

HIGHBURY COMMUNITY NEWS

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'Clear, Hold, Build' police operations in the Finsbury Park area

By DOROTHY NEWTON AND GILL SHEPHERD



Drug dealing and crime at the top end of the Blackstock Road and around Finsbury Park station are of long-standing, with too many men hanging about on the streets in ways which are intimidating to some, especially women. In January 2024 a new push on this cluster of issues was initiated by the Met and by police officers from the three boroughs that meet at Finsbury Park - Islington, Haringey, and Hackney.

Launch Meeting

A meeting was held in December held in St Thomas the Apostle Church, St Thomas's Road - mainly for police-officers, Council officials and local councillors, to explain how they plan to implement the current Policing Framework known as 'Clear, Hold, Build.' BBC News was there to film, and will be returning at intervals to report on progress. A wider community launch will be held in due course.

There were high-quality presentations from the local police and from the three local boroughs representatives: Susan Fajana-Thomas from Hackney; John Woolf from Islington and Adam Jogee, from Haringey. An excellent speaker from the Home Office explained that the Finsbury Park initiative follows initial pilots from which much was learned, and will in turn contribute to learning in other areas where the Framework is being rolled out.

Clear, Hold, Build

It was explained that the 'Clear' phase involves targeted arrests and crime disruption through working with local partners; the 'Hold' phase means stabilising the area so that new offenders do not move in to fill the void created. Finally, the 'Build' phase is focused on long-term community-driven action to address the causes of criminality and to

prevent it from happening again, with backup from police support. Superintendent Jack May-Robinson, from Islington neighbourhoods' team, explained that the Met will also be working as far as possible to design out crime - for instance looking at poor lighting and other physical factors which may be providing opportunities for crime.

Creating a Stakeholder Group for the area

A stakeholder group will be set in place to help monitor and scrutinise the process, and it is clear that outstanding local leadership of and engagement in the whole 'Build' process is going to be needed to make a difference. There are several local institutions based around



We look forward to welcoming you at HCA's AGM to be held at the Ecology Centre, Drayton Park, on Saturday 23rd March from 7 pm.

Our speaker is local resident Sheila Dillon of Radio 4's 'The Food Programme'. Her talk will be followed by a social, with food and drink.

'Clear, Hold, Build'

Continued from page 1...

Finsbury Park, with responsibility for serving the area, but these may not yet work closely together with a common goal in mind. They include:

- The Finsbury Park Trust, established in 2002 as a legacy of the £25 million Single Regeneration Budget (SRB Programme) for the Finsbury Park area. The Trust could be a key community hub and has a new CEO who is working towards this. The Trust rents office space to a variety of organisations such as the Ghana Union, the Islington Somali community, the Congolese Community Council, Finsbury Park Business Forum, the Home Care Alliance, etc, as well as offering community meeting space.

- The Finsbury Park Town Centre Management Group which aims to create a safe, thriving town centre at Finsbury Park with a diverse retail mix providing a good environment for business residents and visitors. A Finsbury Park and Blackstock Road Community Meeting, focusing on safety, feeds into this Group.

- Muslim Welfare House, which runs English and Arabic classes, community events, youth activities, and educational guidance for the young to help them move on into apprenticeship or university.

- Local churches and the Finsbury Park mosque, who are all actively involved

The local Neighbourhood Forum, working under the Locality Act to write a Neighbourhood Plan for built environment planning in the area, may also be relevant.

Urgent problems which need to be addressed

- Many young men (many with little or no English) arrive in debt to those they had to pay to help them

get to the UK. They are pressured by drug dealers to sell drugs to make the money being demanded of them, and much more work is needed on this problematic set of issues.

- There is currently no Community Centre building around Finsbury Park where the men who hang about on the streets could meet indoors, exercise, relax, and receive training. There is a strong need for something well-managed and welcoming. There has been some discussion about creating such a centre in the old Under Fives' play centre just inside Finsbury Park.

- At the moment the risks of being robbed in Finsbury Park itself are far too high.

Finsbury Park is a highly heterogeneous place, 'thrown-together' in the phrase of the author of a recent PhD study of the area. The creation of a sense of belonging, of ownership and of responsibility should be the goal, though it will require a really major effort to create it. ('Mapping multiplicity: place, difference and conviviality in Finsbury Park, London.' Katherine Stansfeld, Royal Holloway College, London, 2019).

The Website for Arsenal's neighbours

<https://www.arsenal.com/the-club/local-residents-news>

Don't forget that Arsenal football club has created a website specially for us, its local neighbours.

Because those of us living near the stadium have to pay for RingGo electronic parking permits for our visitors on match days, it is essential that we know when **all** relevant matches are going to be. These days this does not just include the men's matches but the increasingly frequent women's matches and all other fixtures.

Parking limitations and the need for parking permits comes into play as soon as an event is expected to have an audience of 10,000 or more.

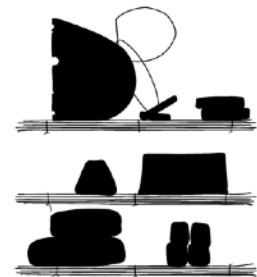
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Maintaining and Enhancing Islington's Bus Services

A response to the article about buses in Newsletter 130

By Rowena Champion - Executive Member for Environment, Air Quality & Transport, London Borough of Islington

Islington Borough Council's commitment to bus improvement

We do understand the importance of the buses, especially for people who are less well off, older, female, from ethnic minorities, with limited mobility, the disabled and children. This is why there is significant work going into trying to improve bus routes and to minimise delays to them.

The Islington Transport Strategy sets out the council's objectives and targets to maintain and improve the capacity of our local bus network, improve reliability, and increase bus speeds by 15 per cent by 2041. The council is making progress towards this target with Transport for London's (TfL) latest data showing bus speeds increased in the borough by 1.3 per cent between 2016 and 2022.

We work with TfL to identify potential improvements to bus priority across the road network and are working on bus priority opportunities that will contribute towards achieving our objectives and targets. The council is currently reviewing proposals for the Essex Road bus corridor and we are also considering options to ease traffic congestion and improve bus priority on the St Paul's Road corridor.

TfL's efforts to improve transport services

TfL is implementing bus priority improvements on the Transport for London Road Network (TLRN) to provide a faster, more reliable and more efficient bus network, including adding more continuous bus lanes

and increasing the hours of operation of bus lanes on the TLRN. In Islington this includes making Holloway Road bus lanes 24/7.

The council is working with TfL on the interactions with our bus priority proposals. We support TfL in its ambition to provide a good quality transport network across all modes. Public transport is vital to how Londoners travel to work, access education and services, and visit friends and family.

Negotiating the best deal possible for Islington

Over the past few years, the council has also been working with TfL to seek to limit the impact of their proposals to change and restructure bus services. TfL were required to make changes to bus services due to the DfT only agreeing short-term funding settlements following the covid pandemic, which left a funding shortfall for TfL and affected bus services across London. The impacts included the need for an additional interchange to complete journeys and the loss of direct services to Whittington Hospital and schools in the north of Islington.

In August 2022, as part of TfL's Central London Bus Review Consultation, we very strongly objected to proposals to withdraw routes 4 and 214 (and others), for instance. Following our consultation



response, none of the subsequent changes TfL implemented as part of this consultation directly affected bus routes operating in Islington.

The council will continue to work with TfL to develop bus priority across the road network and achieve our objective to improve bus journey times.

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The story of a tree

By GILL SHEPHERD



For many years, a fine tall plane tree stood in the grounds of the Tawney Court flats on Highbury Hill, not far from the junction with Aubert Park. The corner site was originally occupied by a large Baptist church built in 1871, and we guess that the plane tree was planted in its grounds then.

We do not have early photographs of the tree, but it can clearly be seen in a 1957 photograph of the church, just before that building was pulled down having suffered Second World War

bomb damage. The tree is clearly already taller than the adjacent houses, 92 and 94 Highbury Hill. So, when it was finally felled in October 2023, it was probably over 150 years old.

It took the three tree surgeons who felled the tree several days to do so, and the final bole, once the main trunk had been felled, was well over a metre in diameter. The tree surgeons remarked sadly that the tree was perfectly healthy inside.

The issue from the point of view of Islington Council

The plane tree was involved in a tree root claim against Islington Council by the insurance company of a house at least 30 metres away from the tree, which had undergone major subsidence. Plane tree roots were found in test cores taken in the house's front garden. Patrick Richardson, Islington Council's Tree Officer primarily responsible for subsidence claims, told HCA, "We resisted the initial request to fell the tree and crown-reduced the canopy in 2021, but unfortunately this pruning did not prevent further property movement, and so we were forced to agree the felling of the whole tree". The council manages tree root claims using the framework of the Joint Mitigation Protocol and Risk Limitation Strategy of the London Tree Officers' Association.

The issue from the point of view of house insurance companies

As far as insurance companies are concerned, they have local councils over a barrel. Insurers assert – not always with conclusive evidence – that damage to a particular house is being caused by a particular tree. If the tree is not felled, insurers can insist that the

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The story of a tree

Continued from page 4...



tree owner – the local council in the case of street trees – becomes liable for the potential cost of underpinning the house. Insurance companies currently have might on their side, and borough councils are exceedingly short of funds. As Islington Council’s Tree Officer explained, even a single court case over hypothetical tree damage from one tree to one house might cost the council £1 million. And at any one time there are dozens of ongoing subsidence claims in the borough. Islington simply cannot afford to fight them.

The bigger picture

In this case, house subsidence was really major. The owners’ structural engineer believed that plane tree roots were indeed partly to blame, though the subsidence was likely to have been caused by a mixture of other factors as well (for instance, seasonally shrinking and expanding clay soil is a common problem for many London Victorian houses).

More generally, it is a worry that fine old trees are being removed from the urban landscape one by one, and often by poorly substantiated insurance claims. In some London boroughs between 10 and 40% of the trees removed each year are due to such claims. The cumulative impact is truly enormous.

Addressing climate change and biodiversity loss

There is a policy to replace lost trees. But it is rare that tree species are replaced like for like. So, trees which would eventually grow large like planes, providing shade and coolness, removing pollution and providing habitat for birds and other biodiversity, are replaced by much smaller ornamental varieties such as silver birches which will never be able to perform the same range of tasks (‘Chainsaw massacre: a review of London’s street trees’ London Assembly Environment Committee, May 2007).

A real commitment to climate change adaptation must mean that, sooner or later the balance of power between insurance companies and borough councils in London needs to be renegotiated, before even more of London’s fine tree canopy is lost.

Although the general election looks as if it might not be held until the autumn, local elections and the election for the Mayor of London and the London assembly are scheduled for 2 May. To express our preferences as citizens and voters, it is imperative that we can vote, and are not turned away at the polling station for lack of ID. If you have photo ID in the form of a passport or driving licence you are fortunate.

But if you know others who should be able to vote but who do not have photo ID, you may be able to help them by explaining how easy it is to get a Voter Authority Certificate.

Acceptable ID

includes a Passport, a Driving Licence, a Blue Badge, an Older Person’s Bus Pass, a Disabled Person’s Bus Pass, an Oyster 60+ Card, and a Freedom Pass. If you think this list looks skewed towards making voting easier for older voters, you are right.

Getting a Voter Authority Certificate

For younger people who do not possess a Passport or a Driving Licence the process is a little more complicated: and you need to apply for a Voter Authority Certificate.

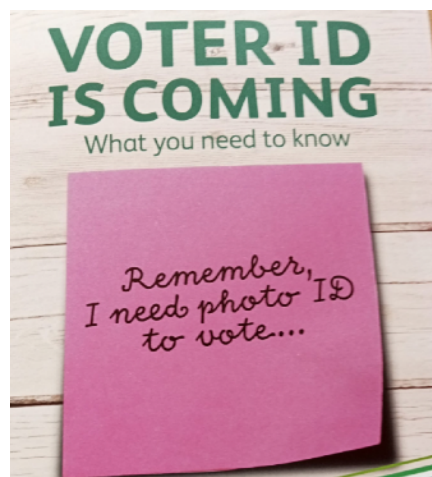
The process takes about 5 minutes online. You will need:

- A digital photo of yourself with your face uncovered
- Your National Insurance number (if you do not have one the process takes longer but can still be completed)
- The voting address at which you are registered to vote

When you are ready to start, go to <https://www.gov.uk/apply-for-photo-id-voter-authority-certificate> . The form is very quick and straightforward to fill in online.



Making sure that you and the people you care about have ID in time for voting on 2nd May



Is Building on London's Green Belt Inevitable?

BY SARAH POTTER

In December 2023, the Centre for London put out a hard-hitting report with suggestions aimed at helping to tackle London's escalating housing crisis. One in four Londoners live in poverty; housing benefit is inadequate; rough sleeping is up by 50% and more than 300,000 households languish on council waiting lists. London's population has grown by nearly 32% since 1991 and long-term solutions have been few and far between. Key and skilled workers are being pushed out of the capital, and councils are spending unaffordable sums on temporary accommodation.

The Centre for London's report calls for a long-term funding boost for affordable housing – amounting to 15 billion a year nationally – to support construction of 90,000 social homes a year over the next 15 years. Housing benefit rates should rise annually to reflect the actual cost of renting and the Right to Buy scheme should be scrapped. But controversially, the centre also called for developing housing on low quality areas of greenbelt often referred to as 'grey belt.' (Charles Wright, <https://www.onlondon.co.uk/think-tank-urges-release-of-green-belt-land-to-meet-london-housing-need/>)

In January 2024, this issue was discussed at the London Forum, which represents local amenity societies, including HCA. It arose because Enfield Council has recently considered giving permission to build thousands of much-needed houses on green belt countryside. Currently the London Plan does not permit this, and two speakers from the Enfield Society presented to the Forum the case they had made against this development. They had suggested to the council that it was feasible to build instead on



brown-field sites in retail parks in the west of the borough.

Mike Kielty, Chair of the Planning Officers Society for London, explained that the 1947 Green Belt Act was designed to prevent urban sprawl, to facilitate the building of new towns and to regenerate war-damaged London.

But it was not designed to address current environmental issues and is no longer working well. He suggested that current planning needs to be based on up-to-date data, with an emphasis on strategic planning for growth based on wider city, region, and employment needs.



Clarissa Hulse

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Green Belt

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Alice Roberts from the Council for the Preservation of Rural England presented an alternative vision: there is already permission in local council plans in London for 250,000 homes in the city on existing sites and a compact city is preferable to building in the car dependent Green Belt. She argued that solving the current housing crisis depends on policies to mitigate the fall in social housing provision and owner occupation, and the rise in private rented housing. She underlined the need for the countryside to continue to provide food, forests, habitat, and open space where rain water can be absorbed.

Enfield Council continues to push to include greenbelt sites in its plans for new housing in the north of the borough, though the Mayor of London reportedly commented that Enfield Council's proposal is premature and unnecessary. For the moment, at least, the development of Enfield's Green Belt is not a foregone conclusion.

Green Garden Waste Collection



From 1 April 2024, green garden waste will no longer be collected for free with normal rubbish collections.

Under the new system, green garden waste will be collected only fortnightly, and there will be an annual charge (of £75.00 for up to 3 garden waste bags) for doing so.

Upon payment of the charge, a garden waste permit tag will be sent to be attached to the handle of one of the

sacks, so that the collection crew are able to identify that you have paid.

If you want to be part of the scheme, it is important that you pay your £75.00, and get your tag in good time before the new arrangements begin on April 1st.

The relevant place on the Islington Council website for doing this is as follows:

<https://www.islington.gov.uk/recycling-and-rubbish/recycling/garden-waste-recycling>



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‘A London Family 1870-1900’ M V Hughes

By GILL SHEPHERD



Highbury and Islington have been the subjects of a wide range of novels, autobiographies and non-fiction works over the years, and we thought it would be interesting to review one of these from time to time.

We begin with an intensely readable trilogy written by Molly Hughes. She originally wrote them as ‘A London Child of the 1870s’, ‘A London Girl of the 1880s’ and ‘A London Home in the 1890s’. They were republished in the single volume of the title in 1991 (OUP), and the first volume has recently been reprinted by Persephone Books under its original title.

Molly Hughes was born in Canonbury in 1866 to a family composed of a stockbroker father, a well-educated and amusing mother, and four wonderful older brothers. The children shared their own big room on the first floor. Hughes describes each child’s shelf and what treasures he or she kept on it, the wooden blocks and

toy soldiers they all played with, the books they all read. No adult ever went into the room unless invited by the children – which only happened when the five of them put on a play, gathering chairs from all over the house to make rows like a real theatre.

She vividly conjures up the 19th-century Islington and London that lay outside the house too: the extreme quietness of the residential streets (unless hawkers were coming along calling out their wares); window-shopping in Upper Street, family walks on

Hampstead Heath or in Epping Forest, slow bone-shaking horse-bus trips to Oxford Street, and walking to St Paul’s and back for church on Sundays.

The boys went to school, but Molly was taught by her mother for the first few years, learning Latin, French, English literature, and needlework. Later she went to a perfectly dreadful - sounding dame school in Highbury New Park for a few years. Molly’s father died in a railway accident when she was only 13. Money was very tight and the four boys had to start work to support the family. Molly’s mother was determined that her daughter should have a few more years’ schooling. She managed to get her accepted at North London Collegiate, (in Camden Town then) newly founded by the formidable Miss Buss as the first girls’ school in the country to offer the same sort of education as that found in boys’ schools.

The description of this school (in volume 2) and of its gradually evolving curriculum is fascinating. Looking

back, Molly Hughes reflects on the massive task Miss Buss had set herself as she strove to make sure that her pupils could pass public examinations, while still ensuring that every girl should at least know how to make button-holes.

Molly herself went on to train as a teacher in Cambridge, and we leave Islington and Camden behind. But her first two volumes are a joy to read - bringing our home area of 150 years ago vividly to life.

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