of non-clinical staff on site varies from a couple overnight to as many as twenty.

Camidoc is a not-for-profit limited company owned by its members (local GPs), and funded by the local PCTs. It traditionally recruits locally, and is very much a locally owned and managed service for the local population. It is governed by a Board of Directors, made up of elected GP representatives and lay non-executive directors.

Camidoc also provides a number of other services including a 24-hour messaging service for Camden & Islington's district nurses and a GP service for unregistered patients and to Holloway Prison, and it is working with the local PCTs to develop a range of other services to meet the health needs of patients without them having to travel to A&E. ■

For further information see www.camidoc.co.uk. To use the service call 020 7388 5800.

Argentine Garufa Grill

A Carnivore's Paradise, but Vegetarians Beware!

By Derek Whitehead

THE GARUFA SPECIALIZES in big Argentine steak dishes; there was one fish dish – Salmon al Roquefort; and three vegetarian dishes, two of which include cheese. Five of the starters were meat based. Also on offer was Provolone cheese and a vegetarian dish of sweetcorn, onion and basil. All the starters appeared to be substantial, so our party of eleven diners chose to go straight to the main courses.

A range of steaks Bife de Lomo (grilled fillet steak) / Bife de Chorizo (grilled sirloin steak) / Bife Ancho (grilled rib eye steak) / Bife de Cuadril (grilled rump steak) were available in sizes from smallish (225g) to gargantuan (400g). Our party all went for the smallest. The steaks were reported to be of excellent quality and perfectly cooked to the finish requested. The steaks were served "con guarnicon" (with garnish), which would not have been enough on its own.

Other diners chose Parillada Garufa: a mixed grill to share, comprising 150g each of the steaks listed plus Argentine style sausage, black pudding and Provolone cheese. Again it was agreed that the quality was excellent. The vegetarian dish (Butternut Squash and Sage Tortellini) was disappointing. £10 bought six tortellini on a cold plate (changed on request).

The side orders included very large home made chips served with garlic and parsley, mashed potato, garlicky butter beans, grilled mushrooms, lettuce & tomato salad and mixed leaf salad. The latter was insubstantial, and the lettuce and tomato salad was dreary compared with the other side orders.

Several people shared desserts which included Flan Casero con Crema o Dulce de Leche (crème caramel with cream or milk toffee), Postre Garufa (caramelised bread pudding), Cheesecake de Dulce de Leche (milk toffee cheesecake). There was also Argentine style ice cream. The desserts were generally enjoyed but quite substantial and very sweet.

Two wines were chosen, one white – Argento Pinot Grigio 2008 at £15.50 a bottle and one red – Norton Malbec 2007 at £13.50 a bottle.

The restaurant has a warm, welcoming ambience and the staff were helpful and obliging. The space is quite small and intimate and decorated with large sepia prints of mid 20th century Buenos Aires.

For two courses the cost including wine was about £30 per person. Credit cards are accepted. ■

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BACH

Cantata: Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis

(BWV 21)

WITH SOLOISTS & ORCHESTRA

COMPLEMENTARY HEALTH:

Acupuncture **Ceinwen Jones speaks to Awais Mian**

What is acupuncture?

Acupuncture is a branch of Chinese medicine. Chinese doctors say stress is the biggest contributory factor to disease – not allowing your body to heal. The Chinese have an incredible understanding of how emotions affect the body. They believe your body has an ability to heal itself. Acupuncture is about stimulating the body's natural energy to do this.

Why did you take up acupuncture?

I was into martial arts as a kid in Highbury. Highbury's a lovely area but there are pockets of it which are very rough... Through learning Tai Ji I felt this strange energy in my body. It was life-changing. This is the same energy that is used for healing in acupuncture.

How do you treat people?

Having trained as a biochemist as well as in Chinese medicine, I work in an integrated manner, looking at the whole person from both Eastern and Western perspectives. Some people are very scared of needles. The clinic has light and welcoming treatment rooms which really come into their own in helping people relax. My treatment methods include acupressure, another ancient technique 'cupping' and preventative healthcare such as teaching exercises to strengthen muscles and improve breathing.

What ailments do you treat?

Many who come to me are in chronic pain. I treat

migraine successfully – a patient who could sleep only on her back due to the pain can now sleep on her side. People come from as far as Kent, for example: a lady who was told, after an accident almost paralysing her right arm, that she would never work again. After a few months of acupuncture, she had regained most of the movement and went back to work.

But the illnesses I treat are many and varied. For a full list go to our website.

Why Highbury?

I've lived in Plimsoll Road most of my life. It's a very open atmosphere. It's still somewhere where people celebrate each others' cultures.

Background

Awais Mian runs Seven Heavens with his brother. They both teach Tai Ji to all ages while Awais Mian also runs the acupuncture clinic. Awais Mian is a registered member of the British Acupuncture Council. Concessionary treatments are available to pensioners and students and those with chronic illnesses. A second treatment room – which is currently being refurbished – will soon be for hire at reasonable rates to other local therapists. ■

For more information: www.sevenheavens.co.uk.

Seven Heavens Clinic, 20 Blackstock Road, London N4. Tel: 020 7704 2777

Homeopathy **Ceinwen Jones speaks to Esi Eshun**

What is homeopathy?

Homeopathy works as a stimulus to the immune system. It addresses you as a whole, not simply your physical condition but your emotions as well. The remedies are all made from natural sources – mainly from plants and minerals.

Why did you take up homeopathy?

I was diagnosed with a systemic disease in 2000. It affected various organs, and several consultants became involved, none of whom worked together. I was not getting better. So I came here to the Healthy Living Centre and I found homeopathy. My lung function improved. My skin problems cleared up and I felt much more positive. It was a revelation. That's why I took up homeopathy.

How do you treat people?

At the Healthy Living Centre we have a daily drop-in homeopathy

clinic so that people can just come and try. I'm the person who coordinates the service. It runs Monday to Friday 4-5pm. Homeopathy can give an instant lift to the immunity. You take as little medicine as possible to trigger a response. The medicine comes in liquid form and we put a few drops of it on some sugar pills. It's really pleasant to take.

What ailments do you treat?

For the drop-in clinic we have people coming with coughs and colds, hayfever and digestive problems. We also have lots of babies coming – for teething problems, colic, etc. Babies respond really well to homeopathy. Many people come with skin problems. These people will invariably require at least another appointment.

Chronic conditions do need a deeper level of working, involving longer and regular consultations. I see a number of people who are feeling

very low and it's rewarding for me to help them get back on their feet.

Why Highbury?

I used to live locally – in Arvon Road, just off Highbury Fields. I first came to the Healthy Living Centre as a patient. And I loved it. There's something very Highbury about it. I couldn't find anywhere else quite like it – the friendliness and the relaxed nature of it are important to me.

Background

Esi Eshun trained at the Centre for Homeopathic Education for four years and is a registered member of the Society of Homeopaths. ■

For more information: www.healthylivingcentre.co.uk

Healthy Living Centre, 282-284 St Pauls Road, N1 Tel: 020 7704 6900

Esi Eshun's website: www.radianthomeopathy.com

A new cycle route for Highbury?

by James Hood

ON WHAT FELT like and may well have been the coldest day of the year, an intrepid group of local residents met with architects FeildenCleggBradley and Islington Council Officers to discuss ideas for transforming the proposed Connect 2 route into something really worth walking and cycling.

The route, which runs from Highbury Corner to Finsbury Park (via Highbury Place, Ronalds Road, Arvon Road, Drayton Park, Gillespie Road and St Thomas's Road) is one of Sustrans and the Big Lottery Fund's 79 schemes to develop a network of high quality local walking and cycling routes throughout the country. Islington has received £600,000 of Big Lottery Funding for this particular stretch of the network.

The hope is that the route will be transformed by intelligent design of public space. We heard a detailed presentation about the evolution of thinking on traffic planning in urban areas, which has moved from an assumption that traffic and

pedestrians need to be managed by segregation, information and control, to a realisation that urban space is a public realm that needs to be shared by and attractive to all its users. We were told that white lines down the middle of a road increase average traffic speed, that signs saying "Slow!" imply that it is otherwise fine to drive fast, and that slower speeds can lead to greater efficiency. We were shown pictures of buses, pedestrians and cars sharing the same urban space, and illustrations of how streetscapes and motorists' and pedestrians' behaviour could be transformed by good design. After walking the route and nearly freezing to death, we were then invited to "transform" parts of the route ourselves, using tracing paper and photographs, coloured pens etc.

A mixture of views emerged in discussion: there was a strong view that Islington would inevitably waste its lottery funding on consultants, with little concrete to show on the

ground; anxiety that £600,000 would evaporate when spent over 2 1/2 kilometres; a proposal to transform the area opposite Drayton Park station into a focal point for the route, with cafes, plants and outdoor seating, and a consensus that the biggest challenge to the route is crossing Seven Sisters Road at Finsbury Park. A proposed variant of the route running directly along the railway from the Ecology Centre to Seven Sisters Road currently peters out in some dismal steps. Ideas included a bridge across Seven Sisters Road, re-routing through Hackney (apparently unthinkable for Islington) so as to use the existing cycle crossing opposite Finsbury Park gates, and transformation of the whole section of Seven Sisters Road into a shared urban space.

There will be further consultation of proposals before anything is seen on the ground, and HCA intends to stay involved in the discussions. More information about the proposals can be found on Islington's website at /Transport/GreenTravel/Connect2.asp. For provocative thinking about traffic calming see Mental Speed Bumps by David Engwicht: www.mentalspeedbumps.com. ■

NEWS IN BRIEF

Changes at the Whittington?

Islington PCT is currently consulting on its strategy for "urgent care": the local arrangements the NHS makes to respond to situations where members of the public feel that an urgent medical response rather than an appointment is needed. There are a number of routes currently available for urgent care: the ambulance service, out-of-hours GP services (see the article about Camidoc elsewhere in this issue), NHS Direct and accident and emergency being the most well known. The pressure for change arises partly from a view that A&E services are used inappropriately by those who could be treated elsewhere, partly from national policy initiatives, and partly because the Whittington has one of the highest rates of "walk-in" A&E attendance in the country.

The central proposal is the creation

of an "Urgent Care Centre" at the Whittington which will treat all walk-in patients. A&E will deal only with medical emergencies brought in by ambulance or fast-tracked from the Urgent Care Centre. Other proposals include enhancing the role of pharmacists, and creating "hospital at home" services to manage the care of patients who might otherwise have been admitted.

The full consultation document can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/b8ohzm> and the consultation closes at the end of March 2009.

Half century for Highbury Hill author

Sylvester Stein's book, 2nd Class Taxi, was published 50 years ago by Fabers. It was one of the first books satirising apartheid, so unsettling the then South African Government that they banned it eight days after publication.

Sylvester was amazingly prescient about subsequent events, which led ultimately to the crack-down that suppressed open opposition until the uprising by the children of Soweto in 1976 eventually led to the release of Mandela in 1990.

It's not a gloomy tale but told amusingly through the adventures of Staff nurse Phofolo (so named at birth after the hospital staff-nurse who delivered him) a "non-European from non-Europe". ■

The Nononsense Press, to celebrate the book's jubilee, have brought out a special limited edition (visit www.thenononsensepress.com to see the unusual format) and would like to offer it to local residents for £3. Phone 07981 325288 to arrange to collect from Sarah Cawkwell at 32 Highbury Hill.

RECENT PLANNING NOTES

By Roger Wright

Queensland Road Redevelopment

ON 10TH DECEMBER, Highbury West Councillors arranged a public meeting for Arsenal's consultants to present the details of their application to re-develop Queensland Road. The application is poor in many respects, height, density, opens space and renewable energy, to mention a few. It does however, now feature the Sports Centre which is welcome.

You can find HCA's objection to the overall plan on our website. However, much to everyone's surprise, the developer's withdrew the application the following day! After New Year, a revised plan was submitted, with only minor changes, which was due to be voted on at the Council's East Area Planning Committee on 2nd February. However, this was cancelled because of the snow! No new date has been announced so far.

DIARY

Tue 17 March 2009 – An evening with Ken Livingstone

'An evening with Ken Livingstone' will be held at Highbury Grove School to raise funds for Islington Kids Afloat (the Mayor of Islington's Charity made up of Islington Boat Club and The Angel Boat: see article elsewhere in this issue).

Tue 17 March 2009 – Islington Gardeners' Spring Talk

Also on that date, Islington Gardeners' spring talk 'Planting a Small Garden in London' by Neill Ludmon, lecturer from Capel Manor. St James's Hall, Prebend Street, N1.

www.islingtongardeners.org.uk

Sat 25 April 2009 – HCA AGM

Highbury Community Association AGM will be at Christ Church Highbury, at 7.00 pm. Jim Smith will speak on 'Trees in London'. Food and refreshments, auction, election of next year's committee and general socialising all as usual.

Saturday 4 April 2009 – Highbury Chamber Choir

At 8.00 pm, St Thomas' Church, St Thomas' Road: Highbury Chamber Choir (with soloists and orchestra) performs Music at Easter, by Bach, Schutz, Purcell, Schein and others. Tickets £7.50, concessions £4.00. Refreshments available.



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Highbury Community Association

The HCA represents 780 residents and businesses on all aspects of living and working in Highbury, Lower Holloway and Finsbury Park. Run by volunteers, it relies on donations. Send cheques to HCA Treasurer, HCA, PO Box 43396, N5 9AD, made out to 'Highbury Community Association'.

Send letters or articles for next issue to hcanews@hotmail.com or Highbury Community Association, PO Box 43396, London N5 9AD.

Visit www.highburycommunity.org

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