

# HIGHBURY

## COMMUNITY NEWS

Issue No 12 February 1999

### Regeneration around Finsbury Park?

One trouble with Finsbury Park is that it has never been anybody's priority.

It only came into being because successive governments could not make it a priority to legislate for a much larger "Albert Park". Using it as a camping ground for the American army in 1917 may have been good for England, but it did no favours to succeeding generations living in the area. Arranging for it to be put in the charge of Haringey, which has plenty of open space, instead of Islington, which has next to none, did not help.

Maybe, just maybe, years of neglect are coming to an end. On page 2 Martin Jenkins of FPAG explains why 17 years of graft by residents may finally be paying off.

The HCA had no part in this but, with the majority of our 530 members living in the designated regeneration area, we wish and expect to be a central part of any regeneration effort. It is a unique opportunity to improve our neighbourhood and our community.

At the same time we need to be aware of the dangers. Not all change is improvement; and where there is brass there is muck. We must expect to fight empire builders, carpetbaggers, greedy developers and social engineers, who will cheerfully find reasons for knocking down our houses or stealing our open space - all in the name of progress, amenity, and public safety, of course.

### Planners versus Highbury residents - again

By Gavin Weightman

Say "Planning Officer" to an architect or developer and they are likely to shudder. These Town Hall bureaucrats, with their rules and regulations, have a reputation for ruining the best laid plans. Any architect will tell you it is one hell of a job to get anything through the system.

Unless, that is, you are at work in Islington. Here you can find a rare breed of Planning Officer, who, with apparent disregard of any policies or guidelines, will give you a cheery thumbs up for whatever you fancy. Never mind the roars of protest from the crowd, the moaning of NIMBYS. No matter what your motives, the quality of your drawings or the logic of your approach, they will wave you through to Committee with a nice, big stamp of approval.

A couple of years ago I discovered this when, as a nimby, I opposed the demolition of garages at the back of my house in Kelross Road to make way for private housing. The site is surrounded by housing and the verdict of residents was expressed unanimously - they want the site left as it is. A petition was presented, a meeting held, but none of this, so far, has had the slightest effect.

The only advice the Planning Officer concerned would give me was that I should put on one side the emotional arguments and look closely at the planning policies in the Borough. Rejection of the plans had to be on technical grounds or the applicant would win an appeal against the Committee's decision.

So I hired a Planning Consultant. I made it clear that he was not to fabricate a case for us - either we had one or we did not. He knew his way around and quickly came out with a report. This was a "back land" site and therefore subject to policies about such sites laid down in the UDP - the Unitary Development Plan. Housing could be built only in exceptional circumstances. In this case, there were none.

Picking his way through the mire of guidelines laid down by the government and the Local Authority, he found that the access road was almost six feet narrower than the minimum requirement (a car and a pedestrian should be able to pass each other in safety). The implications of inadequate access were considerable for refuse collection and so on. In short, there were technical grounds for refusal.

Triumphantly, I presented this evidence to the Planning Officer. The effect was stunning. There was no response at all, no refutation, no reasoning, just a bald "We still recommend acceptance". *And so they still do.* I had wasted my money on their advice to find technical grounds for rejection.

I have had a long correspondence with the Chief Planning Officer, who seemed to be a reasonable chap. But nothing has changed - unless you count a repositioning of one of the proposed houses. So it is off to Committee - this month we believe - with the officers' recommendation for approval.

Islington, it seems, is a paradise for developers seeking planning approvals. To the lay person, Islington Planning Officers appear to be a law unto themselves, bent on a policy of brushing aside the UDP and awkward guidelines, in their determination to recommend anything for approval by the Council.

One explanation for this is that the Council fears being billed for the costs of a successful appeal by rejected applicants, because it is broke. If this is the reason, maybe planners are right to advise acceptance of everything; but this makes a mockery of the planning process. Even if the Council rejects plans and their officers' advice from time to time, what is the point if the Council will not fight an appeal?

At the very least the planners should warn objectors like myself that no amount of expense or effort is going to alter anything; the rubber stamp is at the ready, regardless. ■

## Regeneration at last for Finsbury Park?

By Martin Jenkins, Community worker for Finsbury Park Action Group

After many years of hoping, and many disappointments, there is a real possibility that the regeneration of the area around Finsbury Park may start to happen.

An outline bid for £30,000,000 of government regeneration funding was submitted on November 27th. Led by Islington Council, it is supported - and was developed by Hackney and Haringey and, most importantly, by the local community. The bid was endorsed by a community conference on November 14th and by the Finsbury Park Action Group's AGM the following week.

The three Councils met the Government Office for London on November 6th and were encouraged to put forward a bid. They were told that the Government Office wanted to see three key elements:

- education (including raising standards and lifelong learning)
- transport
- community involvement

Government Office is very keen that regeneration should

have the support and genuine involvement of the local community and is prepared to see a slow start, with a lot of consultation and development work, if this will lead to community-led regeneration.

The final bid will need to be submitted by April 30th; and a lot of work has to be done between now and then. Groups of Council officers and community members are working on themes such as education, transport, the local economy, etc., and would welcome input from local people and organisations. Have you something to say?

To get involved in these groups, please contact **Martin Jenkins** or **Lydia Namarra** at FPAG (Finsbury Park Action Group) on **0181 802 2612** or, at Islington Council, **Martin Gray** on **0171 477 3093**.

In addition to this bid, Hackney Council has applied for regeneration funding for Woodberry Down. This creates the exciting possibility of up to £50,000,000 of public money coming into the area from September 1999. Matched funding from other sources could bring total investment to more than twice that sum.

## "A FRESH FUTURE FOR ISLINGTON - AN END TO CUTS AND HIGH TAXATION"

Oliver Judge views the Labour Council and its works from a Conservative standpoint

As Conservatives contesting Borough Elections in May 1999, we highlighted the missing millions that the Labour Council had not justified. They failed to explain where this money had been spent - where is it we ask? It therefore came as no surprise to hear and read about the cuts that are being proposed, considering the catalogue of financial difficulties that the Council has faced over the past decade. The Council, which has consistently blamed central government for the shortfall in its revenue, is looking to the current administration to increase the level of support.

Islington voters increasingly realise that the increases to the highest level of Council Tax in London rest solely in the lap of the ruling Labour Group and their leader Derek Sawyer. When we pay such high levels of local taxation to this Council we should expect nothing short of excellent. Yet, to make cuts in the services which are the benchmark of this

Council's ideals, stinks of hypocrisy and double standard.

In the Autumn edition of the Council's free magazine Derek Sawyer admits to the mistakes and problems that the Labour Council is faced with. This has been an ongoing problem, yet the only solution appears to be Cuts, Cuts and more Cuts. It states "Evidence ...suggests that we need to change...", well, opinion is for a change of leader and Council, fighting for a deal you so rightly deserve and have waited so long for.

How can the Council's commitments be honoured without a further rise in taxation or additional cuts? I commend the campaign "Spread the Word - Get Reading" yet how is this going to be supported if five libraries are to close. Surely Jennifer Powell, the Head of Information and Customer Services must rethink the Council's strategy.

This Labour Council continues to believe and boasts that it is best suited to hold the reins and dictate how most of the local services should be provided, regardless of cost instead of entrusting that provision in the hands of those most able and experienced to do so.

However, we must not forget those employees of the Council who make every effort to provide an exemplary service. They must be commended on their achievements in the face of adversity from a Council out of time and out of pocket.

As Conservatives in Islington we see it as our duty to continue to challenge for a fairer and more equitable deal.

If these are issues you support and you would like to be able to help or want to join the party please contact **Oliver Judge** on **0171 607 1433** or visit our website address at:

<http://www.esper.co.uk/inca>

# What's up at the Arsenal? Spot the director competition!

You may well ask "What's up?"

Since we have had no news of the momentous decisions about the Club's future being taken by its directors, we sent our spy around to snoop in the board room.

As luck would have it, our intrepid photographer got a snap of a full board meeting in session.

Can you identify the board members present in our photo? Who is the one in charge? Are they discussing:

- a) Whether it would be better to move to Kings Cross or to Finsbury Park?
- b) Whether they can raise the funds for a new stadium without losing total control of the Club?
- c) Whether they ought, as good neighbours, to give more than £25,000 a year to the Gunners Fund?



AFC Boardroom

Photo: Maggie Gregory

- d) Whether to buy another striker for £5 million?
- e) Whether they should let the fans and public know what they are going to do about the Highbury stadium?

There is a prize of a 10p voucher towards the cost of a fake 'official' Gunners scarf to the first reader to answer these questions correctly. As a tie-breaker, contestants must finish the following sentence in 17 words: **"Arsenal is the most open, generous and democratic football club in England because ....."**

*Answers must be in a brown envelope. Please enclose a used £5 note (to cover administration expenses). The editor's decision is final. The competition is open to directors and employees of Arsenal PLC* ■

## Islington adopts Quality Control - at Neighbourhood level Sean Hunt explains how it works in Quadrant

The Neighbourhood Quality and Development Team consists of **Sean Hunt** (Neighbourhood Quality Manager) and **Maureen Cunningham** (Neighbourhood Development Officer) and is based at the Quadrant Office at 95A Sotheby Road. As well as regularly meeting with local people at the Neighbourhood Forum, Service Improvement Panel and other sub-groups, the team is actively involving residents in monitoring the quality of Council services and listening to their views on and priorities for these services. The information collected will be used to develop a Community Plan for the area, explaining what local objectives people have and how they will be achieved.

Below are a couple of the projects the team is currently working on:

### *Mystery Calling*

The team has trained residents from both Highbury Vale and

Whittington Neighbourhoods to become "mystery callers". These callers have phoned several council services and evaluated the quality of the service in terms of how polite and helpful staff were and how quickly they answered the phone. The results from this exercise were discussed at the Highbury Vale Forum on 26<sup>th</sup> January.

### *Neighbourhood Profile*


The team will be producing a profile of the Highbury Vale Neighbourhood in January. The profile gives all kinds of local information, including listings of Council services, voluntary and community groups and local demographic information. It also includes a comparison between the area 50 years ago and now, as seen through the eyes of somebody who has lived in the area for many years and a local teenager. The profile will be available in both printed form and on CD ROM at the local Quadrant office.

This is just a flavour of some of the work the team is doing. If you would like to find out more, please call Sean or Maureen on **0171-527 8639/8641**, fax on **0171-527 8607** or email: **sean.hunt@islington.gov.uk** - or come and see us at the Quadrant office. ■

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**ARE YOU INTERESTED IN GROWING YOUR OWN VEGETABLES?**  
 If so, come to our meeting and workshop on **Sunday 21st of February at 3pm** in:  
**THE ISLINGTON ECOLOGY CENTRE** Drayton Park London N4 (near Arsenal Underground Station).  
 It is much easier than many of us might think to grow a wide variety of vegetables, fruit and herbs in cities. You just need a window box to start!  
 We will also be having a discussion about 'home zones' - a way of reclaiming streets for pedestrians, not just cars.  
**FPAG GREENING GROUP**  
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**ISLINGTON WASTE SAVERS**  
 Are you keen on conservation - and prepared to pay £6.50 a month for it? Or £70 a year, payable in advance?  
 Islington Waste Saver runs a weekly door to door rubbish collection service. Rubbish has to be sorted into separate containers for newspapers, office paper, cardboard, aluminium cans and glass bottles, and left out beside your rubbish bin.  
 For more information about this non-profit making service ring **0171 226 1248**, or write to:  
 Christine Collister  
 4, Bromfield Street  
 N1 0QA.  
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**St Thomas's playgroup**



**MONDAY - FRIDAY, 9.30 - 12.00**  
 PPA-approved pre-school for 2 1/2 to 5 year olds  
 Tel: 0171 354 9347  
 St Thomas's Church Hall  
 Monsell Rd, N4 2QY

Financially assisted by Islington Council

**MILLENNIUM FESTIVAL GRANTS**  
 Small grants up to £5,000 will be available for millennium activities and events taking place between January 1st and December 31st 2000.  
 These grants are intended for small scale voluntary groups (priority will be given to organisations with a turnover of less than £15,000 per annum).  
 Activities will have to be for the benefit of the local community, be open and accessible and be well organised and planned.  
 Grants will not be available for street parties, fireworks, food and drink, core costs of an organisation or endowments and fundraising events.  
 No match funding will be required, although groups will have to show that there is some input in kind (volunteer time for example).  
 There will be a rolling programme of awards throughout 2000 but the first deadline will be June 1999. Applicants can register for an information pack on 0870 600 2000

Painting and decorating - Inside and outside  
 Paper hanging - Tiling  
 Large jobs and small, I tackle them all  
 Ring Peter on 0171 607 9454 or 0956 509002  
 for quote and references

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**FOR SALE**  
**TOTALLY GUTTED**  
 (and rebuilt in N5)

Lovely late Victorian 3 bed house sympathetically restored inside and out. All new services. Period features retained or replaced. Stripped pine floors, 23ft kitchen/diner with Indian Summer slate floor, solid birch units and conservatory roof. York stone patio in sunny 30' garden newly cleared and partly paved. Piccadilly/Victoria lines close. Ready soon for occupation. NO CHAIN

**OIRO £285,000**  
**Tel: 0171 359 5731**

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**Editor's note:**  
 This is the first HCA News since October so you haven't missed an issue! Thanks to the members doing the delivery this time. Send your news and views to the editor at the address below.

*Highbury Community Association*  
 The HCA represents residents and businesses, on all aspects of living and working in Highbury, Stoke Newington and Finsbury Park.