

# HIGHBURY COMMUNITY NEWS

Issue No 31 December 2002

## What you gain on the swings.....

By Beatrice Sayers

Certain residents of Highbury have all the luck. They have a social life unrivalled among Londoners; they ride around in sporty new vehicles, and can choose from an enticing range of ready-made organic food. Once back home, they are thoroughly pampered.

Yes, Highbury babies are a lucky lot. But when Highbury parents seek grown-up entertainment with baby in tow, it's not so easy.

On weekday mornings my 11-month-old's diary is full. It's Monday and she's itching to go to the playgroup at Christ Church to meet her toddler friends. On Tuesday morning she hangs out at the Books for Babies session, one of three a week at Central Library. She likes the wooden toys, and the far-from-wooden librarians, who sing and read to the children.

On Wednesday she can visit St Augustine's Hippo Club on Highbury New Park. Thursday and it's time for a stroll round the fields; or a trip to Freightliners Farm, where she makes an inspection of the cows, goats and sheep, and stops to chat to the ducks and turkeys. On Friday she's off to the Roundhouse for a music session, or a splash in the kiddies' bit of Highbury Pool.

But what about the afternoons? On any weekday, she can go on down to her club. Gary and Roy, stalwart leaders of the Two o'clock Club on Highbury Fields, make sure she feels at home.

The trouble is that her engagements don't always fulfil my needs.

Six weeks into my daughter's life I was already desperate for entertainment. I had been sitting around with her breastfeeding almost continuously since her birth. The cinema was an alluring destination. When my baby wasn't feeding, she was sleeping, so she wouldn't cause any disruption.

I put my daughter in a sling and set off for the West End to see an Italian film. "We can't let you in," the box office assistant thundered down the microphone. "It's got a 15 certificate. No one under that age can be admitted." So they would let me and my baby into a film with a U or PG certificate? Of course, came the reply.

Hmm. Struggling to meet the demands of an infant whose first word was several months off, I was in no mood to listen to an adult talking nonsense. I phoned the Screen on the Green, thinking that a smaller, local cinema wouldn't be so strict. They told me it was "totally illegal" to let mothers with babies into films with 15 or 12 certificates.

In fact, the cinemas were wrong. All they have to do is apply to the council for a waiver for babes in arms. The Rio in Dalston

has for years had a policy of letting mothers bring babies up to the age of one into any film, as long as they leave immediately if the baby starts to cry. It's a shame that so few cinemas operate with that kind of common sense.

So much for a visit to the picture house. What about a less adventurous evening?

Dionne Verbeet and her husband Arjan were looking for an evening meal. It was 6pm and the Highbury Barn pub had a two-for one offer on pizzas; ideal, they thought. But the couple were told to leave because they had a two-month-old baby. They only wanted to stop for 20 minutes to eat, they explained. "We really found it a strange experience," said Dionne.

Eventually, they asked if they could buy the pizzas as a takeaway. No problem, the pub replied, and so they waited by the bar, with baby, for 10 minutes while the food was prepared. Another 10 minutes and they could have relaxed and eaten the pizzas inside. Dionne and Arjan, who had moved to Highbury from Holland only three days previously, were perplexed. "The day after I really thought, 'My goodness, why did we come to London?'" Dionne said.

The present system of children's certificates in pubs is to blame for such absurd situations. If the government's recent proposals to deregulate the antiquated licensing system become law, pubs will be able to set their own age policy – and be pragmatic about a young baby.

But even if the law, and local businesses, could make life easier for parents, the community activities on offer ensure that keeping Highbury's youngest residents happy is child's play. ■



BEATRICE (RIGHT) AND DIONNE HELP THEIR BABIES ENJOY  
THE HIGH LIFE

## More on war on masts By Susanne Gustavsson

The effort to stop the mobile phone mast on the roof of 114 Highbury Park goes on, and there has been a lot of response to the campaign – not only from local residents, but also from local and national papers and even the BBC. Links to all articles can be found on the action group's website [www.nohighburyparkmast.org](http://www.nohighburyparkmast.org).

On November 4th, the chair of the Highbury Park Mast Action Group, Catriona Coulter, was interviewed live on BBC London News, about reports in the national press on hidden phone masts, and about the unauthorised phone mast in Highbury Park.

Apart from the media coverage, the action group has been busy informing local residents about what is going on so that they have the opportunity to object if they wish. Having been advised that the best method of objecting to the mast is to write to the Planning Inspectorate, the action group did their best to ensure that local residents were also informed of this and distributed several hundred information packs to

schools, nurseries and homes in the vicinity of the mast. The Council initially advised that the deadline for submissions to the Planning Inspectorate was 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2002. However, the Planning Inspectorate has since stated that, although they would like to receive observations as soon as possible, they will continue to accept correspondence up to the date of the public local inquiry on 11 March 2003.

In the meantime, it has emerged that T-Mobile is applying to the council for prior approval of 6 antennae, 4 dishes, 6 equipment cabinets and ancillary development on the North Stand of Arsenal Stadium. There are at least two O2 antennae up there already. The reason given for this, is the need to relocate masts from the Council Depot in Albany Place, assuming this gets demolished to make way for Arsenal's new stadium.

Unlike O2, and H3G in Highbury Park, T-Mobile is consulting St John's school. It is not yet known whether any of the many other children's institutions

nearby have been consulted (eg Gillespie School and Early Years, St Thomas's playgroup, Martineau and Ajowa Ebi nurseries, etc). If the T-Mobile request goes ahead, St John's will have three base stations far too close to it and on either side of it.

And this is in spite of the fact that the Department of Health now admits, in its recently revised guidelines on mobile phones, that biological effects are caused by mobile phone emissions at levels below the currently permitted guidelines, but they do not know why. The results of government research are still awaited. In the meantime, the phone companies continue to install their masts. ■

*If you have comments or wish to object to additional masts on the North Stand of Highbury Stadium, write quoting Planning Application No **PO22799** to the Planning Dept. PO Box 3333, 222 Upper St ,N1 1YA - or email **development.control@islington.gov.uk** by 19.12.02*

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## From flying camels to sand rats

By Lis Yorke



HCA BRAINS IN ACTION IN THE ECOLOGY CENTRE

Over twenty-five experts pitted their wits against each other at the Ecology Centre on November 23rd for HCA's second quiz night.

Inevitably some questions were either too easy or too difficult. As ever the teams were adept at eavesdropping, lip-reading and calling out false answers in order to confound their rivals. By the beginning of Round Three, the Framstones had been appropriately renamed the Framstone Hooligans and the quiz mistress was looking forward to a break.

The second half continued in the same spirit and the Hooligans won. There was just enough time for one last drink, then everyone set about helping to wash glasses, clear tables and chairs.

Many thanks to all those who did help clear up, but especially to Nina, who organised the snacks and to Stan who ran the bar.

Just one last question, where **would** you see a flying camel? ■

(Continued from page 4)

Get some cheapo, plastic numbers (tasteful grey unfortunately) - so brighten them up with garish blue liners. Still too dull; so let's spend some money sticking on tacky red plastic signs advertising "Coca-Cola" and the "Sweeper Zone" - whatever that is. But the ungrateful burghers still throw their burgers on the ground. Time to try really hard, the pen-pushers must have thought. How about some nice red "Sweeper Zone" banners on the lamp posts, two feet wide and ten feet high? That'll really show we're caring for the environment, enhancing the streetscape, protecting the residents - and advertising Coca-Cola.

Probably you think this is getting to be a rather far-fetched joke. Think on! The Planning Application is No. PO22542 and it's due for a decision on 16th December. There's a note on the file, saying the Council is in favour of the banners - Well, they would be, wouldn't they? You wonder if anyone has told the Councillors, who do the deciding, that the applicant knows already what they think?

And those Whitehall mandarins..... How will they deal with the excess litter problem when they send in the hit squads to sort us out? Dull of soul, and starved of creative imagination, they'll probably just pay someone to empty the bins. Roll on the day! ■

## Why Highbury?..... Why? When? What now? What next?

*HCA interviews Diane Burridge, who, as a Labour Councillor and local resident, was involved in the fight to create and save Gillespie Park and Nature Reserve, which is now a much loved open space of London-wide Ecological importance.*

### HCA – Why was Gillespie Park threatened?

**Diane** - It was 1987 and Nicholas Ridley, Secretary of State for the Environment, had ordered British Rail, as it was then, to sell off its land in order to make money. I had just arrived in Highbury the year before and been elected as a local Councillor for Gillespie Ward. I lived where I live now, in Avenell Road and I could not believe that the 5 acres of natural land that people walked in and enjoyed, could be thought so unimportant. It was a very serious threat. The plans were to cover it in housing. It seemed everyone of influence was against us. The Leader of the Council, Margaret Hodge, wanted housing above all else and feelings ran very high among the Labour Party, as well as in the community. I was Chair of Environment, one of the big committees, so I was well placed to support the fight in every way I could, but many of my colleagues were opposed to my view and it was not much fun. I knew that housing was important – but so is open space and Islington has the least amount of open space of any borough in the UK, apart from the City of London!

### HCA – When did the tide turn in your favour?

**Diane** – It took 3 years and so many people got involved. It was a real community based campaign and a very organised one with about 10 of us running the day to day matters – all very democratic with no actual 'leader' of course! Children from all the local primary schools wrote letters and came to public meetings. The Press got interested and we had articles in Private Eye, New Society and the national papers of course, when the London Ecology Unit declared the land to be of Metropolitan Importance. The London Wildlife Trust helped and so did David Bellamy. Suddenly, we realised that we had won the argument to reduce the housing right down to an area that would impact less on the Park. We lost some of

the allotments but got more land than we'd had before with the inclusion of the 'Upper Level' for public use. So now it is 9 acres big and still used constantly by the schools for nature classes in the wonderful Ecology Centre and in the Nature Reserve. Of course the Ecology Centre was built with a lot of input and fundraising from the community plus the all-important grant from central Government.

### HCA – What is happening now?

**Diane** – Right now there is a Compulsory Purchase Order to turn parts of the wildlife corridor into emergency access roads and tarmac areas for AFC's new stadium in Ashburton Grove. I am so worried about the impact of the Arsenal plans. I think they are a real threat to our whole area. The floodlighting near the widened road will be bad for the birds and wildlife. Having more than the normal 27-30 matches a year will mean more days the Nature Reserve has to be closed to the schools and the public. And the other thing I am appalled about is the thought of having over 500 cars in an underground car park under the old pitch! Just think about the extra amount of car journeys that will mean! We are meant to be pushing 'no car' policies! I'm an AFC fan through and through but this is just so damaging for Highbury, it makes me despair of the Council that they could have supported it.

### HCA – What do you want to happen next?

**Diane** – I'm not feeling very optimistic right now. I think this area is going to miss the Gillespie Neighbourhood Forum. The people who go to that Forum were, and still are, central to keeping many things to do with our area under control. Without the Forum, I think things will deteriorate. So many good people have fought to keep the area clean, to reduce the number of Match Day Burger vans and monitor what the Council is doing. Still, the Forum hasn't stopped yet! The Area Committee lets people have some say in what goes on and anyone can go, it's just a matter of looking out for the next date in the local paper. I think that is what is good about this area – people do want to make it a good place to live and work! ■



DIANE BRINGS OUT SOME OF HER OLD CAMPAIGN LITERATURE

## BINNING THE COUNCIL

Local Guardian readers must have been surprised to learn the other week that Islington is one of the country's 17 worst Councils, all liable to a Whitehall takeover in the near future. Hard to imagine there are another 16 just as daft. Whitehall probably worries about the big, grown-up things - massive debts, failing schools, benefits payment scandals, black holes in the accounts and so on. Quite right too.

But sometimes it's the small things that get you down. The way you're told the person you want to speak to "is not in work today" as though that were perfectly normal. Or the irritating Red Threatener demanding the Council Tax that you paid last month. Or the pained explanation that you can't possibly have your new dustbin emptied because your front step is more than six inches high.

These things are bad, but bearable. Far worse is what happens when the Council thinks it's being helpful. Take litter, for example. As a nation of litterbugs we are always in want of new bins. Do you remember the dinky, yellow, plastic jobs on every lamp post that somehow got installed without the metal liners, because money was tight? They melted away the first time anyone put a cigarette stub in them; but the straps that held them on stayed 'til the lamp posts were replaced - about ten years later. We're probably still paying for them.

Worried by litter on the ground, the other year someone decided to get Arsenal to sponsor some bins - not any bins, of course, not standard bins, but special, Arsenal bins. Meetings held, consultations made - and what do we get? - a fearsome concrete job, oddly given to falling over and breaking, yet so vandal-proof, the spiky, black, simulated iron surface rips your skin if you try to feed so much as a beer can through the tiny slot in the side. Still too much litter on the ground. So then they go one better.

*(Continued on page 3)*



Jeremy Corbyn MP for North Islington  
Advice sessions for constituents:  
First Friday of month (appointment needed)  
Third Friday of month (walk in)  
At The Old Fire Station, Mayton St. N7  
From 4pm - 6pm  
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Tel: 7226 5775 Fax: 7226 3775  
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## ARSENAL UPDATE FROM ISCA

HCA is one of the member groups of ISCA, the community alliance of groups opposed to the Arsenal developments. If all the developments go ahead Highbury will be changed out of all recognition. ISCA News is enclosed to give you the latest on the businesses fighting for survival in the CPO Public Inquiry set for January 2003.

A new CPO for land to be taken from Gillespie Nature Reserve was publicised last week. ■

**THE BAD NEWS...** Almost all of us will suffer from some form of pain or discomfort at some point in our lives!

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### Highbury Community Association

The HCA represents 740 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, 75 Highbury Hill, N5 1SX made out to "Highbury Community Association".

Send letters or articles for next issue to: HC News, 83 Highbury Hill N5 1SX or email [hcanews@hotmail.com](mailto:hcanews@hotmail.com)

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