

HIGHBURY COMMUNITY NEWS

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Our public parks and green spaces as a health issue?



By SARAH POTTER

In recent years, cuts in local authorities' budgets have reduced spending on non-statutory services such as parks and green space and resulted in the need for income generating measures such as the use of Highbury Fields (pictured above) by funfairs and the Wireless Festival in Finsbury Park. Local residents' access to parks has been restricted and the parks themselves have been damaged by these measures. Now, however, a new report by the Environment Agency, "State of the environment: health, people the environment" and a local project in Islington and Camden parks, "Parks for Health" mark a new interest from our government in people's use of parks and green space for health purposes, related in part of course to Covid-19. In April 2020, Robert Jenrick, Minister for Housing, Communities and Local Government, said "People need Parks". Time in

parks helps to reduce obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and the impact of dementia.

"Parks for Health" is based on the idea of managing parks and green spaces as public health assets so that they have a central role in increasing activity, improving mental health and wellbeing, increasing social cohesion, and reducing isolation. Green prescribing has been introduced in a park in each borough to promote wellbeing, and the National Trust has provided training of staff and volunteers in local parks to improve people's experience of green space.

The Environment Agency's report on health, people and the environment published in September presents the evidence on inequalities in both health and access to green space. The difference in life expectancy between our most and least deprived areas is growing, with a 19 year difference in healthy life expectancy 2016-2018. The poorest people often live in the

most polluted environments, and often have higher rates of underlying health conditions. One study showed that city areas with high numbers of BAME residents have less access to green spaces. In 2016, nitrogen dioxide air pollution exceeded legal limits in nearest play spaces for 14% of under 16 year olds in Greater London, and two thirds of these lived in the most deprived areas. The report highlights that air pollution is the greatest single environmental threat to health. (<https://www.gov.uk/search/all?keywords=The+State+of+the+Environment&order=relevance>)

The Chief Executive of the Environment Agency, introducing the report, said that investing in the environment is "about the smartest thing we could do" since it would save the NHS an estimated £2.1 billion a year if everyone had access to quality green space. Highbury Fields, however, needs immediate investment in a café and toilets and demolition of its derelict building, and a ban on barbecues causing air pollution. There is also interest in open air gym equipment to deflect use of trees and benches for this purpose.



Example of an outdoor gym

Street clutter and obstructions

By DAVID FENTON

There are currently many obstacles in the pathway of disabled pedestrians, the partially sighted and the blind. There have been letters and articles in the local press about cars and bicycles but no mention of hedges, trees and branches overhanging and obstructing the pavement.

I recently had to escort my partner for a walk after he had had drops put in his eyes at Moorfields and had to wear dark glasses for some days. Only

then did I realise the hazards we would encounter. Bushes and hedges almost blocking the pavement; branches from trees hanging out over the pavement, some with thorns at head height.

I was also appalled by the number of undocked electric bikes dotted around the neighbourhood presenting a hazard for partially sighted walkers and often an impenetrable barrier for those in wheelchairs. We must all do better in taking responsibility for the stretches of pavement close to our homes.

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Street sweeping - Highbury West update

By DIANE BURRIDGE

The streets are meant to be cleaned daily, from Monday to Friday - either deeply with a broom or by the picking up of litter. From mid-August to late September, you may have noticed a deterioration in this service. HCA committee members, with some active local citizens, took photographs

to illustrate this deterioration. In particular, businesses on Blackstock Road, near the Gillespie Road junction, complained about an erratic and irregular service. Increased illegal dumping has not helped matters.

The Council stated, late September, that due to the on-going pandemic, they have experienced major staffing issues, which has resulted in some

resources being re-allocated.

This is a worry, as some roads, for example, the upper part of Avenell, Hurlock Street and Elwood were not cleaned for weeks.

We have been told that the new Supervisor for the area, Andy Danezi (andrew.danezi@islington.gov.uk), will be monitoring standards of street sweeping. Please also alert your local councillors if the service deteriorates again. The more people who do this, the more likely it is that the contractually-agreed standards will be maintained.



Blackstock Road is often blighted by poor street cleaning

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Worrying changes to planning proposed

By DIANE BURRIDGE

The Planning White Paper (Planning for the Future), published on 6 August 2020, proposes to make English planning a 'significantly simpler, faster and more predictable system'. There are many areas of concern.

Key proposals include:

1. Local Plans- these will have a new simplified role in identifying land for development and protection and setting clear parameters about what development can take place. Plans will be required to identify only three types of land:

- Growth areas will be suitable for 'substantial development' and will receive automatic outline planning permission on adoption of the Local Plan.
- Renewal areas will be suitable for 'development', and there will be a statutory presumption in favour of development for the uses specified in the Local Plan.
- Protected areas will be sites and areas that due to their environmental/cultural characteristics, justify more stringent development controls. Only for these sites will a standard planning application be required.

Local Plans are to be stripped back to essential elements consisting of a web-based interactive map and text which specify suitable development uses and parameters e.g. height, scale, density limits. Design codes and guides should be produced to guide the form and appearance of development.

2. If planning applications are not determined within the statutory time limits (8 or 13 weeks), the White paper

proposes automatically refunding the planning fee or, for some types of applications, automatically granting permission. The paper also hints at a reduced role for planning committees and delegating detailed planning decisions to planning officers.

3. The national housebuilding annual target of 300,000 new homes would set binding housing figures for each Local Authority.

4. The paper proposes greater digitalisation of the planning application and consultation process.

5. Local authorities will have 30 months to produce a new stripped back Local Plan, with those that fail to do so 'at risk of government intervention'. There will be a requirement to review the Local Plan at least every five years.

6. Section 106 agreements and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) will be replaced with a nationally-set 'Infrastructure Levy' charged on the final development value and paid at the point of occupation, leaving councils to pay for and deliver any infrastructure needed up front.

The Highbury Community Association is supporting the London Forum in their response on behalf of Civic and Amenity Societies in London. Public consultation closes on 29th October. You may want to make your own representations as well.



Robert Jenrick MP, the Communities Secretary, is behind the changes

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Transport in London and Covid-19

By SARAH POTTER

Before Covid-19, competition between vehicles, bicycles and pedestrians for the use of our roads and streets in London was already a serious issue, which we have, for example, experienced locally at Highbury Corner. On August 27th, the London Forum organised a discussion of the effects of Covid-19 on this competition, led by the experts Professor Tony Travers of the LSE and Silviya Barrett of the Campaign for Better Transport.

Tony Travers highlighted how, during the pandemic, government had reallocated road space to pedestrians and cyclists to ease pressures on public transport and increase space on pavements. He also noted that road traffic has now returned to pre-Covid levels, increasing pressure on roads, while public transport is at 25% of its previous level. If such trends continue long term, he thought London could develop a sprawl effect, with office and residential tower blocks built in local centres, and with parts of the tube, rail and bus network closing down, since they would be financially unsustainable. London's creative industries could also wither. A car dominated city like Los Angeles might develop.

Silviya Barrett stressed that cars are the least efficient mode of public transport, while fewer, cleaner vehicles on our roads could reduce air pollution, road danger, congestion and emissions, which are not falling overall at present. She put the case for a smarter technological system of road user charging in order to create a more efficient, greener and healthier city in London.

Professor Travers called for the development of plans for road use, particularly at very local level, to decide who should benefit from the use of roads, and to allocate our diminishing road space. There is clearly a role for local communities here in developing Low Traffic Neighbourhoods and People-friendly Streets - as we are developing in Highbury.

Transport plans for Highbury

By DIANE BURRIDGE

With only 26% of households in Islington owning or having access to a private vehicle, and with people being discouraged from using public transport due to Covid-19, cycling and walking are being promoted more.

And after much lobbying by local residents for a 'Highbury Diamond', the area between Highbury Corner and Finsbury Park is to be 'calmed' to meet such ambitions. Islington Council has agreed to implement a People Friendly Streets scheme (Low Traffic Neighbourhood), alongside the Cycleway 38 scheme, as well as more School Streets - including outside Gillespie School.

Plans for the People Friendly Streets scheme include closing Drayton Park to through traffic. Experimental traffic orders will be used on an 18 -month trial, after which feedback will determine how permanent the scheme will be. Cllr Rowena Champion, the lead for Transport and the Environment, declared that the one-way system in Gillespie Road will continue, but be part of the overall plan to reduce rat-running.

There have been many objections to the Gillespie Road scheme due to displacement of traffic onto Avenell Road (which has seen a 70% increase in traffic in the rush-hours) and Aubert Park (a 20% increase). Having an overall plan for the area will hopefully reduce this traffic greatly.

The Cycleway 38 scheme is mainly paid for by Transport for London - this will include: traffic lights at the junction of Ambler Road and Blackstock Road; pedestrian crossing points at the junction of Aubert Park and Drayton Park; and a roundabout at the junction of Drayton Park and Benwell Road.


Local groups in Islington pressing for safer streets include the HCA, Cycle Islington, Living Streets, Islington Fossil Free and Islington Clean Air Parents, as well as our 'Highbury Diamond' group.

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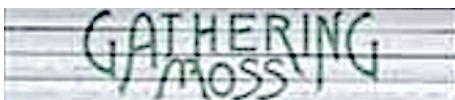
It's a tremendous season for books. Many publishers delayed releases until the autumn, so we are spoiled for choice!

For fiction, we have brand new novels from Highbury author Nick Hornby, Elena Ferrante, Robert Harris, Ali Smith, and the new bestselling crime novel from Richard Osman, 'the Thursday Murder Club' (about a quartet of octogenarians who band together to solve a murder.) We're very much looking forward to prize season with the Women's Prize winner 'Hamnet' by Maggie O'Farrell (about the death of Shakespeare's son) already a bestseller for us, and we're anticipating big sales for the winner of the International Booker winner, 'The Discomfort of Evening', as well as for the entire Booker Prize shortlist.

On the non-fiction side a few outstanding titles are already selling well: Anne Applebaum's 'Twilight of Democracy'; Merlin Sheldrake's 'Entangled Life' (the astonishing role of fungi in shaping our world); Michael Sandel's 'The Tyranny of Merit' (about the forces shaping the notion of the common good); and Fredrik Lodeval's sweeping new biography of JFK. Finally some outstanding natural history titles from veteran writers Helen Macdonald and James Rebanks, as well as Jonathan Slaght's 'Owls of the Eastern Ice', about the quest to find and save the world's

largest owl.

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