

HIGHBURY COMMUNITY NEWS

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Farewell to Stephen Coles

By DOROTHY NEWTON with JESSAMY, ANNE, MALCOLM, ROWAN, SENYTE, the St Thomas' Sunday School children & GILL SHEPHERD

Stephen Coles retired on Easter Day 2020, after 31 years at St Thomas' Church in St Thomas' Road. He was also a member of the General Synod of the Church of England for many years.

Stephen and the building of community

We celebrate Stephen in the newsletter because he has made such significant contributions to the life of the local community by his involvement in so many activities.

He initiated meetings among leaders of different faiths and this dialogue, particularly with Finsbury Park Mosque and Muslim Welfare House, has offered both celebrations, and frameworks for problem-solving. For instance, he has convened meetings to facilitate community responses to drug dealing and drug use in the area. A further legacy of this relationship is the creation of the Finsbury Park Sisters - women from all faiths and none who meet several times a year to share conversation, food and visits.

Stephen regularly visited the notorious Finsbury Park mosque preacher Abu Hamza al-Misri in jail between 2006 and 2012, explaining that while you may hate a person's crimes, you must love them as a human being, and follow the Bible's injunction to visit the sick and prisoners.

Stephen encouraged the congregation to support migrants and asylum seekers as individual



Mohammed Kozbar, General Secretary of the Finsbury Park Mosque; Stephen Coles – St Thomas' Church; and Rabbi Herschel Gluck, President of the Stamford Hill Shomrim and chairman of the national Muslim-Jewish Forum

people, as well as by giving food to the Islington Centre For Refugees and Migrants. He worked to get climate change taken seriously locally and challenged the congregation to think through how our lifestyles affect the world's most vulnerable people, and how to reduce consumption.

The Sunday School children interviewed him, and asked him, 'What

has been your favourite moment about being a priest at St. Thomas'? After much thought, he replied, 'The moment when the Muslims asked me to go and talk to them at Friday prayers, because I felt that there had been a break-through between us, and we didn't have to regard ourselves as separate'.

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Farewell to Stephen Coles

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Stephen and local activities

Stephen supported the Finsbury Park Action Group, the Finsbury Park and Stroud Green neighbourhood forum, the Friends of Gillespie Park and Elizabeth House. He was active in local democracy, attending Ward meetings, and supporting local campaigns. At times he has been a key middleman in negotiations between Arsenal football club and local residents.

Stephen at St Thomas'

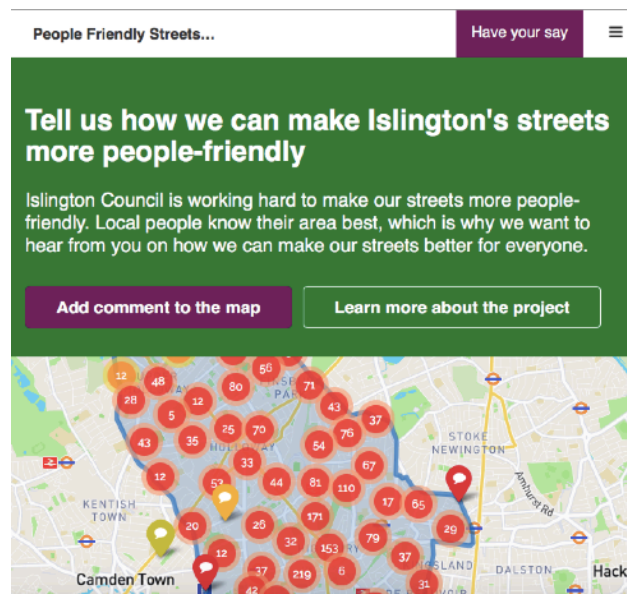
His contacts always went well beyond congregation members, to agnostics and atheists and to those of other faiths. Individuals from within and beyond the congregation commented on his capacity for listening to problems, and for accompanying people on their journey through good times and bad. He was profoundly committed to maintaining diversity in the congregation and remarked to a parishioner, 'If you go into a church and everybody looks like you – run!'.

Stephen has provided a tremendous underpinning to many aspects of our local life. The HCA would like to thank him for everything, will miss him greatly, and wish him the very happiest of retirements.

Help us keep our membership list up to date. Let us know if you are changing your email address or if you would like to add a friend or neighbour to our list

Please contact us at hcanews@hotmail.com

Islington Council's 'Commonplace' initiative



By GILL SHEPHERD

Nothing will ever be quite the same after the Coronavirus crisis is over, which is why now is the time to make changes to make sure everyone can keep enjoying their streets. The council has already started adapting Islington's streets to make it easier to socially distance whilst walking to busy areas for essential reasons, and more changes are being rolled out around schools and transport hubs.

From this summer, the council is introducing People-Friendly Street Plans. By installing inexpensive measures like bollards, planters and smart cameras across the borough, they will create more space for everyone to enjoy their neighbourhoods as they walk and cycle. Local people know their areas best and Islington is asking for views on how to make local areas more people-friendly. The interactive 'Commonplace' map (in the illustration above) gives you a chance to comment – directly onto the map - on problem areas you are aware of near your house, dangerous junctions, excessive traffic and so on. The map may be accessed at <https://islingtonpeoplefriendlystreets.commonplace.is/>.

In our area, comments cluster intensively on issues we are already only too familiar with:

•The closure of Gillespie Road part way along its length has hugely increased traffic now making its way to the Drayton Park/Holloway Road junction along Avenell Road and Aubert Park

•The re-design of Highbury Corner, and the desire of many vehicles to avoid it completely, has encouraged much northbound traffic to choose the Liverpool Road over Upper Street. Some traffic joins the Holloway Road and continues northwards. Some, probably aiming in due course for Stoke Newington, Dalston and beyond, cuts across from Palmer Place into Drayton Park and makes its way to Highbury Park via Martineau Road and Highbury Hill. There have been truly colossal and quite inappropriate traffic increases on these roads.

You can add your own comments or can endorse existing comments in particular places if your point of view has already been expressed.

Commonplace is excellent for showing particular problems at particular junctions and in particular roads. The creation of low traffic neighbourhoods will certainly ease some of these problems by closing cut-through routes in residential areas. But it cannot analyse broader traffic flows and Islington Council will in due course need work on this too, to complement the location-specific insights which Commonplace is generating.

News in brief...

Highbury Community

Association's AGM was cancelled this year. In the circumstances, the simplest thing is probably to continue with the current committee until the next scheduled AGM in 2021. Dates will be circulated in due course.

Highbury Community

Association would like to thank those of its members who have sent donations to help the Association stay afloat. You can donate via the website www.highburycommunity.org or by sending a cheque, payable to HCA, to our treasurer John Egan at 68 Elfort Road, London N5 1AZ.

Wireless festival. The annual Wireless Music Festival in Finsbury Park has been cancelled for this year.

Singing for Highbury. Ivor Game, the singer/songwriter locally resident for many years, has written a song celebrating Highbury which he asked us to publicise. You can listen to it here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0XgnECeV_Y

The Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art, 39a Canonbury Square, London N1 2AN will be re-opening on 15th July with arrangements designed to ensure safe visits in the context of COVID-19.

Unveiling an Islington Heritage plaque to mark the childhood home of Andrea Levy, novelist and chronicler of the British Caribbean experience

By SARAH POTTER

Andrea Levy, best known for her prizewinning novel *Small Island*, was commemorated at her childhood home in Highbury by an Islington Heritage plaque, unveiled on March 14th this year by her husband Bill Mayblin. The plaque is at Twyford House in Elwood Street, where she lived with her parents until she was eighteen.

The plaque is the outcome of a petition to Islington Council by Councillor Sue Lukes who represents Highbury East Ward, and the Highbury Community Association. Richard Watts, Leader of Islington Council and the Deputy Mayor of Islington welcomed invitees to a ceremony in which this outstanding and proud novelist's achievements were celebrated, following her death in February 2019.

At the ceremony, Sue Lukes, spokesperson on migrants on the Council, spoke vividly of Andrea Levy's first novel, *Every Light in the House Burnin*, which draws on the life of her parents, the Windrush generation. They resembled the first-generation migrants in Sue Lukes' own background, for whom

keeping their heads down in British society was often the dominant response to their new life. The second speaker, Baroness Lola Young, who grew up in Islington Council care in the centre opposite Twyford House, and who is now a cross-bench peer, focused on Andrea Levy's second novel, *Never Far from No-where*. This portrays



two sisters growing up in Islington and finding their way in British society as young people of the second generation of British Caribbean migrants, an

experience she herself shared with Andrea Levy and which contributed to their friendship. Local MP Jeremy Corbyn spoke on the theme of protest for social justice, and how Andrea Levy served this cause through her writing. Finally, her husband spoke of her childhood at Twyford House and her character as he knew it in her personal life. We now have a fitting local memorial to Andrea Levy, whose Highbury childhood formed what she saw as the discovery of her past revealed in her writing.

HCA would like to thank Islington Council and Bill Mayblin (Andrea's husband) for organising the unveiling.

Coronavirus advice from Islington Council

The council is working closely with the NHS, Public Health England and local partners to control the spread of coronavirus, keep vital services running and to help those most in need. The council is working hard to keep Islington safe – please do your bit to help save lives.

To find out more, visit <https://www.islington.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/coronavirus-covid-19>

Coronavirus experiences

By CATRIONA OLIPHANT, BETH MOIR, DIANE BURRIDGE, DAVID BRAINE, SUE SEARLE, SAIRA BANO, CAROLINE RUSSELL with GILL SHEPHERD

Coronavirus losses in Highbury and Islington



It was a big shock for Highbury when we heard, back in early May that Danny Michelson of 'La Fromagerie' at Highbury barn had died of coronavirus. His and his wife Patricia's first little 'cheese cave' (on the other side of the road, the last shop before Highbury Fields), acquired in 1992, was a revelation. The business grew and Danny became a spirited campaigner for the Highbury barn shops, eventually chairing the Traders' Association. He will be much missed. Other sad deaths were that of one of the founders of the Park Theatre at Finsbury Park, Jeremy Bond, and of Wally Burgess, a one-time Islington councillor.

But in general COVID-19 has hit Islington less hard than many other parts of London. As of 26th June the borough has the lowest rate of cases of any borough in London at only 226 per 100,000 people

(Islington Council website). To 19th June there were 150 deaths, of which 7-8% were deaths at home, around 23% were deaths in care homes and the rest (69%) were deaths in hospital.

If you want to check on numbers of deaths in the whole country, in Islington or right around this area, this link has everything you need:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-51768274>

COVID-19: A big thank-you to the food shops

Many shops, restaurants and other businesses had to shut in the area during the lockdown, of course, but we were very grateful to food stores, which were able to remain open and went to great lengths to protect staff and customers. Many shops began local delivery services, such as White's the greengrocers at 150 Blackstock Road (07970 509333). 'Seasons and Blossoms' the greengrocer and health food shop at 92 Highbury Park offering a delivery service within one mile of the shop (phone an order to 020 7159 4867). The Stroud Green Farmer's Market developed a shared website (www.themarketbarrow.com) for all its farmers and users and began Saturday local deliveries as well. 'Nourished Communities' (www.nourishedcommunities.com) sell local produce that was once destined for farmers markets and restaurants, and will deliver locally once a week on Sundays.

Local shops which had always delivered, such as Godfrey's the butcher's (<https://www.godfreys.co>) and Bourne's the fishmonger (www.bournesfish.com) of course continued to do so, and some shops began kind informal personal deliveries to shielding or elderly customers. Several pharmacies offered this service (De Peare's at Highbury Barn, Hornsey Road Pharmacy) as did Londis. Transition Highbury list national or



regional veg-box delivery services etc as well as some other excellent local shops.

(www.transitionhighbury.org.uk)

COVID-19: Living with lockdown

About the lockdown period itself, almost everyone has positive stories to tell. We all enjoyed the improvement in air quality, the blue skies the reduction in noise and the birdsong. The emptiness of the streets was a joy for walkers and cyclists of all ages. A pair of red kites were even seen over Finsbury Park and Canonbury – a spectacular bird, common in London in Shakespeare's day, but very rare here nowadays (reported in NextdoorHighbury).



People commented that lockdown generated a tremendously strong sense of community. Shopkeepers and customers greeted one another through their masks, glad to see that each was well. 'Clap for carers' created warmth and solidarity among neighbours - and some laughter at the pots, pans, whistles and didgeridoos being played.

Coronavirus experiences, continued



charity looking after people of any age who are self-isolating. (<https://northlondoncares.org.uk/>) They have been a lifeline to us and everyone who is a member’.

Other charities have made a difference too. ‘Wizzie-Wizzie’, (www.wizziewizzie.org) a coding club for 8 to 14-year-olds meeting in Elizabeth House, has donated over 60 computers to families and individuals in need of support during the Covid-19 crisis. They have also donated computers to a local primary school.

COVID-19: some positive longer-term outcomes

Finally, though travel to central London remains challenging, some positive changes to the way in which we use our local streets is coming about as a result of Covid-19. The London Mayor and the Government are giving money for councils to make three transport interventions: pop-up bike lanes, space for social distancing on shopping streets, and low traffic neighbourhoods to prevent local streets from being used as rat runs. The aim is to enable everyone to walk or cycle for local journeys and to leave limited road space for disabled drivers, deliveries, buses and emergency services.

Some children chalked ‘Welcome’ and ‘I love the park’ at the entrance to Gillespie park. A ‘happiness tree’ was set up in Monsell Road outside the ‘Deepdale’ block of flats by three residents. It is decorated with message-discs saying ‘Stay safe’, ‘NHS’, ‘Peace’, ‘Be happy’ and so



Photo: Courtesy of Julian Morgan



on, and there are blank discs available for any passer-by to add their own message.

One of our members wrote: ‘the lockdown for my mum (96) and me has been a surprisingly positive experience. I have had time to talk to and have ‘socially-distanced’ meetings with friends I haven’t spoken to in five years. Mum and I have connected to people through Zoom get-togethers organised by the fabulous North London Cares, a



Residents call for action on Blackstock Road disturbances



By DIANE BURRIDGE

After three police officers were injured in a fight in Blackstock Road in May, local residents and businesses have called on police to do more to stop street drug dealing and other anti-social behaviour. Residents have told us:

- It's frustrating to watch these people being arrested, but then see them back on the streets the next day. There are groups of young men obstructing the pavement, harassing people and causing perpetual disturbances.
- The smell of drugs in front of the library and college is persistent, and we have to expose our children to this on the way home from school.

•Squabbles turn into heated arguments and then physical fights. The police say they don't have enough staff and that they are doing their best.

The boroughs of Islington, Hackney and Haringey have recently agreed a Blackstock Road Improvement Plan, as part of the Finsbury Park Strategy which will:

- Conduct an Environmental Visual Audit and follow up actions
- Re-allocate motorcycle bays to support moped delivery drivers
- Utilise section 106 money and other funding streams to invest in this area
- Use the Blackstock Road Police base for the Neighbourhood Police Team

- Increase the targeting of drug dealers and other criminals
- Review the CCTV coverage and quality in the area
- Identify and take action on those premises believed to be contributing to the issues
- Undertake community engagement with those groups gathering and those affected, including setting up an Algerian Community Network
- Explore how voluntary and community groups in the area can help - for example: reporting anti-social behaviour, and being involved in Police Ward Panels

The Highbury Community Association will press local councillors for updates on the progress of these action plans, and continue to attend relevant meetings.

Islington's biodiversity action plan 2020-25

By DIANE BURRIDGE

Islington Council is consulting on a Biodiversity Action Plan 2020 to 2025, asking for responses by 31 July 2020. Four key areas for action are: the built environment, designated sites, parks and urban green spaces, and access to nature. The link between biodiversity, health and social well-being is highlighted, recognising that the natural environment provides a wide range of ecosystem services. The Council aims for the borough to be net-zero carbon by 2030, building on the Islington Transport Strategy (2019-2041) and the Air Quality Strategy (2019-2023).

In the borough there are three statutory Local Nature Reserves (Gillespie Park, Barnsbury Wood and the Parkland Walk) and 64 Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC), as well as three sites of Metropolitan Importance (Gillespie Park, the Parkland Walk and the Regent's Canal).

Highbury Community Association responded to the Plan with some clear and measurable action points. It also noted the following:

1.Barbecues - allowing these in our precious green spaces contradicts too many sections of the document, including the Air Quality Strategy and those highlighting the importance of green spaces for our health.

2.Street Trees - it is admirable that there is a target to increase tree canopy from 25% to 30% by 2050. But over 40 trees have been lost locally (in the area bordered by Drayton Park, Aubert Park, Blackstock Road and Seven Sisters Road) in the past few years. There is only the money to replace these

at about seven per year, despite many HCA requests: so we are actually losing, not increasing tree cover. There seems to be no proactive work going on to attract extra funding for trees (and when an HCA member offered to pay for a tree, we were told that it would cost £500!).

3.Maintenance of street trees - too many trees die in their first year for lack of watering. Contractors' work should be monitored more.

4.Play areas – All new developments should have 'kickabout'/play areas for young people and children. Housing at the new Arsenal Stadium and City North developments make completely inadequate provision for this.

5.Rainwater - We need to encourage people not to concrete over their front gardens. The Council should encourage people to use permeable surfaces such as gravel or pierced paving stones.

6.Traffic Management Schemes- are there any plans to green these, as many countries do?

As always, it is easy to have policies and targets – but they are worthless unless implemented. If you wish to respond to this document, the deadline is 31 July 2020: <https://www.islington.gov.uk/consultations/2020/biodiversity-action-plan>



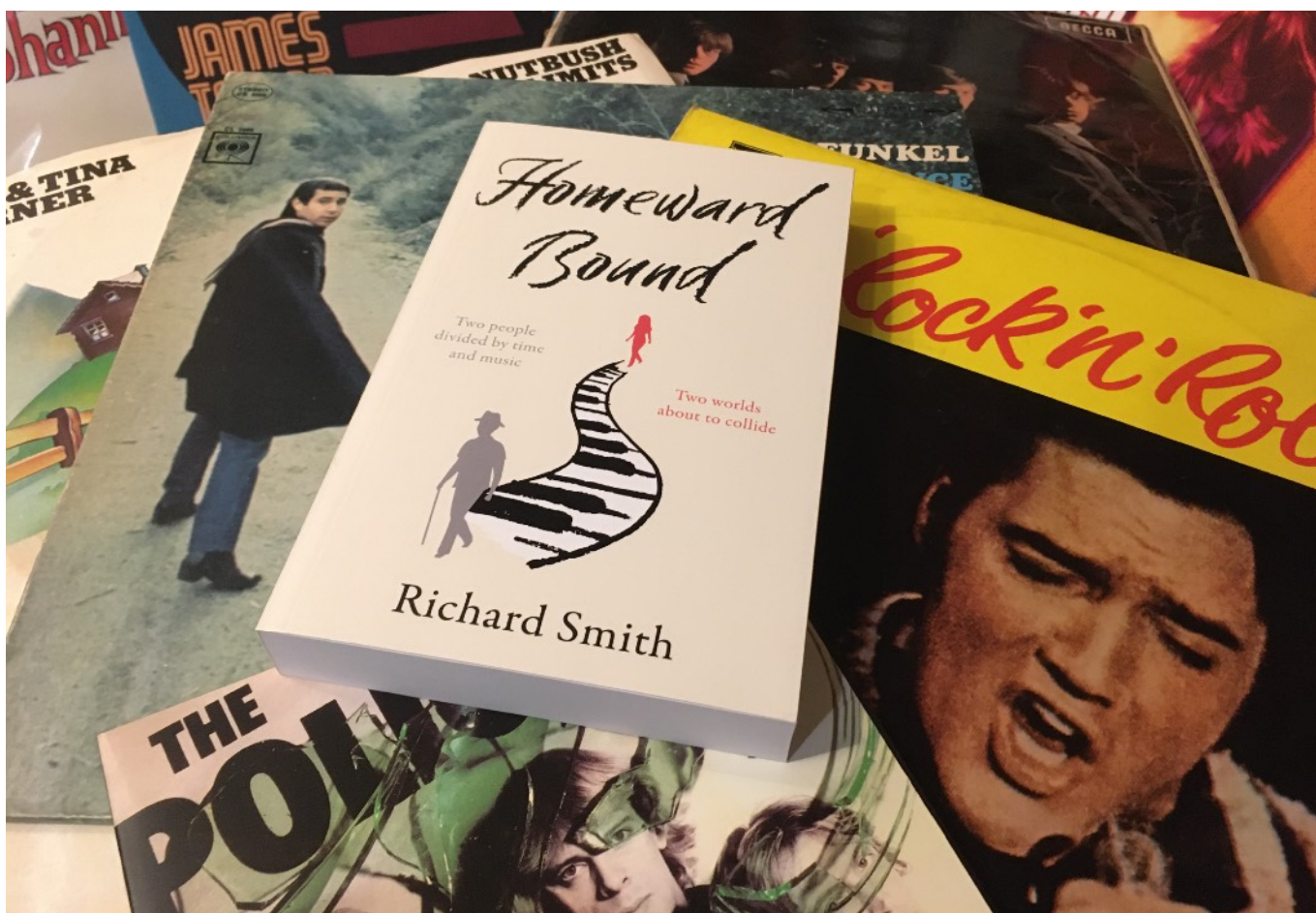
Advertise in HCA News

We have no advertisements in this edition of the newsletter, but expect to have them again from the next edition.

The HCA charges a very reasonable £50 per advert for three issues, and £20 per advert for a single issue. We will include one charity advert per edition free of charge.

Email hcanews@hotmail.com for details

Book review: 'Homeward Bound' by Richard Smith



By GILL SHEPHERD

Richard Smith, a retired producer of documentaries and commercials and a Highbury resident, published his first novel this year. This immensely likeable and readable book contains themes that must ring true for many British families. A 79-year-old Londoner, newly a widower and unused to looking after himself, is on the brink of being frogmarched into an old people's home by his daughter's irritable husband. The possessions of a lifetime, including a massive vinyl collection, at risk of being got rid of so that the house can be sold. A stay of execution presents itself in the form of George's granddaughter, about to start university in London. Tara needs somewhere to stay. George can remain in his own home, with his

old dog, if he has someone to keep an eye on him. It becomes clear that George was once a serious musician - playing in sessions with some of the rock greats whose records he keeps - but had never reached breakthrough. Slowly he begins to engage with Tara and her boyfriend whose musical tastes are very different from his. He plays them some of 'his' music and listens to theirs especially when he discovers that Tara sings beautifully. A late-in-the-day - and unbelievably dodgy-sounding - offer to make a recording and relive those earlier dreams creates a drama which turns the family inside out. Who is gradually stealing the more valuable items from George's record collection? Who even knows which are the valuable items? In a tour-de-force dénouement, Tara and her

boyfriend are offered a major musical break, we learn why George's ambitions were thwarted, and an unexpected secure future opens up for him and his record collection. The characters are vivid and the plot holds you tight. The book is laced through with musical references which you will get effortlessly if, like George and the author you are a '60s kid now in your 70s. But many of them are such classics that you will know them anyway whatever your age. Richard Smith has organised a complete playlist of all the music referred to in the novel, which can be found via his blog, or directly on Spotify. <https://richardsmithwrites.com/2020/01/24/the-music-of-the-book/> <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/4iU4vEwuGFmegaSyJ9cwSZ>

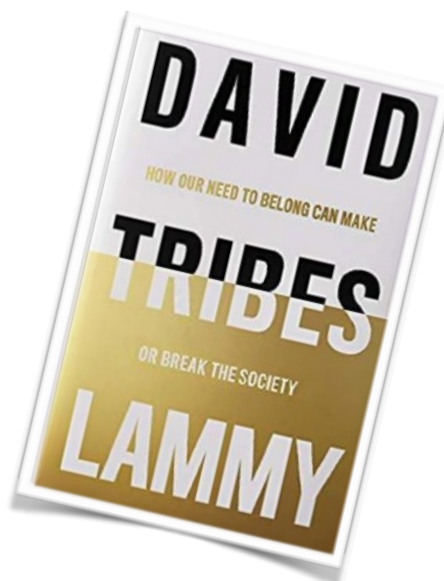
Book review: 'Tribes, how the need to belong can make or break the good society' by David Lammy MP

By SARAH POTTER

David Lammy, born at the Whittington Hospital in Islington and now M.P. for Tottenham, explores what he identifies as the 'new tribalism' in his book. The tribes he identifies are formed by white extremism, fundamentalist religion, populist nationalism, urban gangs and warring factions in mainstream politics. He sees the roots of this divisive tribalism as growing from the decline of local groups and organisations, the rise of precarious employment, growing isolation and social media which foster polarised opinions. He lays out a route-map towards a civic society in which 'tribal' forms of belonging give way to communities, and to devolved nations with a common purpose.

For Lammy, restoring trust and cohesion in local neighbourhoods will involve restoring the massive cuts to local services which once provided housing, education, youth services, transport and training, reversing the growing control of central government and restoring more local government autonomy.

But also, he argues, a cultural change is needed to create 'communities that bring people together' to halt the decline in social mixing. Thus, spaces are needed where activities can go on like evening education and new technology learning, singing groups, board-game evenings, food assemblies, language classes. Another idea is local constitutional conventions where citizens decide what the values and aims should be for their particular area. At a higher level, Lammy proposes that a new civic Britain should have a citizens'



assembly for England to define English values and make policy recommendations, creating a balance with the parliaments of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.

Lammy's book is vividly written from his own experience of community in his British Caribbean family background, and then his education at the King's Cathedral School in Peterborough where he learnt his Englishness in a provincial setting. His sense of the importance of people's local communities and the ways in which people 'are weaving social bonds in tough circumstances' is admirable. But there is much work ahead if a real shift to the empowering of local communities for the common good is to occur.

Help us keep our membership list up to date. Let us know if you are changing your email address or if you would like to add a friend or neighbour to our list

Please contact us at hcanews@hotmail.com

HCA News | Issue 115 | July 2020

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Use of foodbanks during lockdown increases by 325%

Food banks saw demand soar by up to 325% during the lockdown. Some of the hardest hit cities include London, Bristol, Bournemouth and Sheffield. The Trussell Trust (the main supplier of Food Banks in the UK) collected data

which showed that 67% are now dependent as a result of coronavirus, or underlying health and disability issues. Some had lost their job or were facing eviction, and 20% were over the age of 70. At least half of those affected are

children, unsurprisingly (Daily Mirror 26th May).

In our own area, the food bank that used to be run by the Trussell Trust at the Roundhouse has had to close, even though it was receiving a fast-growing number of referrals of people on Universal Credit even before Covid-19 it. Two alternative food banks now exist and are ready to receive our gifts: Saint Joan of Arc church at the top of Aubert Park (in the church porch) and one in the Sobell Leisure Centre. Those in need locally have been referred on to one or other of these.

If you find physically purchasing and donating food items difficult, there is an easier way. The Trussell Trust welcomes one-off donations and direct debit payments and the money is used entirely to buy appropriate items to stock food banks with. www.trusselltrust.org.

