

# HIGHBURY COMMUNITY NEWS

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## A forest for change comes to Islington

By GILL SHEPHERD

This summer the centrepiece Installation at the London Design Biennale at Somerset House is a forest of 400 trees set up in the forecourt. The forest surrounds 17 pillars each representing one of the UN's 17 Goals, guiding world action on Sustainable Development through to 2030. The exhibition runs all through June.

At the end of that time the trees go to various London boroughs which bid for them and we have 200 coming to Islington to enhance the borough's own 'urban forest'. The trees will be planted, following requests from the public as far as possible, in parks, schools and housing estates, and in locations where previous trees have died.

The trees themselves will be given free by the Biennale (these are large beautiful and expensive trees so we are very lucky to have secured 200 of them) but there are costs involved in



their delivery when the Biennale closes, their storage and care over the summer, and their planting at a more suitable time in the Autumn, which come to £150 a tree.

**Islington Clean Air Parents** have committed to raising £15,000, to

provide these costs for 100 of the trees, and Islington Council will pay for the other 100 (and any shortfall), and for the costs of long-term care and maintenance for all of the trees.

The charity is working closely with Islington's Greenspace and Leisure team, and would like to hear from you, too, with suggestions about possible locations in your neighbourhood that could benefit from more trees. (Please email [islingtoncleanair@gmail.com](mailto:islingtoncleanair@gmail.com) with suggestions). If you are able to donate towards their crowd-funder, or would, as an individual, family or group, like to pay for a tree and dedicate it to an individual or cause, please get in touch via the website [www.islingtoncleanairparents.co.uk](http://www.islingtoncleanairparents.co.uk).



# Patients want privacy, not privatisation

By GILL SHEPHERD

There is a secret plan from the Health Secretary Matt Hancock (pictured right) to create a massive new database for all health records and to share it with private companies. The plans mean that highly sensitive data about all of us who use the NHS - including sexual health, mental health, criminal records - could be pooled and shared. The data will not only be sold at profit to private companies (Palantir in the US for instance) but is likely also to be used for planning the future privatisation of the NHS. The government claims that the data is 'anonymized' but since they will have your NHS number, date of birth and post code, who you are is readily identifiable if that is necessary.

Last time the government tried to force something through like this, seven years ago, a huge public outcry forced them to back down. Because over 2 million people signed opt out forms, the scheme was abandoned. The outcry this time around has already caused the government to defer the cut-off date for opt-outs from June to September.

But if it does go ahead this time, it

would be the biggest data-grab in the history of the Health Service. GP surgeries throughout England have been instructed to release the medical records of their 55 million patients to NHS Digital, including much data that the earlier attempt did not dare to touch such as drug and alcohol history. Open Democracy has exposed how US Health Insurance firms are already advising the NHS on how to deal with 'expensive' patients and what services could be cut. Unfettered access to British health data is also a key demand for US trade negotiators.

Just Treatment (an NHS patients' group) has teamed up with Open Democracy, The Doctors' Association UK and Foxglove to challenge the plans. Just Treatment has pointed out, 'this is about the future of the NHS. We are sleepwalking into a health system where profits are prioritised over patients'. The government has not built-in sufficient safeguards to protect this precious data, meaning that product and service corporations could sell the data back to the NHS for eye-watering sums.

A first step is to sign a massive petition against at <https://www.foxglove.org.uk/nhs-data>. But then sign an opt out form and deliver it to your GP before Sept 1st. We have

reproduced one on page 3 for convenience. Half a million people have already signed one. Make sure you do too.



Help us keep our membership list up to date.

Let us know if you have moved, or have updated your email address.

Do you think your neighbours would like to receive the newsletter? Simply ask them to email us and we'll do the rest...

Please contact us at [hcanews@hotmail.com](mailto:hcanews@hotmail.com)

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**Dissent from secondary use of GP patient identifiable data**

Dear GP,

I am writing to give notice that I refuse consent for my identifiable information / and the identifiable information of those for whom I am responsible [*delete as appropriate*] to be transferred from your practice systems for any purpose other than my medical care.

Please take whatever steps necessary to ensure my / our confidential personal information is not uploaded and record my dissent by whatever means possible.

This includes adding the '**Dissent from secondary use of GP patient identifiable data**' code (Read v2: 9Nu0, CTV3: XaZ89 or SNOMED CT: 827241000000103) to my / our records.

I am aware of the implications of this request, understand it will not affect the care that I / we receive, and I will notify you should I change my mind.

Yours sincerely,

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Information to help identify my records** [*please complete in BLOCK CAPITALS*]

Title \_\_\_\_\_ Surname / Family name \_\_\_\_\_

Forename(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

Date of birth \_\_\_\_\_

NHS number (if known) \_\_\_\_\_

Space for additional patient details overleaf

NHS Digital says GP practices are required to action this opt-out, see: <http://bit.ly/NHSDigital-Type1-opt-out>  
 More copies of this letter can be downloaded from [www.medconfidential.org/how-to-opt-out](http://www.medconfidential.org/how-to-opt-out)

# Highbury and me: Bashir Ibrahim, our new Highbury West ward councillor

By DIANE BURRIDGE

Bashir Ibrahim (Labour) was elected in May with 2,465 votes on a turnout of 48%, and certainly knows this area. I asked him about his interests and knowledge of Highbury West.

## What I love about Highbury

I am Islington through and through. I was born in Whittington Hospital and have lived in Highbury West since I was three years old. I attended Ambler Primary School, Holloway Secondary School and Islington College, before pursuing a degree and Masters in Cancer Biology. I am a School Governor at Pakeman Primary School on Hornsey Road.

There are many things I love about our local area - principally the precious green spaces we have in Gillespie Park, Highbury Fields and Finsbury Park. I am also a great fan of our amazing small and independent businesses and you can often find me buying a coffee from Cinnamon Village, a book from Bookbar or Ink@84 or buying groceries from local shops.

I believe we are home to some of the kindest, most community-spirited people. When the pandemic hit, and the Stay-at-Home message was ringing loud in everyone's ears, I took



on a lead role in Highbury Mutual Aid to support the local community - picking up shopping, collecting prescriptions or just having a chat. I am a regular volunteer at Elizabeth House, which has acted as a food hub providing much needed food parcels to those in need. We've all pulled together to get through this pandemic and I could not be prouder to be from Highbury West. As we aim to recover and rebuild from the pandemic, we will need to continue pulling together as a community.

For far too long, I didn't see people in politics who reflected my community nor our interests. I am keen to show people of colour, young people, working class people and those who are born or raised in

Islington that public office is open to them too. The diversity of Islington's community is one of its biggest strengths.

I am interested in more progressive ideas to support young people, building on the Council's achievement of being the first in London to offer free school meals to all pupils. We are now in the top 20 boroughs in the country for boosting young people's attainment. The Council recently launched its Challenging Inequality Strategy, and I am keen to work hard to ensure measurable actions are taken forward on this.

## What are the main issues that you will focus on?

Local residents will be aware of the criminal activity that has blighted parts of our local area - from drug dealing, theft and robbery to anti-social behaviour. I am keen to help address these issues as a priority: it is outrageous that some local people do not feel safe in our area. None of us are safe until we are all safe.

I am also keen to develop policies that help us achieve net zero emissions by 2030. We face a climate emergency and we must all take action now. Traffic on London's

Continued on page 5...



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## New Highbury West councillor

Continued from page 4...

residential roads has risen by 72% in the past 12 years, and we must make sure that our neighbourhoods are better and safer - for living, working and playing - for everyone. Our streets belong to us all. I am proud that Islington has introduced more School Streets than any other London Borough, and there has largely been a positive response to the Low Traffic Neighbourhoods. I am keen to work with residents to explore what more we can do to cut emissions and improve air quality.

I have joined the Council's Policy and Performance Committee, which serves as the principal oversight committee for the work of the Council and its partners. I am also a member of the Planning Committee, which will hopefully allow me to decide on applications that best serve Islington residents and their needs.

### Getting in touch

In response to government guidance to reduce personal contact, all physical surgeries have been cancelled. If you want to seek my help as a Councillor, please email me at [bashir.ibrahim@islington.gov.uk](mailto:bashir.ibrahim@islington.gov.uk) - or please call 020 7527 3114 to leave a message for me.

## Reuniting the two halves of Highbury Fields

The road dividing the two sections of Highbury Fields (an extension of Highbury Crescent) has been closed to traffic since 2014. Initially it was used as a construction compound for the rebuilding works at Highbury Corner. In 2020, Islington Council reopened the road to pedestrians and cyclists under temporary rules. We now have the opportunity to re-unite the two halves of Highbury Fields permanently and to rethink how the space could be better used - whether for nature, play, exercise, or something else.

The Council will launch a consultation on the future of the road this summer. Islington Clean Air parents are launching their own campaign entitled 'Unite the Fields' to generate strong imaginative ideas. You can follow them on

Twitter: @unitethefields and Instagram: @unitethefields.

One idea suggested by HCA back in 2019, which will be raised again during the consultation, is to provide open-access exercise equipment on this stretch of one-time road of the kind seen in Paradise Park and other local parks. There have been many complaints about people exercising in Highbury Fields who make use of tree-branches and memorial benches for exercise, especially over this last year of lockdowns. The Fields' trees are far too precious to be damaged in this way, and muddy feet on benches deter those who come to Highbury Fields to sit and relax. Gym equipment could provide a useful focal point for an active exercise area on the one-time road, and protect the rest of the park at the same time.



## FIVE BOYS Drug & Health Food Store

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3-storey Victorian house

# Remedying fire safety issues in the Emirates and Highbury Stadium flats: who should pay?

Last year, leaseholders at 1 and 3 Queensland Road were told of fire safety defects in their buildings, part of the Emirates Stadium development in north London, and of bills of up to £50,000 per flat for remediation work to fix problems owing to the presence of unsafe cladding, timber balconies or missing fire breaks. At Highbury, the old stadium was converted into a development of 650 apartments in 2006. Residents with homes in the old North Stand and South Stand have been told they could be liable to pay

up to £36,000 per flat after an inspection in December 2020 identified serious fire safety issues.

The total cost of work to make the two developments safe may end up exceeding £10 million, and in the interim properties at both sites are valued at £0 for the purpose of mortgaging, so owners are unable to sell.

Many residents believe Arsenal should bear at least some of the cost of the remediation work, and so does Jeremy Corbyn, MP for Islington North.

Companies owned by Arsenal FC's parent firm Arsenal Holdings Limited

are the freeholders of both sites. The hub and two blocks of the Queensland Road flats which contain affordable homes are leased by the housing association charity, Newlon. Highbury Square Management Company is the leaseholder for the flats built in Arsenal's former home.

A leaseholder with a flat on the 10th floor of a block at Queensland Road, pointed out, "The land our building is on is owned by Arsenal. No matter how much they pretend it has nothing to do with them, it is on their land."

Continued on page 7...



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## Remedying fire safety issues in the Emirates and Highbury Stadium flats: who should pay?

Continued from page 6...

Corbyn notes in an interview: "The responsibility does lie with the freehold owner who constructed it. Not only does the building have to be made safe, but the excess costs being put on to leaseholders who bought what they presumed to be decent good quality safe flats, and who now face these large bills, are completely unfair".

A spokesperson for the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government said: "Government

funding does not absolve building owners of their responsibility to ensure their buildings are safe. Where developers or contractors have undertaken defective work, building owners should take action to recover costs."

However, an Arsenal spokesperson asserts: "Arsenal Football Club has no legal responsibility for the fabric of the buildings at 1 and 3 Queensland Road or Highbury Square for fire safety compliance or remediation. Newlon Housing Trust and Highbury Square Management Company Limited are responsible for the Queensland Road and Highbury Square developments respectively."

A Newlon spokesperson has explained: "We are responsible for commissioning remedial fire safety works at 1 and 3 Queensland Road. We have bid for funding under the government's Building Safety Fund. If

we are successful this should ensure that no costs for remedial works are passed back to residents. Applications for funding to replace flammable cladding can be made for buildings over 18 metres in height, with low-interest loans for buildings below that. But this does not cover other defects such as timber balconies – a problem at Highbury Square – or missing fire breaks, which applies to both Queensland Rd and Highbury Square.

Remediation work on the 10-storey buildings at Queensland Road has begun, and is expected to last at least a year. Meanwhile, as time ticks away, leaseholders remain in a heightened state of anxiety, under the lingering threat of a bill that will change their lives forever.

*Summarised from 'Worthless fire traps: the Emirates and Highbury flats Arsenal won't fix'. Matt Woosnam and Joey D'Urso The Athletic March, 2021.*

## 'Victory in the Park' Day

By DIANE BURRIDGE and SARAH POTTER

"The Open Arms" application (by Assembled Gala Ltd), approved by Haringey Council in March, would have involved supplying alcohol and live music, five days a week from 12 noon to 9pm, for four months, May to September 2021, with a capacity for 700 people at any one time.

The HCA objected strongly to these plans and, with the Friends of Finsbury Park, fought to protect the park. A petition 'Stop the Pub in the Park' had garnered more than 1,000 signatures, and the Council's Planning Portal had posted 135 Objections, including from Islington Council and ourselves. We are grateful to Cllr Gary Heather and local resident Denise Byrne who worked with us on the issue. This was an outstanding piece of community action. Just before the Licensing Committee meeting, the application was withdrawn.

The HCA noted that:

- The Park has been especially precious over the past year, when open green space has been so crucial for mental and physical well-being.
- The application overlapped the exam period for many young people living nearby. The stress of not being able to study quietly, especially in the context of interrupted schooling and pressure to catch up, deserved consideration.
- Having a pub in the park is wholly unacceptable in an area where many local children do not have gardens and the park is popular with local families.
- Daily deliveries of supplies were planned between 6am to 11am, with resultant noise, pollution and safety issues for park users.
- Little thought had been given to crowd control throughout the day. The police have lacked the resources

to deal with existing alcoholism and drug dealing in Finsbury Park in recent years, so the additional challenge of this pub would have overwhelmed them.

At its recent meeting, the Finsbury Park Events Stakeholders Group also heard about planning for other park events. These include the popular Le Clave Festival on 21st August, outdoor cinema, ball-out weekends and a visit from the Krank Brothers.

When confirmed, these events should be posted at <https://www.haringey.gov.uk/libraries-sport-and-leisure/parks-and-open-spaces/events-and-activities/events-parks/large-and-major-events>.

The Richard Hope play-space for children is now open, and the Friends of Finsbury Park are crowdfunding and raising grant money to provide a Skate Plaza facility costing £230,000, to give young people a popular and constructive activity in the park. They have also recently planted a small orchard which will have a plaque in memory of those lost during the pandemic. Finally, a new disabled toilet now exists.

# ‘Just You and the Page: Encounters with twelve writers’

Sue Gee, 2021, SerenBooks, Bridgend, Wales

By GILL SHEPHERD

This quirky and engaging book asks what makes people write, and finds the answers through interviews with twelve novelists, poets, translators, a diarist and a journalist, most of whom live or have lived in Highbury or nearby, as does the author herself.

The title comes from Kazuo Ishiguro, who said of writing once, “in the end, it’s just you and the page”.

Some of her interviewees are household names, some come from more specialised parts of her past but they are all good friends whom she has known for many years. So the interviews are redolent of comfortable, relaxed conversations, and a

shared looking back over long periods of time.

Childhood seems to be the wellspring for many writers: exotic and vivid like that of Penelope Lively in Cairo, painful and hard to accommodate to, like that of Booker prize-winner Anna Burns in Northern Ireland. And for many, the pleasure of extensive childhood reading was what led on to a desire to write.

Predictably too, many of these writers credit a particular adult with the insight which enabled them to read more or set their feet on the path towards higher education and a writing career. Often these were school-teachers, but a much-loved nanny took on that role in one case, a landlady in another. And loyal, affectionate life-long partners have been hugely important too, for many of these writers. Sue Gee asked her interviewees about books which had set them on the path to their future careers. I very much liked Anna Pavey’s admission: ‘it was the

*Famous Five* who eventually unlocked the pleasure of reading. After their terrific adventures, they were all home in time for tea’; while for environmental journalist Marek Mayer, it was W.G. Hoskins’ ‘The Making of the English Landscape’.

Finally, it is clear that many writers simply cannot bear *not* to write. Charles Palliser said that he did not know how he would fill up his time if he was not writing. Afra, an Iranian refugee,

explained: ‘I have that voice with me always, narrating things describing everything I see - my mind is like a camera. It was pain which made me write - a light inside me which nothing can turn off’.

If the book has a fault, it is a bit too much plot narration of writers’ novels: I found I wanted to page past these to the next conversation about the writing process. These are in the end what gives the book its value and makes it such an enormous pleasure to read.



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