

HIGHBURY COMMUNITY NEWS

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HCA Annual General Meeting

By FRANC DAVID

The Annual General Meeting

The evening began with a report on the previous year's activities, and the treasurer's report. Members of the audience then raised issues of concern, several of which could be dealt with on the spot since we had one of the Highbury councillors, Caroline Russell, with us. Caroline explained that the Highbury clocktower is being taken away to be restored. (See the short article about this in the newsletter).

Potholes, uneven pavements etc. can be reported on via the Islington Council app called "Love clean streets." (There is also a brief note about this in the newsletter). There is widespread dissatisfaction at the way Lime bikes are scattered everywhere. Apparently, there is currently no legal mechanism to stop this, and a European city (Milan?) which tried to sue Lime bikes lost its case.



Professor Anne Power



Building homes for the poor

Our speaker this year was Professor Anne Power, Emeritus Professor of Social Policy, and Head of Housing at the London School of Economics. A local resident, she spoke about her new book, "Beyond Bricks and Mortar: Building Homes, Communities and Neighbourhoods."

She described how the scourges of the Victorian era in cities – squalor, overcrowding and disease – first led to attempts to build better accommodation. Initially this was undertaken by private charities such as the Peabody Trust, and by employers who built decent accommodation for their workers. An early example was Robert Owen and his new Lanark project. This was followed by model villages such as Port Sunlight in Merseyside for Lever Brothers workers, and by Saltaire, near Bradford, built by Titus Salt. Later

there were Garden Cities built to take industrial workers out to live in the countryside away from urban slums, but linked back to the city via the railway network.

For the first time it was noticed that there was a relationship between decent housing, and more productive workers. And that those in secure accommodation lived longer too. Both World War I and World War II encouraged governments to build housing for returning soldiers and for those who had been displaced by bombing. 5 million homes were built after World War I and 6 million after World War II by local councils. Mrs Thatcher, however, was determined to break the link between the provision of housing and councils. She encouraged community enterprise such as co-ops and private estate programmes. Under her, housing associations, and private renting exploded.

HCA Annual General Meeting

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Islington has a 200-year history of commitment to community. It has attempted decentralisation of housing control several times and it has at times demolished aged housing estates when it would have been better to refurbish them. But it has at the same time retained many pre-war and immediate post-war estates and upgraded them. The need is not only to keep these but also to support the development of a skilled workforce which knows how to retrofit modern heating systems into old properties and to regenerate them for a new life.

Islington has also done well by contrast with some other councils in its provision of playgroups, youth clubs etc. The council discovered early on – and this is an overarching theme in Anne's book - that the provision of housing cannot be separated from the building of better community facilities and thus ultimately of the building of solid secure communities given a chance to climb out of poverty.

Unfortunately, it has been more common to see the demolition of estates which housed poorer households in all its accommodation, and their replacement by privately built estates where only 20% of properties built (if that) are genuine social housing. And so, while this public/private model remains the approach, the problem of homeless poor households will never go away. Indeed, every demolition-and-rebuild generates more of such households.

Anne's talk made a very powerful case for a rethink and perhaps even a return to central government funding of genuine council housing.

The refurbishment and conservation of Highbury clock tower



The clock tower at the top of Highbury Hill has been in need of refurbishment for some time, and it turns out that what is needed is a good deal more than a new coat of paint.

The funds have been found for its full renovation by the specialist firm Smith of Derby. The assessment of what was required made it clear that it would be impossible to restore the clock in situ and so the whole clock - cast-iron tower and all - will be removed to the specialists' headquarters.

Restoration and refurbishment will take something like 14 weeks from the date when the clock is removed – which, assuming timely approval of funds, might be as soon as mid-July. The final colours of the clock tower, when repainted, will see it restored to its original dark green and gold.

Islington Council are also in the process of trying to make the clock a Listed Building, which will help to ensure that it is looked after properly in the future.

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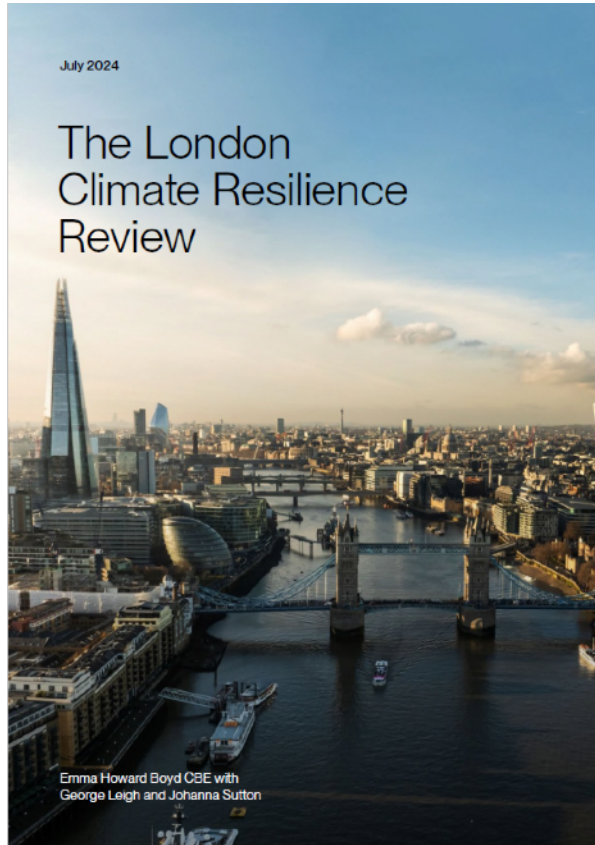
How Prepared Is London for Climate Change?

By GILL SHEPHERD

London, like the rest of the UK, is struggling to cope with the impacts of climate change. A warmer atmosphere holds more moisture, so rainfall is increasing across the UK. All the warmest years since 1884 have occurred in the 21st century. As an extensive urban area largely covered by impermeable man-made surfaces, London is especially vulnerable to heavy rainfall. And our drainage system, still largely reliant on that which the Victorians built, cannot cope with the volumes of rain water we now receive. We have already seen emergencies where floods crippled parts of the road and tube network and entered the basements of thousands of buildings.

It was in response to such emergencies that the GLA and the borough councils together with other bodies launched the London Climate Resilience Review in 2023, and reported in July 2024. The report found that regulation, investment and action on resilience to extreme weather, are not yet sufficient in the face of climate change and increasingly extreme weather. The government is too focused on short-term reactive responses at the expense of developing medium and long-term plans for resilience to extreme weather events.

Almost 80% of lead climate scientists consulted for the survey expect at least a 2.5° temperature rise if not more. The GLA and others should use this trajectory to guide their work: anything less would be an unacceptable gamble with people's lives and taxpayers' money. The climate change committee said that



the U.K.'s current approach to adaptation is not working.

The report suggested that, in the case of London, urgent action is needed in six areas:

- A strategic London wide action plan on heat risk is needed
- London has yet to make preparations for another major surface water flooding incident. In the longer term, sea levels in the Thames estuary are expected to rise by over a metre by the end of this century. More urgently, fewer than 10% of flood defences upstream of the Thames Barrier will be high enough to protect property beyond 2050.
- London must accelerate its understanding of system interdependencies. Transport infrastructure is dependent on energy infrastructure which in turn is dependent on water infrastructure. In

an emergency (for instance extreme heat followed by an extreme thunderstorm) knowledge of how to react to complex system failures is not yet embedded with wider policy teams or planners

- National regional and local governments must do more to prioritise investment in climate resilience. This means embedding climate resilience as a strategic priority across all sectors and improving skills. The review recommended that Whitehall should give councils more funding and more powers to adapt to global warming.

- Londoners should be much more directly engaged in climate impacts, the risks they pose, and adaptation options. For instance they need to understand that sustainable urban drainage systems are needed to make it

easier for rainwater to soak away. At the very least homeowners should stop paving over their front gardens.

- All the above needs strategic coordination. Currently governance is spread between many actors including local authorities, the mayor, and government departments. There is currently no agreed vision of what a well-adapted UK should look like.

There are no targets or goals for desired resilience standards at a national or local or sectoral level. This is a national problem but the whole country would benefit if London and the Mayor took the lead, as a result of this Review. (<https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/environment-and-climate-change/climate-change/climate-adaptation/london-climate-resilience-review>)

Front gardens must play their part in climate-change adaptation

By GILL SHEPHERD

The Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) has commissioned two Mori polls, 10 years apart, the second showing that three times as many gardens were now paved over as were 10 years earlier. London is the worst, with half of all front gardens paved. It also has the biggest decrease of plant cover, with five times as many front gardens with no plants at all compared with the 10 year baseline. The cumulative impact of paving over so much potential green space in London is enormous, given that many hard surfaces in the city have no choice but to exist.

The two main front garden problems

First, paved-over gardens reduce areas where rain can simply soak into the ground. In London, run-off which cannot be absorbed into the earth goes into the sewerage system via street drains. If it cannot cope with a surge of water the excess goes into our rivers. Hard paving can cause severe subsistence too, because it stops rainfall from getting into the ground. This causes the soil to shrink – especially in London where much of the city is built on clay. Houses and garden walls can develop severe problems as a result.

Second, as vegetation is eliminated from our streets it becomes harder to regulate temperatures. Hard surfaces absorb heat during the day and release it at night, creating urban heat islands. The removal of street trees, and the disappearance of vegetation from front gardens all contribute to this. The facts are stark: paving over your front garden contributes to flooding and increases local temperatures.

Planning for higher rainfall

Many front gardens, however small, can accommodate a parked car but still contain attractive green areas. Paving needs to be permeable, for a start. Brick pavers can be laid on compacted aggregate so that water can drain away between the gaps; gravel is a cheap way of doing this too. Plastic matrix pavers (recycled plastic



A minimal amount of brick pavers and deep flower beds with plenty of soil

formed into hexagonal cells) can be laid to hold the aggregate of your choice such as gravel, to stop it spreading everywhere.

Planning to reduce overall temperatures and increase shade

Suitable paving is one priority, and the other is greatly to increase the amount of greenery in our front gardens to lower temperatures. Limited space makes it important to think vertical, encouraging climbers on walls and fences, and planting small trees which increase shade and habitat for birds and insects without taking up too much ground space. Low maintenance shrubs are also valuable.

The goal

As a rough rule of thumb, at least 50% of a front garden should be able to absorb rainfall into the soil, via a combination of permeable paving and plants in soil. As the London Climate Resilience Review stresses (see elsewhere in this newsletter) the public need to know much more about how they can contribute to climate change adaptation in London. This is an excellent place to start. (<https://www.rhs.org.uk/communities/archive/pdf/greener-streets/greening-grey-britain-report.pdf>)



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Islington Council's 'Love Clean Streets' phone app

Local Roads

It is now possible to report issues with local roads (not red routes) through 'My Islington' (if you are registered online with the council) or via the new 'Love Clean Streets' phone app. You can download it via Google Play (<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?>) Or alternatively you can access it via the Apple store (<https://apps.apple.com/gb/app/love-clean-streets/id514610587?>)

You can report potholes, damaged pavements, blocked drains, flooding or faulty street lights, and fly tipping. Take a photograph, provide some basic details, and the council will resolve the issue for you.

Problems on Red Routes

Roads with red lines on the side are maintained by Transport for London (TfL) and problems on these roads, including faulty traffic lights, should be reported directly to TfL. You can do this at the following address: (<https://>



tfl.gov.uk/help-and-contact/contact-us/about-streets-and-other-road-issues)

Problems with Streetlights

Please note however that streetlights are managed by our partner company Enerveo. Faulty streetlights and problems with bollards or beacons can be reported on the Enerveo website: (<http://www.lightsoninIslington.co.uk/Public/Default.aspx>)

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Making Church Path safer for pedestrians

HIGHBURY COUNCILLORS

We agree that there are unfortunately some irresponsible cyclists using Church Path. We are aware of the issue and have agreed with community members and Councillors to implement more signage on the ground, and on banners on the railings. The funding for this has been approved and the works will go ahead.

The new signage will remind cyclists that this path is used by pedestrians and that they have priority in this area.

Help us keep our membership list up to date. Let us know if you have moved, or have updated your email address.

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A special art exhibition this summer at Kenwood

By SARAH POTTER

Until 5th October, “Heiress, Sargent’s American Portraits” can be seen at Kenwood. The eminent artist John Singer Sargent sketched and painted a number of the very rich American heiresses who married into the English nobility from the 1870s to the early 1900s. These heiresses became notorious at the time for the apparently loveless exchange of wealth for a title, but the exhibition shows that their lives and personalities were more complex and interesting than the stereotype of media comment. The Countess of Grantham, a fictional character in *Downton Abbey*, has recently familiarised us with these heiresses in English society.

The first such marriage occurred in 1874, when Jennie Jerome, aged 20 and the beautiful daughter of the Wall Street investor Leonard Jerome, married Lord Randolph Churchill, second son of the Duke of

Marlborough, who went on to have a career as a leading politician. Her first child was Winston Churchill. She was part of the high living social set which surrounded the Prince of Wales, who had supported her marriage when both sets of parents opposed it.

In 1906, Nancy Langhorne, one of three lovely sisters from a prosperous but not rich family, married William Waldorf Astor, the son of the rich American Viscount Astor who had moved to England. Her portrait by Sargent is included in the Kenwood exhibition, and she became the country’s first woman MP in 1919, standing in his constituency when her husband inherited his father’s title and went to the House of Lords.



She campaigned on women’s issues, unemployment and abstinence from alcohol, and was later known for her support of the rejected policy of appeasement of Hitler’s Germany.

Mrs. Wilton Phipps, pictured here in Sargent’s portrait, inherited wealth from her father’s career in banking and railroads and married into a county family from Wiltshire. She worked in local government and was made a Dame in 1926 for services to education. The comedienne Joyce Grenfell was her granddaughter and said that she was lovely to look at even in old age.

There is a charge of £12 for this exhibition unless you belong to English Heritage, but there is a very informative guide including details of Sargent’s sitters and the artistic techniques employed in the portraits and sketches. Bus 210 from Finsbury Park stops outside Kenwood.



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Car ownership trends in London

By GILL SHEPHERD



Transport for London's latest report on car ownership tells an interesting story about variations in car use across the capital ("Travel in London 2024 focus report: car ownership trends". <https://content.tfl.gov.uk/travel-in-London-2024-car-ownership-trends-acc.pdf>).

Firstly, and unsurprisingly, there is a big difference between inner and outer London as far as car ownership is concerned. In inner London almost 2/3 of households are car free, with this percentage stable since 2010. In outer London – where most Londoners live – only 1/3 of households manage without a car. This number has also changed little since 2010 despite over a decade of campaigning to reduce car use. Rail remains the dominant mode for getting to work in both parts of London, but the car's role in outer London is significant and irreplaceable for many people.

What is really interesting, however, is the pattern of car ownership in the context of household composition. Most single person households in London are car free – over 70%. But for a couple with children the picture changes dramatically and nearly 80% of such households own at least one car.

The Mayor's transport strategy has set ambitious targets to reduce car ownership, but the evidence suggests he is swimming against a very powerful demographic tide. TfL's

own data shows that car ownership patterns remain stubbornly aligned with household size, structure, and with household location.

Despite rising populations, road traffic volumes in London have been broadly steady over the last couple of decades. After the pandemic they levelled out at just below pre-pandemic levels and have been relatively stable since.

So, a transport policy crafted for a non-existent 'average' Londoner is doomed. That average conceals a multi-modal reality. The car-free ideal works well for single professionals in areas with good public transport, but remains impractical for larger households, and for those living in areas where public transport is more limited.

Finally, the report fails to comment on another factor which we see regularly in our own area. And that is that many tradesmen have moved to outer London, where house prices are lower, but use their vehicles to drive themselves and their tools the 8-10 miles in to Highbury and Islington to work for inner London households here. As things stand, we need them and they need us, and there is no car-free solution to this interdependence.

Finsbury Park Concerts this summer

By SARAH POTTER

Finsbury Park concerts start on Friday, 4 July and run over the weekend of the 5th and 6th of July and the weekend of the 11th to 13 July.

Stereophonics play on 4 July, Fontaines DC on 5th and Slayer on 6th.

Wireless runs throughout the next weekend from the 11th to 13 July. The headliner is Drake.

The period during which access to the park is affected is of course longer than these two weekends since there are build up and take down periods before and after the concerts.

At the recent (online) Finsbury Park Stakeholders meeting, the Festival Republic representative said that they were expecting a quarter of a million people over the two weekends. The tennis courts and the skateboard park will be open, but the skateboard Plaza will be covered with temporary toilets.

A letter for all residents in the affected areas – Islington, Hackney and Haringey – will be going out shortly. In the affected areas there will be the usual road closures with stewards able to admit local residents. The letter should also contain precise details about the total period during which the park will not be fully accessible

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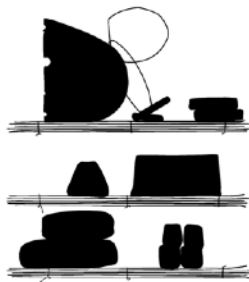
A response to the article on Air Quality in newsletter 134

By NEIL CHRISTIE

If Highbury feels calmer, cleaner, and safer than a few years ago, you're not alone in noticing. Since its launch in early 2021, the Highbury Low Traffic Neighbourhood (LTN) has brought measurable benefits to our streets. In the last few years we have seen reductions in traffic, more walking and cycling, and improved air quality. The LTN is part of Islington Council's People-Friendly Streets programme, and the data shows that it's making a difference. (1)

Dramatic Drop in Traffic on Local Roads

Traffic within the Highbury LTN has fallen by 76% since the scheme was introduced, with some roads like Benwell Road and Drayton Park seeing daily traffic drop by over 11,000 vehicles – a reduction of 80 to 90%. (2) Speeding has reduced too: most drivers now travel within the speed limit, helping make our streets safer for everyone, especially children and older people. (2)



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Importantly, the LTN hasn't just pushed traffic elsewhere. On Highbury's boundary roads, overall vehicle numbers remained stable – or even slightly declined – according to Islington Council's monitoring report. (2) Traffic on roads beyond the boundaries reduced by 10 to 59%. (2) It should be noted that traffic did initially increase significantly on Blackstock Road north, though it subsequently diminished from that initial peak.

This is still a problem that needs to be addressed, but this was the only boundary road to see an increase. This reflects wider evidence that LTNs reduce miles driven (3) and decrease traffic rather than simply displacing it. (4) And an exemption means that Highbury Blue Badge holders can pass through their local filters. (5)

Cleaner Air

Interventions such as ULEZ and traffic restriction measures have been associated with an improvement in London's air quality. Islington's Annual Air Quality Report (2022) confirms continued reductions in harmful nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) levels across the borough.⁴ In Highbury specifically, air quality monitors show that NO₂ concentrations have improved in recent years. For example, the average NO₂ level at Ambler School on Blackstock Road nearly halved, from an illegal level of 41 µg/m³ in 2019 to 23 µg/m³ in 2022. (6)

This progress is especially important given that air pollution disproportionately affects children and vulnerable residents. Cleaner air means healthier lungs and better quality of life for all.

A More Active Community

Safer streets also mean more people are choosing to walk and cycle. Highbury has seen a 50% increase in cycling. (2) And 30% of respondents reported walking or cycling to local shops more often. (7) These changes not only reduce emissions but also foster a stronger sense of community and wellbeing.

Looking Ahead

Highbury's experience shows how local action can transform neighbourhoods. Our streets are now safer, our air is cleaner, and our community is more active. Let's keep building on this progress to ensure a healthier, more liveable Highbury for generations to come.

Sources:

- (1) Islington Council. *People-Friendly Streets Programme Update*, Jan 2023. [Link](#)
- (2) Islington Council. *Highbury LTN Final Monitoring Report* – Appendix 4a, 2023–2024. [Link](#)
- (3) London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. *The Impact of 2020 Low Traffic Neighbourhoods on Levels of Car/Van Driving among Residents*. [Link](#)
- (4) Active Travel Academy/Possible. *Changes in Motor Traffic Inside London's LTNs and on Boundary Roads*. Jan 2023. [Link](#)
- (5) Department for Transport. *Low Traffic Neighbourhoods Research Report*. 2024. [Link](#)
- (6) Islington Council. *People-Friendly Streets in Highbury*. [Link](#)
- (7) Islington Council. *Air Quality Status Report 2022*. [Link](#)
- (7) Islington Council. *Highbury Fields People-Friendly Streets Trial Public Consultation and Engagement Analysis*. May 2022. [Link](#)