

# HIGHBURY COMMUNITY NEWS

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## New community centre at Christ Church in Highbury finally begins to take shape

By TANIA WITTER

We are happy to announce that, after 5 years of planning and preparation, work on the construction of this centre has finally begun. Contractors came on site towards the end of March, just before our planning permission ran out. The site has been cleared and levelled, and on Monday 19 April, we had a formal ground-breaking ceremony, with Andy Chrich, the Vicar, Tania Witter, Associate Vicar and Co-chair of the Community Centre Committee, Verity Baldry, Chair of the Committee, Matthew Lloyd, Architect, Barry Smith, Managing Director of Haynes and Smith Ltd, the contractors and Michelle Paton, Christ Church liaison with the site works. (all socially distanced)



It was a joyous occasion, blessed by lovely weather, the beginning of the realisation of what has been a vision for Christ Church for over 10 years. In

his introductory remarks, The Vicar said,

'Our vision for this building is that it will enable us to be more open to the world and to connect better to the community. The space we have in the church itself is used almost to capacity by various groups meeting through the week and by the church congregation on Sunday. This new building will allow us to expand our children and youth work and will enrich what we can offer to the community and our charity partners. There will be more space for community groups to rent for their activities and we will make a proportion of the time free for charitable purposes. It is our hope that the new building will be a real asset to the community, as well as enabling the church to expand its own ministries.'



# Residents voice concerns over 4 month-long 'pub in the park' in Finsbury Park

By DIANE BURRIDGE

"The Open Arms is a performance-led pop-up occupying Finsbury Park for summer 2021. As a recipient of the Arts Council England's 'Culture Recovery Grant', we will be looking to bring to life an activation that celebrates and supports the rich pool of talent living within the borough. Essentially we providing a stage for local performance in the midst of rapid venue closures".

This is how the Open Arms event was originally presented. But it has turned out a rather different sort of event: running for four months, alcohol will be sold both on and off the premises. Local people and organisations are worried at the loose arrangements proposed. The Open Arms licence application would allow the sale and consumption of alcohol, accompanied by live amplified music, five days a week (Wednesday to Sunday) from 12 noon to 9pm each day. Effectively, a pub the park: especially concerning since the proposed area for the events be very close to the children's play area in the park. We have all seen how important green open space is during lockdown. Finsbury Park is situated in a densely-populated, deprived inner-

city area, and the park is therefore essential for this purpose.

## Public Safety

Who will police access to these events and ensure people's behaviour is in accordance with Public Safety? Finsbury Park is unfortunately already a crime and ASB hotspot and both will likely be exacerbated by alcohol consumption in the park.

## Prevention of Public Nuisance

The local infrastructure in the park will be negatively impacted, to the detriment of the general public. This was the case following previous events held in the park, with damage to plants, the grass and the park infrastructure. The duration of these events will wipe out a quiet summer in this park for local families, a park in Haringey but built for the general public, a rightly and much-lauded claim by Haringey Council in its anniversary booklet.

## Protection of Children from Harm

This licence application is for events covering a period when many young people have exams. There will be a real risk of noise pollution, from loudspeakers and people, as has

happened during previous events in the park. It is a concern that there will be ASB and crime from drunken revellers over a long period each afternoon and evening, separated from children playing by only a short distance. This is wholly unacceptable in an area of deprivation, where many local children do not have gardens to relax in, and the park is so popular with local families: the park is key for their well-being.

## Next steps

The HCA sent an objection, as did many other local bodies and the Finsbury Park Ward Islington councillors. The licensing committee meets on 4 May, and will no doubt try to find a way forward that meets local objections while allowing the promoters to hold a modified version of the event. HCA will attend the meeting and also an Events Stakeholders meeting to be held on 12 May run by Haringey Council.

Friends of Finsbury Park have now launched a petition entitled "Haringey Council: Stop the Pub in the Park", which already has 700 signatures. If you would like to add your name you can sign the petition here : <http://chnng.it/xwXLscFrrs>

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# Islington, St Peter’s Ward LTN, introduced 3 July 2020. Six month monitoring report (March 2021)

By GILL SHEPHERD

## Traffic Monitoring Results

### Internal Roads

On internal roads, traffic was only 43% of what it had been pre-LTN (p.21). With cut-through traffic banished, it was observed that overall traffic speeds had decreased, suggesting that “through traffic tends to go faster than local residential traffic” (p.26).

### Boundary roads

The boundary roads (pps 33-34) of the St Peter’s LTN trial area are City Road, the New North Road, heading north-west, and the Essex Road heading north-east. For simplicity, the road running from Angel tube station to the Essex Road (successively known as Islington High Street, Upper Street, and Islington Green then Essex Road), is referred to in the report as the Essex Road. Although portions of all three roads form part of the boundary of the LTN, they all continue well beyond it (Map 1 p11).

The New North Road saw an increase of 32% in traffic (p.33). City Road showed a decrease in traffic, but it adjoins the former Old Street



roundabout, which was being converted to a peninsula during the monitoring period under a major roadworks scheme, so the report finds it likely that some traffic was avoiding the City Road roadworks for reasons which had nothing to do with the St Peter’s LTN (p.35).

As for the Essex Road (p.34), the report claims a negligible 1% change in motorised traffic on it. This is a good example of the distorting impact of adopting too narrow a focus when monitoring an LTN and its immediate boundaries. The report explains that some northbound traffic would, if it could, turn right from the New North Road boundary road onto a more northerly section of the Essex Road lying completely beyond the LTN

(p.22). Since this right turn is banned, vehicles have re-routed through Greenman Street, one road south of the New North Road, where a right turn onto the Essex Road is allowed. A 90% increase in traffic volumes on Greenman Street was reported, translating into an increase in traffic on the unmonitored section of the Essex Road beyond the St Peter’s LTN boundary (Map 1 p11). So overall, and uncaptured by the monitoring results, traffic on the Essex Road did increase more than has been reported, but we do not know by how much.

### Cycling and walking

Although most and least used roads

Continued on page 3...

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# St. Peter's Ward LTN report

Continued from page 2...

changed, overall there was no increase in cycling within the LTN in the monitoring period, and there was a 32% decrease in cycling on boundary roads (pps. 39, 41). The team were not able to monitor walking.

### Air quality

From the data available, There was no difference in overall air-quality between St Peters and the rest of the borough. (p.50).

### London Fire Brigade

The differences between the 2019 baseline and response times in 2020 were negligible (p.53).

### Antisocial behaviour and crime patterns

The St Peter's LTN showed slightly higher rates of crime and ASB compared to the borough as a whole. The report states that this is not linked to the implementation of the LTN (p.59). It is not stated on what evidence this assertion is based.

### Data reliability observations

(1) As the first six-month monitoring of the St Peter's trial took place during lockdown, from June to November 2020, traffic reporting had to be adjusted upwards by 22% to give a more likely picture of LTN impact (p.14).

(2) Since vehicles travelling through the LTN area are likely to pass several cameras, the number of vehicles counted in the area is higher than the number of trips. (Changes of plus or minus 10% are considered insignificant).

(3) The St Peter's LTN is directly adjacent to 3 other LTNs, all introduced during the monitoring period - Canonbury East (introduced 27<sup>th</sup> July), Hoxton West (in Hackney, introduced 24<sup>th</sup> August) and Canonbury West (introduced 2<sup>nd</sup> October), so it is not possible to be certain of the source of the traffic on the boundary roads (p.17).

### Overall

The St Peter's LTN has been successful in expelling 57% of cut-through traffic from within the ward, with decreases in traffic speeds there in the case of the remaining 43%. Thirty-two per cent of cut-through traffic was found on the New North Road, and 1% was found on the monitored section of the Essex Road. No explanation is given for the remaining 24% of the traffic removed from inside the ward. Even if hypothesized evaporation figures (drawn from other boroughs) of 11% are used, this change has still translated into an additional 46% of traffic on the new North Road and the Essex Road.

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# 'Highbury and me': interview with Sheila Dillon

By GILL SHEPHERD

Sheila Dillon is the presenter of Radio 4's 'The Food programme' and hosts the annual BBC Food and Farming Awards. She's from a Lancashire farming background originally, and has lived in Highbury in Avenell Road since the 1980s. She had been working in New York on 'Food Monitor' magazine before moving to London and her husband is an American financial journalist.

## Highbury

I asked what made her choose Highbury and she said it was chance: she had a friend in Stoke Newington and stayed with her while she house-hunted. One filthy rainy day she walked up Avenell Road from Arsenal, thinking, 'Well I'm not living here - it looks so depressing. But then she arrived at the house she had come to look at and as the owner opened the door, she saw the most beautiful yellow hall, and bought the house on the spot. Later on, when her husband's American parents came for their first visit, the taxi driver who drove them from Heathrow said, 'I don't know what your son is doing, living in an area like this'.

That was 1980s Highbury - another world - but the place gradually worked its magic. She says, 'I just love the fact that Highbury is a village, with a centre, so you meet all your friends on the way to the shops. Some years ago, a friend persuaded me to start going to Christchurch, and I met some great people that way, too. I'm very fond of Tania Witter (associate vicar) and we try to go for a walk together regularly.

'Then - we are so lucky to have Godfrey's, Bourne's, Five Boys..... Seasons and Blossoms too: I did a radio interview with Rosie, one of the managers, at the height of lockdown about the importance of corner shops. I really like the Vietnamese restaurant and Miss Pem the flower shop, as well'.

## A career in food politics

She started on the politics of food during the Reagan era when unions were being broken and small meat companies being bought up by larger ones. 'Today something like five companies dominate world meat production. So, when I came to London and joined The Food Programme, we would make programmes about political and moral and social aspects of food - who controls what we eat.

'Sometimes you get the sense that the public understands more than the government about what we eat, and health. You have huge chunks of the NHS budget being spent on type II diabetes and far too little link-

through to diet. Look at the food served in hospitals, and those volunteers going around with trolleys full of Twix bars, crisps and Lucozade.....

'And we increasingly know that there is a relationship between what we eat and climate change and disease, too. Covid will never go away while we carry on cutting down rainforests and promoting factory farming. Those two drivers will absolutely ensure disasters from time to time.

'We have to stop eating ultra-processed foods, think much more about soil health, and get away from a farming model which aims to produce the cheapest food possible without true cost accounting. Food is cheap at the point of sale but is not really cheap: it is destroying health, soil, land, and water'. She quoted Tim Benton (Population Ecology, University of Leeds) who says, 'Don't produce dreadful cheap food with the excuse that it is for poor people, deal with the poverty so they can afford decent food'.

Continued on page 6...



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## Interview with Sheila Dillon

Continued from page 5...

### Lockdown

What did she learn during lockdown? 'What struck me above all during lockdown, was the fantastic pressure on green space. There just isn't enough of it in our part of London. We have to campaign against too much more building, and cherish the green spaces we have.'

'I did become a better cook than I was before. And I know it's a terrible cliché but two people gave me sourdough starters and so I had to learn how to make sourdough bread! I ought to have been writing the Food Memoir I am planning, but I didn't do much of that.'

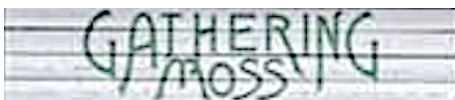
'Oh, and I discovered that people were much more comfortable being interviewed in their homes on Zoom rather than coming in and getting scared inside Broadcasting House.'

### And the Highbury Low Traffic Neighbourhood?

'Well, we live on Avenell Road near the top. Before the LTN it was just awful - like the M25. So there was a huge improvement. But now we are getting used to what we can do and what we can't, we can see the limitations.'

I have brittle bones and daren't ride a bike. Tania drives to the supermarket for her shopping but it is a real trial. We do need a technology which distinguishes between residents and rat-run traffic. There is always such a gap between vision and reality and I am so tired of the evangelists. Look at those drawings beforehand of the revamped Highbury Corner full of smiling people - and look at it now. Litter and drug-dealers. It was greener and cleaner as it was.'

But ultimately? The reality is that we will never leave Highbury. If you spent nearly 40 years somewhere, you belong there, and that's that.'



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## Andy Hull: thanks and best wishes from the HCA



Andy Hull (pictured above) has recently resigned as one of the three Highbury West ward councillors. We are very grateful for his years of active service to the ward, for his readiness to listen and to respond to emails promptly, and for his kindness to many individual ward residents. We wish him well both in his new job, and in his decision to live in Morocco for the time being with his in-laws. For both his wife and his son, this is an important time for being close to older family members.

## Highbury West Ward Partnership Meeting, March 2021

The meeting was held on zoom. Presentations were made on the installation and early teething troubles of the Highbury West Low Traffic Neighbourhood, and on results from the first six months of the St Peter's ward Low Traffic Neighbourhood trial (reported on elsewhere in this newsletter).

Participants were particularly concerned about:

- (i) poor early signage and,
- (ii) slow Council responses to emergencies or roadworks that called for temporary cancellation of camera filters at particular spots and the covering of signs; the great difficulty in contacting relevant officials when unforeseen problems arose and the need for a master emergency number, manned ideally out of working hours and at weekends, as well as during the working week.

# Aubert Court and Drakeley Court

By GILL SHEPHERD

London Borough councils have been asked by the Mayor to look at all their Council housing sites to try to find additional opportunities for building further council housing units. In Islington's case - already the most densely populated borough in the whole country, with over 16,000 inhabitants per square kilometre - this is a major challenge to the few remaining local green spaces left to us.

So when leaflets landed on our door mats in March proposing the shoehorning of 36 additional flats into the space occupied by Aubert Court and Drakeley Court, many people were sceptical about any loss of the splendid green space which Aubert

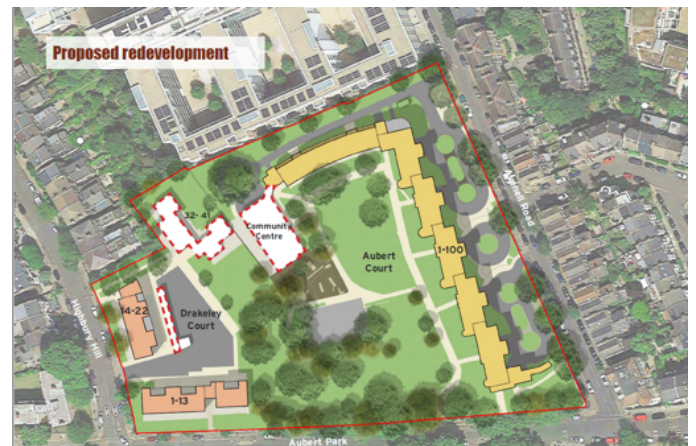
Court, in particular, commands. Preliminary zoom consultations between the architects, the council, and local Highbury residents, took place in late March.

To our surprise, the presentation of the planned changes offered several advantages over the current situation. Firstly a lot of dead, unattractive tarmac and garage space behind Drakeley court was available to play with. Secondly, Aubert Court's ageing and shabby community centre was to be replaced by a building with a new community centre on the ground floor and 36 council flats of 1,2, and 3 bedrooms above it. The loss of some green space which had belonged to Drakeley Court, was replaced by new gardens where the garages and

tarmac had been. All of the big old trees in the Aubert Park garden will be retained and nearly all of the green grassy area.

The main obvious threat so far is that a block of one-bedroom flats in Drakeley Court will have to be pulled down to accommodate part of the new larger block of 36 council flats. Although all the current inhabitants of the flats are being offered alternative accommodation or the right to one of the new flats, it is very understandable that these residents feel particularly threatened.

There will be a further consultation in July, when more detail is available, and the project - if it goes ahead - will begin in 2022. The illustrations below show the planned changes to the site.



## The Gunners Pub

A revised planning application has been made for the very necessary refurbishment of the Gunners pub on the Blackstock Road in Highbury, and the redevelopment of the unsightly outbuildings behind the pub into an extension along Elwood Road, with a ground floor commercial space and flats above. This revision aims to meet objections to the original application from the Council's planners, although it met Islington's policies on preserving our local pubs and increasing housing. While the original plan provided 6 mainly 3-

bedroom flats, the revised plan is for 8 flats of between 1 and 4 bedrooms, all with their main windows facing south over Elwood Street and not over the next-door building, and also with increased balcony or roof terrace space. The revised design also sets back the first and third floors of the block from the road below, in order to enhance the pub as the dominant building. Increased protection from noise pollution from the live entertainment planned for the pub basement is also included. The flats do meet legal room-size requirements, but it is regrettable that these requirements are nowadays so very minimal.

Anyone wishing to view the revised

planning application no. P2021/0446 can go to <https://www.islington.gov.uk/planning/applications>. While the price to be paid for meeting housing needs is the densification of London, the amenity of local residents, their areas and the quality of new housing are also essential concerns for communities

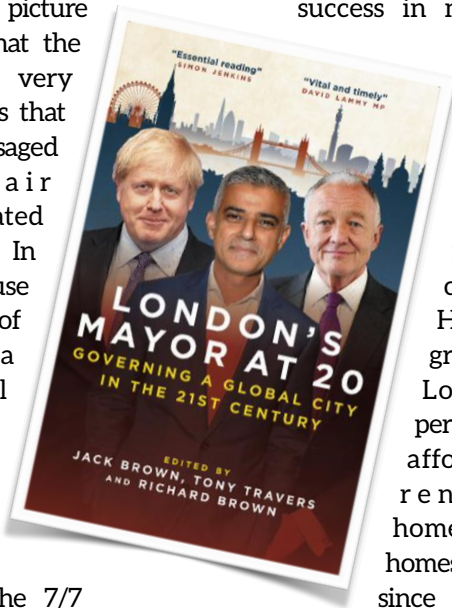


# Book review: ‘London’s Mayor at 20’

By SARAH POTTER

*London’s Mayor at 20* (J. Brown, T. Travers and R. Brown, eds. Biteback, 2020) provides readers with an analysis of how the Mayor’s office was created, and of its evolution and future direction. A range of expert contributors also assess the extent to which London and its people have gained from having a Mayor responsible for key areas such as transport, policing, housing, planning and culture.

The broad picture that emerges is that the Mayor has been very influential in ways that were never envisaged when the Blair government created the office in 1998. In part, this was because the significance of London itself as a prestigious global city grew more rapidly than had been foreseen, and also because of unforeseeable events such as the 7/7 attacks and the Grenfell Tower tragedy, when the voice of London’s solidarity and grief has been the Mayor’s. On the other hand, many developments of the early 90s have continued to influence the mayoralty strongly since then. For example, the idea of London as a world city was one of these, and London First, an inward investment body founded by business in 1992, lobbied for a new all London government, Crossrail and support for the city’s cultural life, all of which have been formative in the Mayor’s role since then.



Reviewing the development of transport in London in the twenty years of the mayoralty, Stephen Glaister finds in this area, where the Mayor has had clear powers since 2000, increased investment and use of public transport and a better service. The Low Emission Zone established in 2008 and the Ultra-Low Emission Zone of 2019 have improved air quality. Rick Muir’s assessment of London’s policing underlines the greater accountability of the Metropolitan Police under the Mayor, success in maintaining police

numbers and neighbourhood policing, but also the need to improve police engagement with minority communities. Housing has been of growing concern to Londoners in this period with issues of affordability, private renting and homelessness. More homes have been built since 2000 according to Kath Scanlon, but ‘in only a few of the last twenty years has housing production ... reached official targets’ (p. 245), in part because these reflect political pressures. Most housing is built under the London boroughs, outside the Mayor’s control.

In their final evaluation, Ben Rogers and Tony Travers outline three possible futures for the London Mayor and Assembly – more devolution of power, abolition, or stasis with minor reforms, which seems the most likely option. One of their conclusions is that ‘The Mayor of London will need

to be a key player in articulating the policy options facing the city post-Covid’ (p. 330). The Mayor, however, faces increasing central government control both as the price for financial support to TfL during Covid, and to increase the new housing target to a yet more unachievable number. Given recent culture wars and political antagonisms, Rogers and Travers suggest that ‘survival as a precursor to a potentially better future’ (p. 331) may be the least worst outcome for the mayoralty and for our government system.

## Islington environmental emergency alliance

By BEN GRIFFITH

The new Islington Environmental Emergency Alliance had its first meeting on 18 March.

More than 50 people discussed how we can work with the Council to tackle the climate emergency and collapsing biodiversity. There was a great positive spirit and agreement that the Alliance needs to be effective, independent and action-orientated.

It’s early days, but working groups will be set up on subjects like home insulation or transport. The Alliance also needs to clarify how it will liaise with the Council, develop links across the community, and learn from other alliances including in Camden and Hackney.

Community groups already on board include Transition Highbury, Fossil Free Islington, Extinction Rebellion Islington and Islington Clean Air Parents. We also need support from individuals, with all their expertise, no matter how much time they can spare. If you’re interested, please contact [griffith\\_ben@hotmail.com](mailto:griffith_ben@hotmail.com)