

# HIGHBURY COMMUNITY NEWS

Issue No 5 February 1998

## ARSENAL UPDATE

### Arsenal expansion - what does HCA say?

The HCA supports Arsenal as part of the community and understands that the Club wants, ideally, to keep up with its competitors, by building more seats and hospitality facilities, to provide more income. However, the HCA will not support any expansion scheme that:

- makes the traffic worse
- takes more trade from our local community shops
- involves more frequent use of the Stadium
- calls for rebuilding either the West or South Stands, if this means the demolition or blighting of people's homes.

Tenants will not be moved and home-owners will not be 'bought' out.

The HCA will fight for these people, and for the wider community, for as long as necessary.

THE COUNCIL'S Planning Brief, which will guide the Club, was passed on 11th December by the Chair's casting vote, after the Leader of the Council, Derek Sawyer, was appointed in October to fill a long-standing vacancy on the Planning Sub-Committee. You might remember hearing him urge the Committee in July last year to pass the first, totally inadequate Brief 'We have delayed too long' he said, despite the many good reasons being given for the need to rewrite it.

The news about Arsenal's wish to expand Highbury Stadium, and the HCA's opposition to expansion outside the existing West Stand, has now reached the National Press. A long Guardian article on 27th November gave a balanced view and various Radio programmes, Sky and

Cable TV News items and minor mentions in tabloid and broadsheet papers appear every now and then. The local papers continue to report each step.

The Leader of the Council is now saying 'We have always been aware that Arsenal Football Club are exploring all options as there may be circumstances in which it would not be possible for them to achieve what they want at Highbury.' He said this after the 20th January announcement that Arsenal and Wembley Directors had had talks, which excited the Press for a day or two. The Planning Brief says AFC must put forward 2 alternatives, 1 of which must involve relocation. AFC has chosen to study Kings Cross and another scheme for Highbury that

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### **THANKS TO:**

*All those who have given cash, cheques, time and expertise over the last few weeks*

### **NEW MEMBERS**

*Welcome to the 60+ new members who have signed up since the last newsletter. If you know of friends or neighbours who want to receive HCA News, please ask them to ring **Roger Wright 354 1413***

### **FUNDS NEEDED TO KEEP HCA GOING**

*Please could you help? Send cheques to 'Highbury Community Association' to HCA Treasurer, 111 Highbury Hill, N5. To join the fundraising group ring **Lee Green 354 8641***

### **DIARY**

*The HCA has fixed a date for its AGM, the first after the inaugural meeting last August. The AGM will be on **Wednesday, 18th March**. Venue to be decided.*

does not involve knocking down the West Stand.

Peter Kelsall (Arsenal's project manager) said on Radio 5 Live on 18th January that he believed about 10-12 houses would be demolished entirely. He agreed that 30 gardens would be built over and said *'it may be desirable for properties to be 'redeveloped', as it was put in the Brief, but we understand that to be demolition and rebuilding.'* This may mean that the houses whose gardens are built on, will be demolished and rebuilt, into modern, single aspect flats or 'units'. This would be the simplest way to comply with the terms of the Brief regarding loss of light to the homes.

HCA has accepted an invitation from the Council, to join a 'Progress Review' Group to monitor the studies commissioned by Arsenal. No dates have yet been fixed.

Arsenal plans to hold an exhibition in May/June on their preferred scheme and the results of studies, before submitting an application in June.

#### WHO WILL BE AFFECTED?

To take part in any future European Super League and to keep up with the likes of Manchester United and Chelsea, AFC will need a hugely expanded stadium with many new and improved facilities. The HCA believes the ground could then be used far more frequently throughout the year. Match day traffic already affects many people living and working as far away as Stoke Newington, Hackney, Haringey and Camden. More matches will increase

the disruption to these areas. Football has changed since the 1980s and 80% of Arsenal season-ticket holders now live more than 5 miles from Highbury. More than half of these fans come to matches by car. Public transport is good, but both Arsenal and Finsbury Park Stations are already over-full on Match Days. Is this safe for the fans? Can our emergency services reach residents or the stadium easily with so much traffic congestion on Match Days?

Most important for Arsenal fans is the worry that this expansion may not be enough for the Club, despite the extra income from the bigger seating capacity and from other uses of the Stadium. Manchester United already has 55,000 seats and uses its Stadium 7 days a week for conferences, functions etc. Chelsea has similar facilities and ability to generate income. Leeds is building a secondary arena and hopes to have 180 events a year.

Many supporters think that 50,000 here will not be enough and that Arsenal will fall behind its rivals unless it can get a bigger site elsewhere. Over time, the clubs that have purpose-built modern stadia are likely to get richer and be more successful than those that do not. Staying here with 50,000, fewer facilities than their competitors and no possibility for further expansion could make AFC a second rank club in a matter of a few years.

As for the Arsenal Board of Directors, which surely has its eye firmly fixed on the Stock Exchange, maximum income generation is everything; but a move may be seen as commercially dangerous; and a full quotation on the Ex-

change could spell loss of control for the three families that own 70% of the shares.

Possibly the worst scenario for both fans and community would be for development to take place here at the cost of a terrace of houses and the disruption of two or three seasons of building work, only for AFC to move in 5 years time, having built a Stadium too big to sell on to another Club.

Peter Hill Wood, the Club's chairman, raised an interesting possibility in the press before Christmas, when he said one option was for the Club to remain at its present size in Highbury. At least it would keep Arsenal's options open!

#### HIGHBURY HILL TENANTS

CIRCLE 33 tenants, Council tenants and tenants living in Arsenal owned flats are all being represented by the HCA. The HCA met the Circle 33 Area Manager who promised to call a meeting for tenants before the end of January. Circle 33 and Arsenal tenants have not heard from their landlords, despite the fact that about 30 tenants have homes directly behind the West Stand, and others live opposite. Margot Young is available to keep tenants up to date and to advise. She is holding an HCA meeting for tenants on 5th February, so tenants do not need to come to the 4th February meeting at Christchurch. **Ring her on : 704 8876**

### COME TO THE HCA CAMPAIGN MEETING ON WEDNESDAY, 4TH FEBRUARY, 7.30pm - 9.00pm AT CHRISTCHURCH, TOP OF HIGHBURY HILL

(Please note, the 11th February date some members knew about has been cancelled)

**Your help is needed, however little time you can spare - or just come to learn more. The last meeting was 3 weeks ago for people living close to the Stadium. Now they want more people to join them, so the network of contacts and information is widened. Please come to this meeting! Surveys, research, fund-raising are all vital over the next 3 months. Ring 359 5731 to find out more.**

# Confessions of an Arsenal letter writer

BY PENNY VALENTINE

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Until recently I was a fairly normal woman. I had almost come to terms with various forms of addiction: chain-smoking, giggling fits, low-key depressions, chocolate biscuits....

Occasionally I would lie in bed composing a brilliant, vitriolic outraged letter in response to something I had just read in the Guardian. The next morning, no matter how incensed I had been the night before, I had forgotten why I'd wanted to write at all.

I had always been rather scathing about letter writers, thinking they were sad people with no proper hobbies, or dim-bos who lived in the Shires, who had nothing better to do than sound off about the decline of Proper English in Inner London comprehensive schools. I had a nickname for these good folk: "Outraged of Chelmsford." Somehow it brought to mind the huffing smugness that emanated from the letter pages of national newspapers.

Of course, all this was B.A. - Before Arsenal.

Last February I went to the public meeting set up by Islington Council about Arsenal's desire to expand their capacity. Although, a thousand years ago, I had been a local newspaper reporter, I had never been to a public meeting about a local issue as a potential participant. So I was surprised how quickly you can get angry when you can't get a straight answer and when you suspect that something is Not Quite What It Seems.

When the *Arsenal Stadium Advisory Group* was formed that night, I joined, thinking it might be better to be involved than not. I remember asking Ian Crawley, the Council's Planning Officer, if this would restrict my right to protest. When he smoothly assured me it wouldn't, I said "Good, then I'll come with my kalasnikov in my bag." A look

that I took to be annoyance crossed his face momentarily. It was a look with which I was to become all too familiar over the next six months.

By Spring it was clear that we were talking about something much nastier than a few more bums on seats and intense paranoia was rampant. The interesting thing about paranoia, as we all know, is that "*Just because you're paranoid, doesn't mean somebody isn't out to get you.*"

Even so life has to go on, and it did. I might never have written that first letter at all had it not been for a wretched person in Canvey Island who felt, having read local newspaper coverage of residents' fury at Arsenal and Islington Council, it was his god-given right to tell us what a bunch of mean, middle-class whingers we were; and that "his" Club should be able to do just what it liked.

That did it.

This letter - accidentally - encapsulated exactly why the behaviour of Arsenal and indeed, the Council, was driving me crazy.

Yes, it was turning into a David and Goliath fight (residents versus Big Business.) Yes, it was making a mockery of any difference between the old Tories and New Labour (policies before people ... yum yum), but much more, it was about peace and inner spirit. I was going to say "the environment" but that has become such an abused and ill-used term it has practically become meaningless.

It is clear from my many addictions that I'm not, in strict terms, "an environmentalist." I'm not a Green, I don't ride a bike, I'm not vegetarian and, although I think the local Ecology Centre is a jolly good thing, I've never actually been inside it.

In fact, I'm a bit of a one-woman pollutant in my own way; but when I first moved to Highbury 12 years ago there were two things I loved about my house: the amount of light that streams through even on an overcast day and a garden that shelters me physically and psychologically from the tension of inner city life.

These are things that are good for anyone's soul. We need light to thrive, and the pleasures derived from gardening in a city are manifest in the thousands of lovingly tended window boxes, balconies and gardens from Council estates to houses we see all around.

So I thought of Arsenal planning to block out the sun and the sky and stampede over gardens I had tended for neighbours, where wild blackberries straggled and roses arched overhead; and I thought of "Canvey Island", whose sky will remain large and whose roses, should he have them, will not be chewed up by a digger and I sent off the first letter.

After that it was easy. It only needed a Draft Planning Brief Council meeting or a daft letter from Derek Sawyer, or a little economy with the truth and my computer would start whirring. I wrote to the Islington Gazette, I wrote to the Highbury and Islington Express. When my letters were cut I was outraged, even though, as a journalist, I'd done exactly the same thing to other people in the past. I'd whine pitifully that "they'd taken all the best bits out."

I don't think I'm any more eccentric than I was a year ago, and I don't think I've turned into an "Outraged of Chelmsford." I have only ever written to the local newspapers about this one local issue. I have actually only written three letters that were published - although it feels like a lot more.

It may not have made the earth move, but it has made me feel less impotent in the face of an Alice in Wonderland scenario, in which the Club say "We have no plans, we have no plans" and the Council planners chant "The Unitary Develop-

ment Plan, the Unitary Development Plan" as though it were the Holy Grail rather than a piece of local legislation that can be read any way you like, depending on where you're standing.

So my advice to anyone who lies in bed

composing letters they never send is .....do it. Apart from being the saviour of our bit of the sky, I don't really want to be known as the Highbury Harpie.... and Angela Sinclair and I would be grateful for company.

## FUNDRAISING SUCCESS

Lee Green's Fundraising Group raised a substantial amount of much needed money at the Christmas Party, which was held at the Ecology Centre on 5th December. The party was also a good one! Jeremy Corbyn MP, who is very supportive of the HCA's position on the possible Arsenal Stadium expansion, dropped in, which was much appreciated. Annie Waring, who made all the arrangements for the auction and party, has thanked the shops and businesses for their very generous donations. *"We wouldn't have been able to cover our costs, let alone raise funds to keep the HCA going, if the shops had not been so generous with their gifts. Thank you all again!"*

**To join the fundraising group, ring Lee Green 354 8641**

### Planning Application - Newbury Lodge

This has gone to appeal after the Council turned down the application for a flat on the roof of this 1960s building in Hamilton Park West.

### Derelict buildings

Two derelict buildings with Dangerous Structure Notices on them remain unrestored in Highbury Hill. No 103 (owned by the Council) has recently been shored up for safety after residents complained.

No 91 was condemned two years ago and continues to deteriorate alarmingly. A local resident, who lives behind the house, has made constant efforts to get the owners, the Bangladeshi High Commission,

or Islington Council, to repair this 4 storey house.

Mrs de Bunsen says *"The window arches are dropping now and it will not be long before bricks fall out onto the street below. I want the Council to act before someone is injured."*

Robert Scott, of the HCA, who has also spent time on the matter, agrees that the building is continuing to deteriorate. *'Until it became dangerous, it was used as a popular social centre for the Bangladeshi community. The house has an interesting history as it was here Bangladesh formalised its separation from Pakistan. So it is very important to Bangladesh.*

*Two years ago it might have been saved, but the usual wrangling and inertia from the Council means it may be too late now."*

### Chatterton Road Group

This group has done a survey of residents' opinions on traffic - results next month. A representative will attend the next Gillespie Neighbourhood Forum (9th February, Stephen's Ink Community Centre) to request that the Council act on the

### Help fill this space !!!

If you have something you would like included in the next issue, an article, a letter, an advertisement, please ring Alison on 359 5731.

We are delivering one copy of this paper to each household. If you want a second, or if we have your details wrong, ring Roger Wright 354 1413

*Highbury Community Association*

The HCA represents residents and businesses, on all aspects of living and working in Highbury, Stoke Newington and Finsbury Park.