

HIGHBURY COMMUNITY NEWS

Issue No 13 April 1999

WHOSE REGENERATION?

Council officers from Islington, Hackney and Haringey have been working together on a bid to secure £25 million of Government money to regenerate the Finsbury Park area. They seem confident of success; but we shall not know until August whether they have satisfied Whitehall bureaucrats that they can use the money effectively.

The government is keen that the actual business of spending the money and getting extra funding should be tackled by the community of local residents and businesses and not by the Councils and statutory bodies alone. The HCA believes this is vital. Otherwise the money may be spent for purposes that appeal to politicians and bureaucrats, not on the projects local people choose for themselves; and the energy and empowerment that goes with community involvement will be lost.

Can the Councils actually hand over control, or will they fix things so that they keep most of the money for their own purposes? The jury is still out. There is a lot of noble talk about "community involvement", but not much effective action. The people in charge of reaching out to the community seem to have a very selective view about whom to consult. Several local groups have complained about confusion, lack of information and outright hostility from the people in charge of the bid; and, at every meeting to discuss it, there are complaints about the absence of non-white faces. Oddly nobody seems to remark on the near total absence of volunteers and businesses. The three boroughs have a big problem talking to one another - the clash of corporate cultures is obvious at every turn; but it is not good enough that they are learning this skill at last. They need to work a lot harder at talking to those they so obviously regard as outsiders, the businesses, community groups and the dispossessed.

UPDATE ON HCA ACTIVITIES
HCA represents people in Highbury and surrounding areas, on *all aspects of living and working here*. Members are involved in several projects. One is to provide information to 550 members through this *Newsletter* every 8 weeks. *Arsenal Football Club's expansion plans* - one of the biggest issues for the area. Expansion at Highbury is 'on hold'. Rumours of AFC moving to other sites. HCA keeps a watch on it. *Blackstock Advice & Community Trust* - HCA rep. with experience in housing advice appointed to committee. *Elizabeth House Youth Club* - HCA rep. gives management help, will give building liaison advice once the £300,000 renovation works start this year.

Green Issues - continuous ideas and initiatives channelled through Council and publicised in local papers.

Government money to regenerate area - HCA has over 300 members living in the area subject to the SRB5 Bid for £25 million.

HCA has registered interest in applying for a salaried Community Worker to expand activities already carried out by volunteers.

Neighbourhood Fora - HCA reps attend Nag's Head, Drayton Park, Gillespie and Highbury Vale Fora.

Liaison with smaller groups - Chatterton Road Residents, St Thomas's Playgroup, Blackstock Road Shops Group

Liaison with other Community Groups - Highbury Fields Association, Finsbury Park Action Group. □

COME TO THE HIGHBURY COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

FREE PARTY!

DATE: WEDNESDAY 19TH MAY

TIME: 7.30 - 10pm

**AT: ECOLOGY CENTRE
191 DRAYTON PARK, N5**

**YOU ARE ALL WELCOME & ENTRY IS FREE
THERE'S PLENTY OF WINE AND SNACKS PLUS A TALK**

by BOB GILBERT, ISLINGTON ECOLOGY OFFICER

ON

**"MEDICINE, MAGIC & MYTHOLOGY OF THE STREET PLANTS
OF HIGHBURY"**

The HCA will hold its AGM from 7.30-8.00pm to update you on the last year's work and to elect a new Committee. Bob will start his informal talk about 8pm for 40 mins and the party will end at 10pm. Non-HCA members are welcome to join the HCA (free) at the door. The Ecology Centre is at the junction of Drayton Park with Gillespie Road. **0171 359 5731** for more info.

Merilyn Moos asks “Are we going back to the ‘50s”?

In 1955 I was one of two girls from a class of over forty to get into a grammar school in Durham. I still remember my classmates’ tears when they realised they had not got in. ‘Separate but equal’ was how the grammar/secondary modern school divide was presented: recognition of different abilities and aptitudes. It was represented as ‘equality of educational opportunity’. In practice, the division reflected and reinforced class divisions (roughly the “successful” 20% into grammar schools and 80% “failures” into secondary moderns).

Fortunately, such was the force of the many differing campaigns against the tripartite system and the 11+, that the Labour Government of 1966-70 gave birth to the comprehensive system, a sickly but preferable progeny to the tripartite system. Now Year 6 SATs have taken over from the 11+ I sat in 1955. Introduced by the Conservative Government, in order, they said, to improve and compare primary schools’ standards and progress, Year 6 SATs results are published in league tables. This is to assess schools, not pupils, or so Conservative and Labour politicians tell us. Also, parents are seen as consumers in an educational market place, requiring information about the product ie the schools.

Last year, my son took SATs, aged 10. When he got his results, it was my son’s turn to cry. He did not know the history behind the abolition of the 11+, but he knew that he had only got Grade 4s and his friends had at least one Grade 5. Although the teachers had told them that Grade 4 was the expected grade, the children were all convinced that Grade 5 was what was really expected, if you’re not to be seen as ‘dumb’. Joe announced he was stupid and there was no point in trying any more and he did not want to go to secondary school. Fortunately, his secondary school does not use SATs results as a basis for differentiation in the first year but the children, even in the second term, are still well aware of each other’s grades, with accompanying shame for Joe. Now he is doing well and SATs for him, are history.

We are also told that these tests do not have an effect on the children. The tests are supposedly seen as just another part of the school day. Year 6 children take tests in written maths and mental arithmetic, a variety of English tests,

science and technology - all within one week. It is arduous and teachers cannot pass them off as just another test, whatever Conservative and Labour Government spokespersons have argued. Just how far the process of Year 6 SATs testing is not a neutral one can be seen in the reaction of the children themselves. As in the 11+, the children feel and are, labelled. Their image of themselves as successes or failures is reinforced and magnified. Parents, too, are more and more aware of these tests, not just as a measurement of the schools, but as a measure of their child. The sale of SATs’ primers’ has soared.

The Year 6 SATs are part of the increasing differentiation between secondary schools, occurring under the mantle of parental choice and educational diversity. The publication of the secondary school league tables shows some schools as apparently far more desirable than others. Motivated parents see it as an unacceptable risk to allow their children to go to a school with poor results. That the explanation may lie in the catchment area, not the teachers or the school is beside the point. The effect is a self-fulfilling downward spiral for many schools as they are left with children who did not get into other more “successful” schools. So secondary schooling is becoming increasingly differentiated and segregated.

And as well as SATs we now have SETs - where Year 6 SATs are used to put children into ‘Sets’, where children are grouped by ability in each subject. Under New Labour’s educational strategy SETs are becoming increasingly acceptable and while SETs are not as rigid as old-fashioned streaming, SETs become clustered together so that the secondary school effectively has a ‘top’ and a ‘bottom’ tier. Surely it will be only a short step before secondary schools require SATs results as an admittance criterion - reviving the divisions created by the 11+?

Sadly, the Labour Government sees SATs as an essential part of its drive for improving school standards. Under the slogan of ‘standards and excellence’, of not penalising the bright child in order to bring up the weak, educational thinking is returning to the time of the 1950s and 1960s when streaming was justified on the basis of ‘separate but equal’, a practice which led to the exclusion of the vast majority of young people from identifying with or benefiting from post 11 education. There is nothing ‘new’ here, just old-fashioned inequality, and misery and lack of opportunity for many children. ■

ABANDONED CARS LITTER THE STREETS

How many burnt out or wrecked cars have you seen left around the Highbury neighbourhood recently? Some HCA members have counted a new one a week, smashed up, with or without the seats ripped out. A few have been burnt out shells. Abandoned

cars might be a serious traffic and safety hazard but they are not dealt with by the Police. Ring the Council on the **Abandoned Cars Line: 527 4766**. The police told the HCA they do not know who is doing this - if you can help ring Highbury Vale Police on **263 9090**.

SUPERMARKET SCANDALS - by Margot Young

FREE GENES ON SELECTED PRODUCTS!!

Many people want to know how to avoid food containing genetically modified material. You cannot do this at present simply by looking at labels. Although the number of products based upon genetically modified Soya protein or tomato are fairly small, (Sainsbury's list fits on to one side of A4 paper), the list of foods which contain substances derived from genetically modified Soya, such as lecithin, or Soya oil (which can be in vegetable oil), is as yet unpublished and seems likely to be so vast as to be of little use, unless you have 3 hours to spare before you do the shopping list.

To give an indication, Sainsbury's claim to have 80 researchers working full time at present trying to trace the origin of Soya and Soya derivatives in their products. The problem is that genetically modified beans grown in USA have been mixed with non-GM beans. In other words the supermarkets *don't even know*

themselves which products are free from genetically modified material. A worrying fact, however, is that the US increased the percentage of the genetically modified crop from 2% of the total Soya crop in 1996 to 30% in 1997, making it likely that most of us have unwittingly eaten an increasing amount of genetically modified material. The most reliable way of avoiding all genetically modified food is to eat organic produce, which while an increasing range is available, is unfortunately still beyond the means of many.

FRESH JUICE SQUEEZED OUT OF SAINSBURY'S....

How many times have you unpacked the weekly shop only to realise that you've been sold goods on or past their use-by date? Despite their claim to prioritise food safety, supermarkets seem incapable of removing past-date food from the shelves.

So, what can you do about it?

One tactic is to call the supermarket concerned, point out the health hazard and ask them to deliver a replacement. When I tried this out, they predictably said that the product should be returned, when they would happily exchange it. This was the moment to stand firm, so I asked (calmly) why I should be put to the trouble of making a second journey because of their mistake. I was passed to a manager who initially resisted my efforts to get him to take responsibility, but once he was offered the alternative option of the goods being handed over to the environmental health department, along with pointing out that the produce had been partially consumed by a child, who hadn't been sick yet, he started to come round. In the case of a bottle of juice sold by Sainsbury's 3 days past its use-by date, they were outside the door in 20 minutes with a giant sized replacement. ■

SQUIRREL FACTS

by Your Squirrel Correspondent

Housing - Squirrels live mostly in 'dreys' - large globe shaped and intricately constructed nests of twigs, leaves, moss, grass and other soft materials, such as paper tissues and fabrics. The dreys are high up in the trees or in 'dens' in hollow tree trunks or large branches. They leave their dreys to search for food in the mornings and afternoons, returning for a midday 'siesta' in the heat of the summer. There is always a frantic search for food about one hour before darkness falls, and then every wise squirrel retreats to its home.

Diet - Left to the wild, their menu changes according to



seasonal availability and includes all forms of tree seeds, nuts, young shoots, bark and fresh sap, fungus, insects and bulb tubers. Not a list to endear them to gardeners and foresters! I believe gardeners should offer other food to the squirrels to prevent the destruction of the garden plants. They like all types of nuts - unroasted and without salt, sunflower seeds and fruit such as grapes and sliced apples. They also have personal 'fads' and don't all have the same taste in food. If offered any nut in its shell they almost always run off to bury it, whereas they will eat any unshelled and cut-up nuts immediately, often in front of you. ■

More SQUIRREL FACTS to follow in future Highbury Community News.

HIGHBURY COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION COMMITTEE

Can you offer time and commitment to the Management Committee of the Highbury Community Association?

Nominations, in writing, supported by signatures of 3 existing HCA members should reach :

HCA Treasurer, 132 Highbury Hill, N5 by 12.5.99

**LONDON'S FIRST FARMERS' MARKET OPENS
IN ISLINGTON
SUNDAY JUNE 6TH 10am - 2pm**

An idea popular in the USA is coming to Islington this summer. Truckloads of freshly picked, local seasonal produce will be on sale at Camden Passage, N1. Farmers will bring their own fruit, vegetables, salad greens, juice, cheese, flowers, wines, eggs, honey and much more. Because farmers sell their own produce direct to people there is no need for transport, preservatives, packaging and middle men. Food is fresh - eggs are 2 days old, not 2 weeks old and raspberries come direct from the farm, not the packing shed. There's more variety and buyers can expect unusual items such as striped beetroot, white courgettes, pea shoots, double-yolked eggs and honey in honey combs. The farms are all within 100 miles of London. Only farmers are allowed to sell in these Markets and they are only allowed to sell food they have grown on their farms. The Markets help to keep small family farms in business, give customers fresh food and a chance to ask farmers how it was grown and how best to prepare it for eating.

Market organiser Nina Planck grew up on a Virginia farm, which was part of the revival of these markets in the USA. She spent her summers selling berries, flowers and vegetables at farmers' markets. She says 'The idea is that profits go back into the Markets, to continue the benefit to the Farmers.' For more information ring **0171 354 9968** or turn up on Sunday June 6th to see for yourself!

*****FREE LEGAL ADVICE*****

BLACKSTOCK ADVICE & COMMUNITY PROJECT

213A BLACKSTOCK ROAD N5 2LL

EVERY WEDNESDAY EVENING 6 - 7.30PM

**Please ring Shibu Mukherjee
on 0171 359 7120
for an appointment**

HOUSE PAINTER AND DECORATOR

TIM is available for large or small jobs inside or outside. Ask him for his references, if you like. **Tel: 0181 548 4370**

Highbury Singers go to Church

The Highbury Chamber Choir will mark its twelfth anniversary this May by singing Palestrina's '*Missa aeterna Christi munera*' at St Thomas's Church on **Whit Sunday 23rd May at 10.30am.**

The vicar, the Rev'd Stephen Coles, describes the chance to have a traditional sung Mass at the feast of Pentecost as a 'real treat' and is hoping for a good turn out for the festival which he says is the second most important in the Church calendar.

The choir was started in 1987 by Highbury resident Nicky Spice. From small beginnings and much unaccompanied singing in draughty halls, there are now twenty members, most of whom live in Highbury, and regular concerts.

With or without musical accompaniment, this lot are not to be missed!

All welcome to St Thomas', at junction of St Thomas' Rd with Monsell Rd, N4

Editor's note: Have you any news or views you want published in the HCA News? Issues are published every 8 weeks. Send news or notices of events to the Editor at the address below. Thanks to the members doing the delivery this time!

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