

# HIGHBURY COMMUNITY NEWS

Issue No 18 April 2000

## COMMUNITY SLAMS COUNCIL HASTE OVER ARSENAL

On Monday 17th April at 7.30 Islington Town Hall will be given over to a special meeting of the Planning Committee to decide whether to approve planning briefs for 31 acres of protected industrial land at Ashburton Grove and a further ten and half acres where Highbury Stadium now stands.

If approved the briefs will pave the way for Arsenal PLC and any property developers to whom they may sell Highbury Stadium to apply for planning consent to build a new stadium with up to 60,000 seats on Ashburton Grove in place of most or all of the seventy or so businesses that are there now; and to turn the Avenell Road site into a mixed development with high density housing.

The briefs set out in very broad terms the sorts of development the Council thinks appropriate and the limits they intend to impose. Provided the developer sticks to the guidelines there is then a good chance any planning application would be approved. So business and community groups in the area are keen to make sure the limits are tough enough.

One big complaint they all have is that the Council has not left enough time for proper consultation - just six and half weeks to consider proposals that could change the face and character of North Islington for a lifetime.

Although the Council arranged three public meetings, they failed to get the leaflets out on time, so many people only heard about them from the newly formed Islington Stadium Communities Alliance (ISCA). The overworked Planning Officer, Graham Harrington, had to deal with 749 written responses, some of them up to 30 pages long. These were supposed to be in by 3rd April, but one of the most important, from London Underground, bears an office stamp for 6th April, while one of the two business groups at Ashburton Grove (AGAB) representing the major property owners failed to meet the deadline at all.

When the revised drafts appeared a day late, on 11th April, with over 100 changes in them, they were still incomplete and there were no details about the comments made by official bodies. Committee member Cllr Maureen Leigh complained, "I had to go and pick up the papers myself. It's not right, we are supposed to have them delivered five working days in advance. How can we be expected to make a decision when we haven't even seen all the papers properly?"

Highbury resident, Richard Lucraft, has written to councillors advising them that the Council has slipped up by not consulting properly before issuing a draft planning brief and by agreeing to help the Arsenal without also advertising their land for disposal and offering to help other developers in a

similar way. "In their eagerness to push this thing ahead, they seem to have fallen foul of the 1972 and 1999 Local Government Acts", he explains.

Quite apart from matters of procedure, community groups are amazed and appalled at the way the Council seems prepared to rewrite its strategic planning guidelines enshrined in the Unitary Development Plan and government circulars.

Nick Jack of the Islington Green Party fought and won at Public Inquiry a similar battle with the Council over proposals to put a giant supermarket on the Lough Road site, West of Holloway Road. He says "It doesn't matter what planning officers say, there is simply no provision to change the designations of the the industrial and Nature Conservation land. If they want to do that, they have to change the Unitary Development Plan itself". That is a process that could take a couple of years.

If you care about the outcome, make sure to be at the Town Hall on Monday 17th April at 7.00pm. Since the whole meeting will be devoted to the briefs you should have a chance to speak too. □

### HIGHBURY COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

20TH MAY 2000 AT 7.00PM - 8.00PM

IN

QUEENSLAND MULTIMEDIA ARTS CENTRE  
(26-38 QUEENSLAND ROAD, N7)

FOLLOWED BY

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## FOOTBALL UNLIMITED!

One of the main objections Highbury people have to the Ashburton Grove proposals is the idea of a "multi-use" stadium that could be used for other events than football. This is one issue that seems to unite football fans with those who dislike the whole idea of a bigger stadium.

Planning officers and councillors have been lobbied vigorously to restrict the use to football and to spell out exactly how many events will be allowed in a year and what the hours of operation would be. These were all essential details missing from the original draft brief for Ashburton Grove. The HCA advised that the most important constraint was the number of events rather than the nature - as one crowd is much like another in terms of the disruption it causes.

The answer planners have come up with is to allow as many football matches and video-screenings as Arsenal wants, but to restrict other events to six per year, of which no more than three could be concerts. This is a solution that will please almost nobody.

Not residents - With removable pitches, there is no physical limit as there is at present on the number of matches that could be played.

Not fans - Many fans believe football grounds should be for football only, and do not like the idea the game might be put aside for more profitable "events".

Not the Club - Given the cost, they are going to want to use the stadium a lot more than they do at present; and there may not be that much demand for even more football matches.

But the Club may have a way round the restrictions. They can always apply for permission for extra events; and how likely is it that the Council will be in a position to say NO?

## CARS & RAIL LIMITED?

In planning terms one of the enormous difficulties of the stadium scheme is making the traffic work. Railtrack, London Underground and the train operator WAGN have all cast serious doubts as to whether there is capacity for the extra crowds on the rail systems. They are not against the idea in principle but they are all demanding major upgrades to the stations, the track and the signalling - and they expect the developer to pay for the lot; and WAGN expects subsidies for running extra trains too.

Planners have set a ceiling on the numbers coming to any new stadium by car. No more than 20% of the increased crowds. This would mean fewer than come by car at present, and there would be a one mile exclusion zone on match days, much bigger than the present traffic zone. Also Islington Council have revealed that new plans mean the whole borough may be a controlled parking zone by 2003, before a new stadium could be in operation.

Discussions between planners and community groups this week revealed the big weakness of the car-parking scheme - enforcement. How do you monitor the number of cars, and what do you do if there are too many. Islington's Head of Regulatory Services, Ian Crawley, admitted there is no easy solution, as there is no legal way of penalising a developer for failing to meet targets; it would need a voluntary legal agreement. An even bigger headache could be stopping illegal parking. Crawley readily agrees the current parking scheme does not work because there are not enough wardens, and yet the Council loses money even on the small number it employs. How many more would be needed for a one mile exclusion zone, and would the developer pay the costs?

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## ASHBURTON AT WORK- AN INDUSTRIOUS ESTATE

Two local photographers, Prisca Thielmann and David Kohn recently staged a show at QMMAC of pictures taken of some of the many business activities in Ashburton Grove from printing to metal plating and from furniture hire to butchery. The show was sponsored by John Robertson of "Model Solutions" an internationally famous model-making company.

There is still time to see a selection of the prints on view in Islington Town Hall until 18th April. ■

## Lillibulero at QMMAC

By Rachel Stott

What were all those vaguely familiar melodies floating around QMMAC on the afternoon of Friday 24th March? Lillibulero, a real foot tapper of a folk tune with a complex political past and a curious similarity to Hushabye Baby; Oranges and Lemons set in catchy cross-rhythm with a lively jig; a mournful song with nonsense words like a half forgotten nursery rhyme?

All work in progress for a Highbury composer creating an opera for children from a book by the famous author Joan Aiken. 'The Cuckoo Tree', one of her series of books about the indomitable heroine Dido Twite, has all the ingredients of an exciting children's drama; spooky witches, an elusive band of smugglers, a mysterious puppeteer, twins separated at birth, a helpful elephant and a traitorous rat, on whose villainy the whole plot hangs. (NB Harry Potter fans,

J.K.Rowling was not the first to use this device!)

The idea of this opera is to combine performance by professional singers and players with that of children of all ages. The first steps were taken in QMMAC on 24th March where a band of 6 professional musicians recorded songs with singers Billie Hylton-Friend (age 5), Talia Cohen (age 9) and Tom McKenna (age 11). This was only the first stage in a plan to record excerpts from the score which involve children acting, singing and playing. If you or your child would like to be involved at any time please contact me on 020 7704 0147 or email [rachel@symphony82.freeserve.co.uk](mailto:rachel@symphony82.freeserve.co.uk).

Writing an opera is not generally a profitable business, and at present I have no funding for the project at all. Reading about QMMAC in HCN and discovering that there were free rehearsal spaces and recording facilities on my doorstep came as a wonderful surprise. Three cheers for QMMAC and for the most helpful and communicative Newsletter ever! ■

## The Brownies of Islington Green

### By Sarah Gerlis

THEY are known as the organic enthusiasts of London. They eat organic food, buy organic clothes and eat in organic restaurants. Walk five minutes around Upper Street and you will find an organic pub, an organic restaurant and an organic baby clothes shop. Look more closely though and you will see that none of these places suffers from long queues and empty shelves.

Ask most people in Islington whether they buy organic food and the answer is NO. Ask most organic shop and restaurant owners whether they think Islington is the organic hub of London and they will also say no. The reality is that most of Islington's residents are no greener, richer or more health conscious than most Londoners. Organic items are bought by a minority of people living in Islington, a much smaller minority than in Kensington and Chelsea. Take away the double income, no kids or DINKS of Islington and you are left with a majority of people who shop in Chapel Market and don't waste money on organic food.

The number of people buying organic food in the UK is growing at a staggering rate of 40% a year. Almost one in three people regularly buy organic products; but Islington does not have any more organic enthusiasts than most areas of London. A spokesman for Marks and Spencer said that other stores in London sold more organic products than its branch in Islington: "In terms of organic food sales, the Islington store is about twentieth in the league and lags behind Muswell Hill, Camden, Kensington and King's Road stores" he said.

Jo Baker, owner of Islington's organic baby clothes shop, *Green Baby*, agrees: "We get a lot of customers from the richer areas of London such as Twickenham. Most of our Islington customers are young couples who work in the City and have a lot of money. I know Islington is known as the perfect area to find organic enthusiasts but this is not necessarily true.

"I set up the first store in Islington because I live here but I think there is more demand for my clothes in Chelsea and I am planning to open a shop there," she said.

Walk into the world's only organic pub in St. Peters Street, *The Duke of Cambridge*, and you will find most of Islington's organic devotees. Located in the middle of a residential area in St. Peters Street, this pub is not easily found by the organic fans of Chelsea and Kensington. Paying £2.50-£3.50 for a pint of organic beer and up to £2.50 for an organic soft drink, customers can enjoy a smoke-restricted night out there. Geetie Singh, the owner of the pub says 70% of her customers are local. "Most of our customers are bohemian, trendy, middle-class residents from Islington and are not representative of the average Islingtonian. We opened our pub here because it happened to be available at the right time but we looked at other areas such as Notting Hill, Clapham and Battersea," she said.

Organic food is big business. People in the UK spent £540m on organic products last year alone. Supermarkets charge 60-70% more for organic meat and vegetables than for the same non-organic products. Dr Anna Ross from the University of the West of England said that prices of organic food will not go down as demand increases: "Supermarkets are able to exploit huge consumer demand with excessive price hikes on organic food," she said.

People are prepared to pay the extra cost for organic food because they believe it is healthier. But Ian Maber, a clinical nutrition consultant, says that we are wrong to believe that organic food is healthier than non-organic food: "Supermarkets and food suppliers are fooling customers into thinking that any product with an organic origin is healthy. Organically grown crops could be contaminated by animal fertilisers which are riskier to eat than GM food," he said.

He also says that some organic products contain more fat, salt and sugar than their non-organic equivalents: "An organic version of a tomato soup, for example, costs twice as much and contains added salt and sugar, both of which are unnecessary and can be extremely unhealthy," he said.

We may be moving in an organic direction but the downsides of going organic are slowly becoming more obvious. Islington's residents are probably right not to jump on the organic bandwagon and no doubt the health-conscious Chelsea-set will be jumping off it soon. ■

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## Children's community centre gets the go-ahead

Elizabeth House, the voluntary sector youth centre in Hurlock Street, off the Blackstock Road, will shortly undergo a massive modernisation.

Over a year ago the Centre, which runs youth and play schemes for local children, received a Lottery grant of nearly £270,000 towards its building programme.

HCA member, Robert Scott, is one of the trustees. He explained "The lottery grant sounds big, but the the buildings

are in a terrible state and sadly neglected, so we have had to find another £120,000 just to get started. In the present climate that is not easy, and it has taken longer than expected."

Thanks to the efforts of Legard Road resident, Peter Kent, and other Board members, funding is now in place; and building work is expected to start by the middle of May.

Money has come from several sources, including English Partnerships, the Tu-

dor Trust and the Finsbury Park SRB, which is contributing £25,000.

The works, which will take at least 9 months, will enable the centre to offer a full programme of children's activities in attractive surroundings and to provide space for other community uses.

Most importantly for the community at large, the fine Victorian hall which seats 200 people will be fully restored. This will provide a much needed facility for the Highbury area; and renting it out will help the Centre fund its main activities. ■

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## HIGHBURY COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION COMMITTEE

A new committee will be elected at the AGM on 20th May.  
We need people who want to be more actively involved,  
who have community projects they want to promote and  
who are prepared to organise and push things forward.  
Fund raisers and secretarial skills particularly welcome.

Nominations in writing, supported by signatures of three  
existing HCA members should reach:  
HCA Treasurer, 132, Highbury Hill, N5 by 29.04.00

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Send letters and articles for next issue to:  
HC News, 10 Stavordale Road, N5 1NE  
or email: [pauline.gerlis@talk21.com](mailto:pauline.gerlis@talk21.com)  
by 05.06.00

### *Highbury Community Association*

The HCA represents 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, 132 Highbury Hill, N5 made out to Highbury  
Community Association.