

HIGHBURY COMMUNITY NEWS

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Harvey Nick's on Highbury Corner?

By Alison Carmichael

Snappy design and attractive displays do not commonly spring to mind when the words 'Charity Shop' are mentioned. So I was intrigued to over-hear Sandra McFauld, Area Manager of the Marie Curie Charity Shop on St Paul's Road, Highbury Corner, state with some pride and conviction to a new employee "I see this shop as the Harvey Nick's of all our Marie Curie Shops - the others are the Marks & Spencers". Harvey Nichols here? Confirmation indeed that Highbury is changing!

Asked to explain, Sandra said that of the 160 Marie Curie shops throughout the UK, the Highbury shop is the most profitable, is soon to introduce a trial credit card payment facility and receives the best quality donations in both clothes and bric-a-brac. "We make the most profit from good quality donations but everything donated is used somehow. On our busiest days over 30 bags of donated items arrive through the door, all needing sorting and categorising. Clothes not good enough to sell are collected by the ragging service which recycles for the Third World, some clothes are displayed for sale straight away, some kept for our Seasonal Displays, and clothes unsold after 3 weeks on display are sent for sale in another shop. This shop nearly always reaches its weekly sales target, and I'm proud of it."

It is immediately apparent that this charity shop is different from most. Clothes are clean and every item steam pressed. Amongst the simple black tee-shirts, hardly worn GAP shirts, NEXT jeans and improbably long men's trousers, there are the occasional Nicole Farhi jackets and expensive-looking couturier outfits. Clothes are arranged logically by type and also by colour - jackets on one rail, evening dresses along one wall, men's wear in the far corner; and each has a price label stating which week of the year it was first displayed. A quick inspection of labels shows that very few items have been on sale longer than a week - indicating a fast turnover. Responsible for the lay-out and the window displays is Anne-Marie Cox, the Manager of the Highbury Shop, and a long-time Islington resident. "I change the window display every week and try to dress the mannequins in co-ordinating colours - not easy as I'm dependent on what has just been donated! This week the display was black with a Hallowe'en theme. Our other window shows ceramics and the new 'giftware' which we sell for our Marie Curie Trading Company."

About 20-30 customers visit the shop without fail every week searching the rails and book-shelves for good buys. Dealers are often seen checking the bric-a-brac carefully, turning plates over to inspect the marks. "I would hate to think that we let valuable antiques through without selling them for the best possible price. One of the things I love about this job is that my staff, and that includes our volunteers, have learnt to recognise when something needs

to be checked by an expert. We've sent ceramics and jewellery to Christies and Sothebys and it is great to raise a lot of money for a good cause."

Although the Marie Curie Charity Shop has been here for only 5 years, Marie Curie Cancer Care, (once known as the Marie Curie Memorial Foundation), has been around for over 50 years and is the largest, most comprehensive, cancer charity in the UK. The brainchild of a surgeon, Ronald Raven, and his sister, nurse Dame Kathleen Raven, it is unusual in covering four main areas of concern in the field of cancer care. Eleven Cancer Care Centres, a night-sitting service with 6,000 Marie Curie Nurses, an Education Department training NHS doctors and nurses and a Research Institute, serve the public and complement the work of other cancer charities and the hard-pressed National Health Service.

Volunteers are vital to the smooth running of the Highbury Shop and it is the Manager's view that the benefit is very much two-way. "A volunteer, especially a young person interested in going into retail, will learn about every aspect of shop management - security, window dressing, customer contact, designer labels and, of course if interested, how to recognise antiques! It's hard work, but we have a good atmosphere and I like to let volunteers choose their hours and do as much or as little as suits them."

If the quality of donated goods relates directly to the profitability of a Charity Shop, then this is an interesting indicator of how much Highbury's social mix has changed recently. Now there are people living in Highbury wealthy enough to donate their un-worn Chinos and Hobbs jumpers to the Shop, with many others less well off coming in triumphantly to snatch up the bargains. The Shop constantly needs donations, of whatever quality, as long as they are clean; although, as Anne-Marie admits, some are maybe not as useful as others "The strangest donation I had recently was a very old Christmas Pudding! And the one which made me jump was the pair of false teeth, nestling amongst some warm, woolly clothes."

A comforting thought - maybe Highbury has not changed so much after all?

Marie Curie Charity Shop Tel: 226 0565
National Cancer Helpline Tel: 0800 716146

Do you care about Islington Schools?
See the back page!

Last Minute Appeal on Kelross Road Backland

By Gavin Weightman

It was good of Ian Crawley, Head of Regulatory and Planning Services for Islington Council, to write in the September issue of HCN such a full response to criticisms of the planning process in the borough that I had made in an earlier piece.

Reflecting on my experiences as an objector to a scheme to build four houses on the site of garages at the rear of my house in Kelross Road, I had concluded that Islington was a developer's paradise and that Planning Officers took little or no notice of the case we had made; nor did they follow their own planning policies and guidelines. Everything was weighted in favour of the applicant, who negotiated directly with the Planning Department to create an "acceptable scheme."

In reply, Ian Crawley seems to agree that this is how it is, not only in Islington but elsewhere in London. He points out that nine boroughs are more of a push-over for developers than Islington, approving between 90 and 99 per cent of applications as opposed to only 87 per cent in this borough. In addition he says that the system of Neighbourhood Forum Planning Committees which "determine planning applications" is unique to Islington. He does not say that the system only operates in part of the Borough. In our case the Forum determined nothing - its advice was simply ignored by the planners.

The fact that the position of objectors might be marginally more favourable in Islington than elsewhere is interesting; but it hardly answers the points I raised. We opposed a scheme that was contrary to planning policy for housing on backland sites and that failed to comply with guidelines on access. Nobody in Planning Control disputed this. The Neighbourhood Forum said the scheme should be refused; yet Planning Officers recommended approval.

We got wonderful support from our Ward Councillor, Laura Willoughby, who spoke up for us from the public benches when the case came to Committee in February; and, by a large majority, planning permission was refused. The appellant was informed officially of this decision on 4 March this year. He had six months to appeal. The September deadline passed and we heard nothing. By mid-October we had reason to believe it was all over. Then we got a letter from the Legal

Department to say an appeal had been lodged with the Secretary of State on 30 August. Planning Control had passed the news on to Legal Services on 2 September.

The Legal Department sent me the appellant's submission to the Secretary of State, drawn up by a firm of planning consultants. Not surprisingly quite a large part of the case the consultants make was provided by Islington's own Planning Officers. This includes some highly contentious statistics suggesting that, as residents, we would be much better off with houses than with the existing garages on the site.

In addition, the consultants have climbed onto the bandwagon of Lord Rogers's recent Urban Task Force report recommending that 60 per cent of new housing in the south-east of England, including London, should be built in cities on "brownfield sites." This was not a relevant policy at the time of the original application for planning permission; and the implications of adopting the policy in Islington have yet to be worked out. As Ian Crawley points out, the borough already has 120 people per hectare compared with an average of only 77 for Inner London. Surely, those figures suggest that Islington has already fulfilled its quota of housing in the South East and it should adopt a local policy of maintaining or improving the quality of life for those who already live here.

We do not yet know how the Council will defend its decision to turn down the Kelross Road scheme. Apparently its defence will not be ready for a few weeks. But I do have a letter from Graham Loveland, Chief of Planning Control, assuring me that, in the event of an appeal, the Planning Officers would do their best to justify the decision of the committee, even though this would mean reversing their own original recommendation. At least there is a strong technical ground for refusal, as the Planning Committee concluded, because the access road to the site is much too narrow for residential development.

Meanwhile, we will do our best to persuade the inspector that the democratic decision of the Planning Committee, which recognised the unanimous local hostility to this scheme as well as its impracticability, should be upheld. We trust the Planning Officers will do the same. ■

Elizabeth Dudley, mother of two boys, replies to Bernadette Banks's letter in Issue 14

There are many things a new mother and baby can do in Highbury. The Highbury Fields Two O'clock Club (2-4pm weekdays by the Tennis Courts) and Tic-Toc (nursery rhymes at Christ Church on Friday mornings) are both very popular. The Roundhouse (354

5149) hosts *Soft Play, Tumble Tots, Very Little People, Music Workshops and Dance Classes*. Creshendo, in Canonbury Rd (0181-675 6611) is good for story telling, soft play, music and games. Join the local NCT. Most of the mothers I met through the NCT 8 years ago are now good friends, as are our children. Call Mary Flatley on 349 4920. The Active Birth Centre (482 5554) runs various classes for young babies and

many of the local children's clothes and play shops advertise relevant activities in their windows (Stoke Newington Church St is especially good for this). Fieldway Crescent Library (619 6900) lists most of what is going on in the area on its noticeboards. Finally, you may find it worth glancing at the children's section in Time Out each week. London's art galleries and museums often run child friendly activities. ■

Parking Problems? What's New

Plans for major extensions to parking control in North Islington were given the thumbs down by residents whom the Council consulted in the Summer.

Instead of two large Car Parking Zones (CPZ) extending all the way from Highbury Fields to Tollington Way, and bounded by Hillmarton Rd in the West and Hornsey Rd in the East, there will now be two much smaller ones.

Work on these starts in December with controls due to be implemented in February 2000. Restrictions will operate 6 days a week from 8.30 am to 6.30 pm. Permits will cost £95 per year.

The Holloway CPZ, described by the Council as a "minimal extension of the existing E Zone", will cover Highbury Terrace, Highbury Terrace Mews, Ronalds Rd, Arvon Rd, Witherington Rd, Melgund Rd and Horsell Rd. Framfield and Battledean Roads may be included, subject to further consultation.

The Nags Head CPZ will restrict the streets bounded by Mayton St, Hornsey Rd, Tollington Rd and Hertslet Rd.

CPZs are meant to ensure that residents are not squeezed out by commuters coming into the area.

In Holloway there are not only workers

but students from UNL, not to mention the army of people from points North, who currently find this a convenient spot to ditch their cars and continue into central London on public transport. At the Nag's Head, according to one Mayton St resident, most locals take their cars to work in the early morning to be replaced by incoming workers and shoppers.

Those who find they can no longer park in the areas covered by the two new zones will inevitably move on to the nearest unrestricted streets.

The Council accepts that there will be an adverse impact on the adjacent areas including that covered by the existing Gillespie Parking Scheme. As this only operates on Match Days, it does not help residents the rest of the time.

There are already problems of displaced traffic on the edges of the Gillespie Scheme; and it doesn't cover the needs of local businesses as there is no provision for non-resident shop owners and others with commercial vehicles. They cannot get a permit to park on match days, which is one reason why some local traders close down altogether whenever there is football.

63 Blackstock and Gillespie traders are petitioning the Council for a revision to the rules. One of them, Colin Small, who runs a busy joinery shop in Blackstock Road is frustrated.. Eyeing the litter-strewn street on Sunday morning he complained, "I pay £4000 a year in Rates, and what does the Council do for us? Nothing. If there's no match they don't even clean the streets. If they let the shops collapse, the whole place will die."

The Council does not have the money to conduct a review of the scheme or pay for extra measures. Last Spring they asked the Arsenal, which has started to pay for the current scheme, to fund a review (estimated to cost no more than £20,000); but The Club's management declined to do so while the future of the stadium remains uncertain.

Islington, Hackney and Haringey are all due shortly to start separate traffic studies around Finsbury Park with a view to further parking restrictions. Islington's area will cover the patch bounded by Seven Sisters Rd, Green Lanes, Gillespie Rd and the railway. This could be the next local CPZ.

Asked if the whole borough would be controlled one day, Mr Smedley, of the Engineers Dept. admitted "things could be going that way" but stressed there was no intention to introduce further parking measures without popular support. ▣

Fajitas and Fun in Funky Finsbury Park

By Pauline Gerlis

I always like to take my ever-hungry 17-year old son Adam out for lunch as a special treat during his holidays and this half-term we decided to try "Exquisite", a local Mexican restaurant, about which we had received a flyer. Every day, some half-a-dozen restaurant adverts land on our doorstep and are binned after sitting in an unread pile of similar bits of paper.

This one, however, had "half price every day 11am-7pm" splashed across it, which, together with a verbal recommendation, made this the chosen venue for our half-term treat. So - a brisk 15 minute walk to the Blackstock Road which seems to be becoming a trendy site for new eating places. I love the idea of walking to and from restaurants. In the first place, it builds up a healthy appetite ('though in Adam's case, per-

haps not such a good idea), then the return journey enables one to feel better about having eaten too much.

Exquisite is a small, attractive restaurant with various Mexican-type hats and rugs adorning the walls. There is an abundance of dark wooden furniture scattered around and, for a Friday lunch time, there were a great many chattering people. A cheery waitress handed us a comprehensive menu along with a huge dish of tortilla chips and a very tasty dip.

Adam ordered a Mexican chicken soup, but I felt too full after the chips so passed on the starter. The soup was a meal in itself, with lots of vegetables and chicken pieces in a lovely hot, spicy soup. That made it difficult for Adam really to appreciate the huge amount of

"fusilli al Gurdinera" which he had as a main course. However, it was very good, if a little too spicy for his taste. My main course, sizzling chicken fajitas served with three delicious dips, was excellent.

All this plus a large bottle of mineral water came to £8.35, which seems unbelievable. Even if we had gone to McDonalds and both had a Big Mac and chips with the necessary drinks, it would have cost the same - and we had been in very pleasant surroundings with (Adam tells me) some very good music playing. I hardly noticed it, but he kept bursting into accompanying song. Roll on the Christmas holidays when I think we will be visiting exquisite **Exquisite** again. ▣

Exquisite, 167 Blackstock Road, N4 0171 359 9529

Letters from.....

Susan Forson, Finsbury Park Action Group

We have had a number of complaints about car parking as up to 19,455 people descend on Highbury for the Arsenal away-match screenings. We'd like to know if your readers also have parking problems. Call FPAG on 0181 802 2612.

We have also had complaints about the noise level from these screenings. If you find it too noisy, call Islington's Environmental Health Department on 0171 527 7217 and ask for a noise monitoring form. ■

& from.....

Barney Jones, Highbury Hill

I read in one of the nationals recently that AFC are currently looking at 6 possible options re moving from their Highbury Ground. Using the revamped Wembley Stadium is apparently still under consideration. Do you know what the current position is? A regular update in each newsletter would be most welcome. ■

All we know is the last public statement by AFC Chairman on 11.8.99: "We are actively looking at a range of options, including redevelopment of Highbury and relocation,hopefully, by this time next year, we will be in a position to be more positive about our future." - Ed.



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DO ISLINGTON SCHOOLS NEED PRIVATE ENTERPRISE? *-What do we want for our children?-*

Highbury Community Association is holding a
PUBLIC MEETING
to discuss Islington's Education Service Wednesday 1st December 1999
7.30pm Christ Church, Highbury Grove
Entry FREE

Chaired by Roger Blitz, Editor of Highbury & Islington Express. Speakers will address recent issues, audience invited to make points/ask questions, wine served.

*Teachers, parents, politicians invited
Sponsored by Highbury & Islington Express*

Editor's note: Send news or views you want published in the HC News to the Editor at 83 Highbury Hill, N5 1SX or email: alicar@bigfoot.com. Deadline for next issue 09.01.00

Highbury Community Association

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