



HIGHBURY COMMUNITY NEWS

FROM THE HIGHBURY COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

Gardening to Celebrate Plants and Wildlife: help and Support from the Ecology Centre, Gillespie Park

Spring is upon us, and at the time of writing the daffies are looking their exuberant best. Thoughts turn to gardens, but what if, like me, you love plants, gardens and flowers but are not all that green-fingered? I went to the Ecology Centre in Gillespie Park to find out what advice they offer the local community on gardening.

In previous years they have offered:

- Plants for sale;
- Courses on organic gardening;
- Events held during the school holidays on building bird boxes etc;
- Advice on developing a wormery, with good examples so that people can look at them and ask questions when the team are available.
- Advice on producing compost heaps.

The building will not be open to the same extent this year as it was last year because of the funding cuts. However, the opening hours will be more targeted.

It's not just a time for gardening though according to the Ecology Centre team. It is a good time to think about feeding our birds, and then put your thoughts into practice. Birds need feeding in spring (when they are breeding) not just in winter, especially this year when the months of December, January and February have witnessed particularly severe

weather. Keep water ready for them, as well as food. After the spring they find their own live food, for example caterpillars, but meanwhile they need a little help to get them to that point.

The team advise you to think about your planting plans for the year. You'll probably be ordering seeds - choose wildflowers that are more friendly to bees etc. Look for native species and plants that are less complicated. For example pinks are a better choice in this context than carnations because the petals are easier for the bees to get inside. There are demonstrations at the Centre of plants that are good for pollinating insects, e.g. daisies.

There is also a really excellent pack "Wildlife Gardening" which is available from the Ecology Centre. It gives an overview, and includes help to start the following projects:

- A butterfly garden;
- Gardening for birds;

- Feeding birds;
- A mini-meadow;
- Pond building;
- Pond maintenance;
- Wildlife on walls;
- Problem wildlife;
- Monitoring your wildlife garden.

It also includes information about suppliers and contacts and local information about wildlife gardening in Islington, as well as a list of wildlife gardens in London where you can get further ideas. The advice sheets are laid out to make the information easily accessible, they include useful advice on the best trees for a bird garden and list good nectar flowers for butterflies for example.

You can find out more, including contact details, from the Ecology Centre web pages:
http://www.islington.gov.uk/environment/sustainability/sus_nature/islington_nature_reserves/ecology_centre.asp



The HCA represents over 900 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, please email hcanews@hotmail.com or write to PO Box 43396, N5 9AD.

The opinions expressed in HCN are not necessarily those of the Highbury Community Association and its committee members.

The Problem of Local Youth Gangs

Like so many inner-city areas, Brownswood ward has its share of youth problems. To find out more about these, HCA's TOM RUBENS interviewed Sgt. KEITH MCMASTER of the Brownswood Safer Neighbourhoods Team (SNT). Readers will recall that this is Tom's second interview with Sgt. McMaster for the newsletter, the first having been concerned with the overall work of the Brownswood SNT.

TR: What is your general experience of local gangs?

SM: Young people often spend time with a large group of friends, which gives them a sense of belonging, and in most cases is a normal part of growing up. However some gangs are linked to criminal activity and this is where problems start. Some young people join gangs because of peer pressure, bullying or intimidation. However they may also join a gang for protection, territory, to earn money through crime, to gain respect or settle arguments.

Hackney has an Integrated Gangs Intervention Project, which aims to reduce re-offending and serious violence, improve engagement with education and employment and increase the number of people exiting gang violence.

TR: To what extent are local gangs involved in drug dealing?

SM: Young people involved in criminal gangs may be forced to commit offences such as robbery, assault or drug-related crime. They are also more likely to carry offensive weapons or deal drugs.

TR: Do you know of any cases of police corruption, or of allegations of corruption, in connection with gang drug-dealing?

SM: No. Securing and maintaining the trust of the community is integral to the principle of policing by consent. We must demonstrate that we police fairly, with integrity and with the absolute minimum use of force. The Metropolitan Police's Directorate of Professional Standards is charged with investigating allegations of police corruption.

TR: Apart from what's already been said, are there additional problems posed specifically by ethnic-minority gangs?

SM: Most gangs represent a cross-section of the community. I haven't encountered any gang consisting of a single ethnic group.

Most young people are not involved in gang activity, but they may have heard about it or know someone who carries a weapon. Parents should speak to their children and see what they think about gangs. Slang or text speak is

common among all young people and use of it could be innocent but it could also be used to cover up what they are saying. Be aware of what websites your children look at; gangs will often have websites or profiles on social networking sites, such as Facebook or YouTube.

Don't let younger children stay out late or spend a lot of time on the streets unsupervised.

TR: What actions is the Brownswood SNT taking to tackle these problems?

SM: My officers have direct and extensive dealings with young people on the ward and build up contacts with youth services. We regularly run 'trading places' seminars: over a 2-day period, 10 youths have 1-1 sessions with police officers in plain clothes, helping them build a rapport with officers and understand our role. The results have been very positive. We have also set up meetings with the local Youth Forum, where we listen to the youths' concerns. They pass on these positive messages to their young people who they know to be involved in gangs.

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Spice up your life, join the HCA committee!

HCA needs two or three more committee members. Do you have a few hours to spare every month or so? We are currently under-represented in Finsbury Park and Highbury East, but would welcome members from anywhere in the area who are keen to be involved in the local community.

Do you like arranging social events, are you good at admin., do you like helping to produce newsletters? There is something for everyone. Please email hcanews@hotmail.com, or write to the PO Box if you are interested and someone will get back to you.

Help provide 7 days-a-week shelter for the homeless

Shelter from the Storm is a UK registered charity which provides hot meals and a warm bed to homeless people. It is London's ONLY free homeless shelter which is open all year round and receives no help from government. It is not affiliated with any other organisation; it is run entirely by volunteers from the local Islington community and is funded by donations alone. HCA talked to the team about their work, and how you can help the homeless.

During the Christmas season we all seemed to become more aware of homelessness. We were all encouraged to adopt a 'rough-sleeper' as if they were a puppy. But at "Shelter from the Storm" they know that Christmas means very little to the homeless. With no friends, no family, no work, no home, there isn't much to celebrate. It is just another day for the homeless - on the street and in the cold. This is why they operate 6 days a week 52 weeks of the year.

Shelter from the Storm made the move to Kings X, which against all expectations is working brilliantly and the team is within grasp of its dream of a 7 days a week shelter. Just one day on the streets puts guests in real danger. Shelter from the Storm has had some fantastic success stories this year. Mark was an alcoholic when he came for help a year ago. Since he's been working with a Shelter from the Storm counsellor, he's been sober for 5 months, held down a job for 3 months and 2 weeks ago volunteers helped him move into his own bedsit - a transformation!

Shelter from the Storm relies entirely on generous donations to survive. The volunteers and supporters have worked their socks off, but it's never enough, there's always more to do. If you would like to offer your support on this amazing journey from a Sunday night in the crypt of a Church to the first full time, completely self-funding homeless shelter, then please get in touch now.

VOLUNTEER INFORMATION

Shelter from the Storm is always looking for new volunteers to allow it to keep offering its service on as many nights as possible. If you are interested in getting involved please go to: sfts.org.uk/volunteer.html

Shelter from the Storm need volunteers for the following shifts :

Morning - the team arrives at 6.30am (until 8.30am) and prepares breakfast plus general duties e.g. Cleaning etc. Guests will leave at 8am latest.

Evening - the team arrives at 5pm (until 9pm) and helps with cleaning, cooking dinner and preparing for guests plus general duties e.g. Making beds, cleaning etc.

Overnight - at least one male and one female volunteer arrive at 9pm and stay overnight to keep guests safe, leaving at 6.30am when the breakfast team arrive.

Shelter from the Storm address:
Unit 11, Acorn Industrial Estate,
Blundell Street, Islington N9
(Between Caledonian Road and York Way)
Website: <http://www.sfts.org.uk/>

Contact the team:
General Manager:- Sheila Scott /
Sheila@sfts.org
Trustee:- Louie Salvoni /
Louie@sfts.org

BY A HCA COMMITTEE MEMBER

Teas for the Elderly

We have a significant number of elderly people in the community who experience loneliness and isolation. Their very loneliness and isolation makes it difficult to identify them, make contact and offer some solutions to their situation. I talked to Martin Ledigo who organises local afternoon teas to elderly people under the umbrella of a national organisation.

Martin says that he has been doing it for about two years now and finds it very rewarding. He also knows that it has a positive benefit for people in our area. He joined in after he found the organisation 'Contact the Elderly' while looking at possibilities for outreach from Christ Church Highbury.

"Contact the Elderly" provide oversight and support to help volunteers find potential guests, they also provide training - for example on how to manoeuvre a wheelchair - as well as insurance.

"Some people are not very mobile, and hardly ever leave their homes; they need the opportunity to get out and meet people, Martin continues. Some people don't have family, have lost friends, and are not receiving very much support. Our teas for the elderly initiative is not just for those who attend Church it is for anyone. Those who are part of the Church community already have access to support anyway"

The parties are held at people's house once a month, a different house each time. Volunteers collect the guests at around 3pm, then there is tea, cake and discussion, with things winding up for the return home at around 5pm. The food is all home made by volunteers.

"There is something very special about serving people. It is very special to get to know them." says Martin. He has seen clear evidence that senior citizens also need other practical help. "Call Centres can't deal with the elderly, they can't give good service to old people, that has become clear. Our society is not set up for people in their eighties who do not understand things - for example filling in forms, insurance, tax, etc."

Martin and his fellow volunteers are looking for more potential guests, as well as volunteers. To find out more or join in, go to the Contact the Elderly website: www.contact-the-elderly.org or email Martin: martin@metaphorpartners.com

Highbury Roundhouse - Timing is everything



In the last issue of HCA News, I was able to tell you that the Roundhouse had secured the services of The Morton Partnership, one of the most eminent firms of structural engineers in the country. At the second attempt, Brian Morton had met the District Surveyor

in January and the DS had agreed that our back building, the 'bottleworks' building, was not in imminent danger of collapse.

More good news followed. Our Councillors agreed to fund the investigations Morton required before he could draw up an engineering solution. The first question Morton had asked when he went into the building was, "What is the state of the ground beneath the building?" Astonishingly, no-one had asked that before and none of the numerous, expensive surveys that the council had commissioned, could shed any light.

Those of you who have followed the Roundhouse's fight for survival will realise that nothing has been straightforward. Morton has been delayed by misunderstandings about who was directing the investigations, who was carrying out the investigations and who was paying for the investigations. He has encountered a lack of co-operation and sometimes obstruction from some council officers. On one occasion, council contractors announced they were turning up on a Monday morning to dig holes in completely the wrong place.

Meanwhile Councillors have been worried how quickly time was passing. So have we. We desperately want to resolve the current situation. The Executive of the Council decided, on March 17th, to give us a deadline to prove that it is possible to save the building at a reasonable cost. That deadline is March 31st.

In the nick of time, Morton was finally allowed to drill boreholes and take samples on March 16th. He brought along a team of geotechnical engineers and contractors who will estimate the cost of repairing the building. He is confident that, despite the tight deadline, he can "provide a timely, realistic and cost effective proposal for the retention of the building". That's what, in their own words, the Council is asking for.

March 31st is becoming a significant day for us. There is a full Meeting of the Council on that Thursday and we shall formally present our petition. You can still see it and sign it at www.savehighburyroundhouse.co.uk. Hundreds of local residents have not only given us their support but added personal comments to show what the Roundhouse means to our community. Once the Council has received Morton's rescue plan, the petition should help convince them to pay for it.

We are very grateful to the HCA for choosing the Roundhouse as the beneficiary of the fundraising raffle and auction at the AGM. I'll be there and, by April 2nd, I'll be able to give you more details of Morton's rescue bid.

As you read this, most of these dates will have slipped by. By now, the Council may be about to make - may be making - may have made - a decision. It's just a matter of timing.

TONY MILLER
Secretary to the Highbury Roundhouse

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Sotheby Mews Centre saved!

The Sotheby Mews Day Centre has been under threat from cuts as noted in previous issues of this newsletter. It has been saved following a significant amount of protest as a result of co-operation between Islington Council, Age Concern Islington and Highbury Roundhouse.

The Council had previously proposed shutting Sotheby Mews Day Centre and its lunch club as a response to the Government's requirements for financial cuts. However, there was a considerable outcry both from users who value services and activities provided there and from the wider community - HCA has supported efforts to save this vital source of support for the lonely and vulnerable members of our community.

Plans have consequently been revised and an expanded lunch club will now operate from Sotheby Mews Day Centre

Cllr Janet Burgess, executive member for adult social care at Islington Council said: "I'm pleased to say that from April, Highbury Roundhouse lunch clubs will join Sotheby Mews, providing a hot meal for 3-4 days a week and ensuring we keep services operating and the Centre open."

Andrew Berthier of Highbury Roundhouse said: "We want to continue to support elders who use Sotheby Mews so we are very keen that this arrangement benefits both existing Centre users and the new ones coming over from the Highbury Roundhouse lunch clubs."

Highbury Roundhouse lunch club has undertaken to make sure it looks after all those who currently use Sotheby Mews, including groups of Asian and Turkish elders, with culturally appropriate menus and activities.

New Islington Citizen's Advice Bureau

Anyone living in the borough will soon be able to get help to solve their problems with debt, benefits, employment, housing, discrimination and many more issues, when Islington's new Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) opens on April 4th.

The Islington CAB will be based at 222 Upper Street and has been funded by Islington Council as part of its drive to tackle poverty and inequality and to make Islington fairer. The CAB is entirely independent from the Council and the advice offered is free, confidential and impartial.

The CAB will offer a drop-in service at 222 Upper Street from 9.30am - 4.30pm Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday. On Thursdays the CAB will be open from 1pm - 8pm.

The service will be staffed by paid staff and trained volunteers. The service will be delivered by an existing CAB, the RCJ Advice Bureau and a new telephone service will also be available from the end of April.

We are delighted to be delivering this new CAB service as we know how important it is to provide the advice people need for the problems they face and to improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives. We are really keen to involve local people in the service and if you are interested in volunteering and training to be an advice worker please contact the bureau's guidance tutor, Florence on fayo@rcjadvice.org.uk.

ALISON LAMB

Chief Executive of RCJ Advice Bureau and Islington CAB

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Highbury Barn Square spruced up

It has been quite a few years coming, but a refurbishment of the square outside the Highbury Barn pub is nearing completion. Danny Michelson of La Fromagerie, who represents the Highbury Barn shops, spoke to Highbury Community News about the developments.

Work is almost complete, but still to do (at the time of writing):

- New benches to be installed.
- Community notice-board to be set up.
- Landscaping and planting of flower beds.
- Lamposts need to be positioned, wired in and configured.

The plan to make these improvements was devised around five years ago, Danny tells us, and a consultation of local businesses and people was conducted as part of the development process. Transport for London contributed the funding to Islington Council in the 2010/2011 budget in order to carry out the work. There were worries that the funding might be lost

because of the financial situation, but fortunately it had been ring-fenced.

The intention is to create an attractive meeting place for members of the community, and to hold events. It is hope that a programme of these will develop. There is also a plan to hold a regular outdoor market on some days of the week, but there is no timescale so far for introducing that.

Information on the first community event in the square is included below.

The Barn Easter Egg Hunt

The Highbury Barn pub, now under new ownership

of course, is organising the first social activity in the refurbished community space, an Easter Egg hunt, which will take place on Easter Saturday. The Barn's marketing manager Isobel Cripps talked to Highbury Community News about the plans.

At this event there will be:

- An Easter Egg Hunt which will be held between 11am and 1pm.
- Egg-painting and face-painting. Boiled eggs will be provided for the egg-painting.
- Some of the traders will offer give-aways and treats.

The pub, which emphasises fresh produce home-made, will be encouraging people to stay on for lunch. There is

a children's menu and a special offer on that day of 2 children's meals for the price of one.

Already the clientele is developing and changing. "We have a group of Mums who come and settle down at the back of the pub, meet each other to chat and feel comfortable to breast-feed their babies", says Isobel

"We want to establish and build a good relationship with the community. It is a lovely old pub, and we respect that. We also want to offer high quality food."

For further information about the Easter Egg activities, and meals in the pub, contact:

highbury.barn@greenwich-village-inns.com

