

HIGHBURY COMMUNITY NEWS

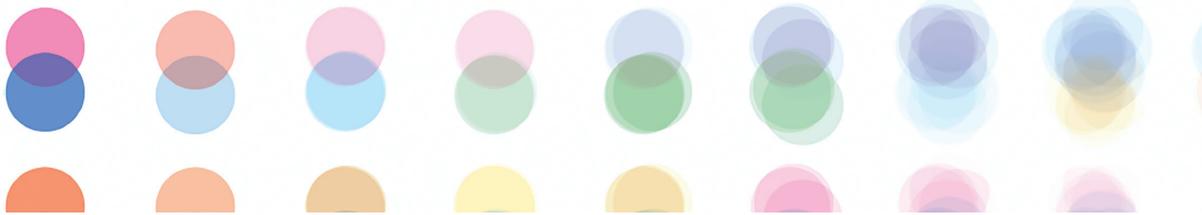
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HM Government

UK OFFICIAL

Global biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and national security

A national security assessment



20th January 2026

This Government security assessment was completed during 2025, but No. 10 Downing Street reputedly regarded it as too alarming to publish. It was only released, without publicity, in January this year as the result of a Freedom of Information request. Produced by the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) and DEFRA, the report was originally presented last year at COBRA (the cabinet committee convened to handle national emergencies). But despite its gravity, it was withheld from the public. Many current government decisions run counter to its recommendations.

Key findings

1. Global ecosystem degradation and collapse threaten UK national security and prosperity. The world is already experiencing impacts including crop failure, intensified natural disasters, and infectious disease outbreaks. Threats will increase with degradation and intensify with collapse. Without major intervention to reverse the current trend, this is highly likely to continue to 2050 and beyond. **(High risk)**
2. Cascading risks of ecosystem degradation are likely to include geopolitical instability, economic insecurity, conflict, migration, and increased inter-state competition for resources. **(Moderate risk)**
3. Critical ecosystems that support major global food production areas and impact global climate, water, and weather cycles, are the most important for UK national security. Severe deprivation collapse of these would highly likely result in water insecurity, severely reduced yields, global reduction, fisheries collapse, changes to global weather patterns, release of tract, exacerbating climate change, novel zoonotic diseases, and loss of pharmaceutical resources. The Amazon rainforest, Congo rainforest, boreal forests, the Himalayas, and South East Asia's coral reefs and mangroves are particularly significant for the UK. **(High risk)**
4. Ecosystem degradation is occurring across all regions. Every critical ecosystem is on a pathway to collapse (irreversible loss of function beyond repair). **(High risk)**.
5. There is a realistic possibility that some ecosystems (such as coral reefs in Southeast Asia and boreal forests) start to collapse from 2030, and others (rainforests and mangroves) start to collapse from 2050. **(Low risk)**.
6. All countries are exposed to risks of ecosystem collapse within and beyond their borders. Some will be exposed sooner than others and are likely to act to secure their interests, particularly water and food security. Migration will increase as food and water insecurity rise, and political instability and conflict are likely to escalate as states compete for dwindling resources. **(Moderate risk)**.
7. Without significant increases in UK food system and supply chain resilience, it is unlikely that the UK would be able to maintain food security if ecosystem collapse drives geopolitical competition for food. The UK relies on imports for 40% of its food and fertiliser and cannot currently produce enough food to feed its population based on current diets. Disrupted food supply chains will increase global food prices. Countries best placed to adapt are those that invest in ecosystem protection and restoration, and resilient and efficient food systems. **(Moderate risk)**

Assessing Islington’s proposed list of Gypsy and Traveller Sites, using the National Policy Advisory Panel on Gypsy and Traveller Housing Guide

Eleanor Poulton



In 2021, a 24-page document was produced to guide the creation and management of good quality sites for Gypsies and Travellers. (*‘Places we’re proud of,’ 2021, Joseph Rowntree Foundation*). The report stressed the importance of strategic planning, good site design for comfort and safety, and intensive site management with adequate maintenance processes and support for residents after sites have been created.

Islington’s proposed sites fail to align with the strategic planning principles outlined in this document, which stress the need for appropriate site selection rather than opportunistic development. Successful gypsy and traveller sites are typically located in peri-urban locations where there is enough space for landscaping to reduce conflict with adjacent residential areas, and where it is possible to meet minimum design standards, such as safe outdoor space and community areas. The proposals contradict both Islington’s own

environmental sustainability policies and the Guide’s emphasis on soft landscaping. The sites do not meet these locational criteria and the small scale of the 1- and 2- pitch sites raise fundamental concerns about operational viability. Thus these choices are all unsuitable in the light of the Guide’s recommendations.

Furthermore, the Guide makes clear that any sites provided require ongoing intensive management because of the unique needs of residents. Only if the site is large enough, can dedicated staff provide on-the-spot support, ensuring timely maintenance and the addressing of health and safety issues. Thus, economies of scale are required if sites are to make economic sense, and to be well maintained after they are created.

The current proposed list of potential sites in Islington fail to meet standards for strategic planning, location, scale, or environmental sustainability. A fundamental rethink is needed.

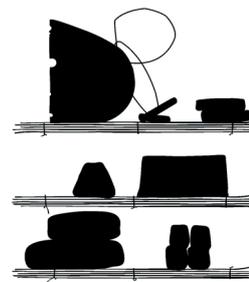
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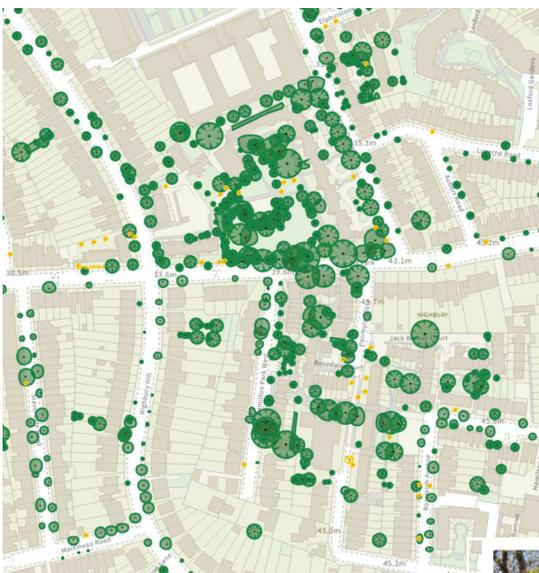
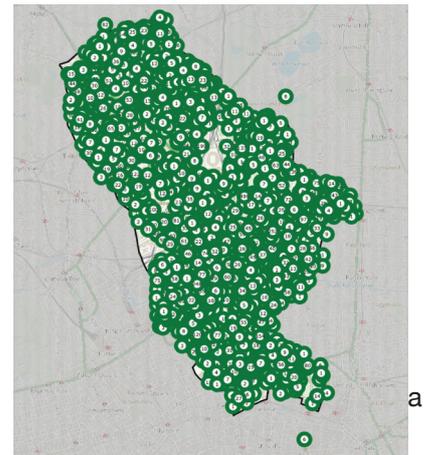
Islington's Tree map, and how we can value our trees

Gill Shepherd

Did you know that we have a tree-by-tree record of just about every tree in Islington? It is the most wonderful resource that deserves to be used widely.

Go to <https://trees.islington.gov.uk/Trees/Map> and you will arrive at a page with a picture of Islington coated in green blobs, with a legend down the left hand side inviting you to make choices about what you view.

Click on the map and enlarge it to the point where you can start to see individual areas and individual trees. Here I have chosen central Highbury, with the large number of trees in the grounds of Aubert Court forming a sort of hollow square. It's possible to see clusters of large trees in Hamilton Park West, and scattering of smaller street trees almost everywhere.



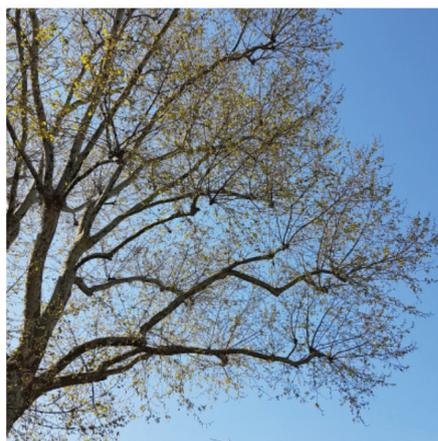
Enlarge further, and you can choose an individual tree. For sentimental reasons (and since it featured in a previous HCA newsletter) I chose the huge plane tree which used to exist on the corner of Highbury Hill and Aubert Park until it was felled at the behest of a house subsidence insurance company. Luckily it has not yet been removed from the map

At that point you are shown a photo of the tree, with basic details about its species and age and an assessment of its value.

Finally, you get the details of how CAVAT assessed its monetary value, by calculating total carbon stored (6,000 tonnes) total CO2 sequestered (22 tonnes), runoff avoided, stormwater intercepted and pollutants removed. Not many trees have a value as high as that one did, but even the rows of trees worth about £4,000 each are performing a function that it is good to be able to put a price on.

CAVAT (Capital Asset Value for Amenity Trees) was devised some years ago by LTOA, the London Tree Officers' Association. It is now a widely used professional methodology for calculating the monetary value of amenity trees as assets. It informs tree management, planning and compensation for damage.

It assigns a monetary value to trees based on their size, location, health, and social amenity value. It is commonly used by local authorities for planning, for insurance claims for damaged trees and for strategic urban forest management. Larger trees in high-population, high visibility areas receive the highest value.



20600 (Single tree)

Species: Plane; London
Site: Tawney Court
Owner: Housing – Islington Site
Estimated height: 14 m
Age: 100 Plus
Tree Asset Value (CAVAT): £828,500
Last inspected: 2025/2026
Next inspection: 2028/2029

	Total Annual Benefits	£8.40	
	Total Carbon Stored	6.014 tonnes	
	Total CO₂ Sequestered	22.1 tonnes (£1,388.42)	
	Annual CO₂ Sequestered	7.104 kg (£0.45)	
	Annual Runoff Avoided	3.573 m ³ (£6.22)	
	Annual Stormwater Intercepti...	11.7 m ³	
	Annual Pollutants Removed	878.2 g (£1.72)	
	13.3 g £0.01		336.2 g £0.04
	35.3 g £0.00		442.0 g £0.33

Densifying the Suburbs: recent discussions at the London Forum

Sarah Potter

At the recent meeting of the London Forum on 29th January, members of local amenity societies such as the Highbury Community Association gathered to discuss the issues involved in densifying the suburbs. In London, the demand for housing is currently high, as are rents, but the housebuilding target in the current London Plan, of 27,000 new homes by 2036 in strategic locations, is being undershot. One of the main speakers at the meeting reported that at present, only about 8% of the target is being delivered, and he emphasised that this is depriving people of the chance of acquiring their own house or flat. Heritage protection constrains the amount of building that can be done in inner London, and so densifying the suburbs is now taking place in outer boroughs such as Croydon and Brent.



Professor Tony Travers
Patron of the London Forum

Professor Tony Travers, Patron of the London Forum, traced the development of concerns about density, from the intense overcrowding and poor living conditions in 19th century inner London, to 1944 when the Greater London Plan made density standards part of the planning process. The Green Belt was also set in place to contain urban sprawl. Since then, London has experienced first a decline in population, and then fast growth which has since slowed. Professor Travers asked how far the densification of the suburbs now underway is being implemented in

ways that are the best possible, or at least good.

The architect Ben Darbyshire, President of the London Forum, then looked at possible models of development, which included the building of temporary accommodation and homes for those wishing to

downsize, thus underlining two urgent housing problems for local councils – providing temporary accommodation and empty nest households which constrain the amount of available housing.

Speakers from the Outer London boroughs of Waltham Forest and Brent presented their current policies. Justin Carr from Waltham Forest reported that development in Brent will include transformational tall buildings inside the North Circular with a limit of five storeys outside it. Paul Lewin from Brent indicated that growth would occur in Wembley Park with tall buildings to meet housing targets and the housing crisis in the borough. These will bring a substantial change to the borough’s character, though other areas will continue to be low density.

Participants were left in no doubt of the seriousness of the issues involved, and Ben Darbyshire stressed that councils needed to be the main providers of housing if it is to be affordable, since private sector developers, who work on the basis of profit, can only provide a limited percentage of affordable homes among the homes that they build.

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Planning strategically for London's buses - TfL Bus change proposals

Franc David

Transport for London (TfL) conducted a consultation in January about changes to ten or so central London bus routes, five of which come through or near Islington - the 19, 38, 259, 279 and 341. TfL gives two reasons for these proposed changes. The first is that fewer of us are coming into central London post-pandemic, so TfL is running too many buses for too few passengers, and must balance demand. The second is that congestion is making buses unreliable.

Proposed changes

The 19, currently running from Finsbury Park to Battersea Bridge, will terminate at Victoria Station. If you want to continue to Battersea you will have to find another bus to do so.

The 38 from Clapton Ponds will terminate at Holborn instead of Victoria, with reduced frequency on Saturdays, Sundays, and evenings.

The 259 currently running from Edmonton Green to Kings Cross, will now terminate at the Nags Head on the Holloway Road.

The 279 currently running from Waltham Cross to Manor House tube where you can change onto the Piccadilly line, will now stop, exceedingly inconveniently, at Stamford Hill.

The 341 currently runs from Enfield to Waterloo station via Stoke Newington, Islington, and Clerkenwell. The proposal is for it to stop in Haringey.

A new bus route 10 is proposed from Mildmay to Battersea Bridge to provide an alternative service to the 19, but no details are yet available.

Bus users need more support

Age UK London says "All too often changes to bus routes have a negative effect on older Londoners and disabled people who rely heavily on bus travel.

Any changes that have a direct impact on passengers by lengthening their journey, increasing the number of bus changes needed, or leaving gaps with no service available are not acceptable."

All these proposed changes shorten bus routes and fragment journeys. Many of TfL's passengers are older, or less able or are people with young children or parcels, making getting off one bus and waiting for another difficult. And while Underground and Overground lines are being upgraded with new trains and new track, there is still a substantial constituency of bus users who avoid tubes because of cost. Shortening bus routes may give the illusion of better journey times, and will take buses off the road, but these decisions are at the expense of travellers being asked to undertake more time-consuming journeys. (TfL survey '19 and 38 bus routes restructure'; London Evening Standard, "Key London bus routes to be cut as passenger numbers fall"; Secret London, "Some of London's busiest bus routes could soon be facing significant changes and one is set to be axed completely".)

Congestion

Buses in Outer London tend to manage average speeds of over 10 miles an hour, but speeds for inner-city buses are a good deal slower – around 7 mph, for instance, in Westminster and Camden (TfL Board document). Bus speeds were lower in every borough in 2023/24 than they were ten years previously (London Travel Watch). According to the London Assembly, TfL has not met its own bus journey time targets since 2022-2023. (London City Hall).

TfL admits that Low Traffic zones have increased congestion (BBC website 23/1/2026) and road space itself has not always been well managed. For



Buses held up in Highbury traffic jam

instance, TfL data shows that there are over 400 km of cycle lanes in London (for 1.2 million daily cycle journeys) while there are only 300 km of bus lanes, servicing 5 million daily bus journeys - over four times as many. ([london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-london-assembly-does/london-assembly-press-releases/managing-road-space-europes-most-congested-city/](https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-london-assembly-does/london-assembly-press-releases/managing-road-space-europes-most-congested-city/)). The Transport Minister, Lord Hendy, has admitted that the installation of cycle lanes has slowed some bus journeys.

Conclusion

While some rationalisation of bus routes is no doubt needed from time to time, the bus network basically needs to be given a far higher priority in TfL thinking, as London's lifeblood. Many more bus-only lanes are essential. They are not only the main mode of transport for London's older, poorer, and predominantly female inhabitants and for schoolchildren, but they could also take more cars off the road if they started to supply many more of the east-west routes that the tube system fails to provide.

Otherwise, it is only too easy to foresee a continuing downward spiral in which fewer and fewer people use buses as they become endlessly slower and more inconvenient.

The history of the Taverner Estate

Andrew Smith



Taverner Estate – Addington Mansions 1978

I live on the Taverner Estate, in the bit called Peckett Square, and I am helping a new ground-floor tenant make something of their garden so it would be interesting to know what there was in the way of gardens around the flats in their early days.

In the 1978 photo, reproduced here, there are no gardens - just tarmac right up to the doors. But by then the estate was at its lowest ebb. When I was given a key to a flat there in 1981, I had to pass by burning mattresses, yapping dogs, and cars on bricks to reach it. It was acknowledged to be just about the worst all Islington's housing.

I lived in what was effectively a building site for six months, but then it turned into the tidy and

green estate it became for the next 45 years. In its early days it must have been quite smart: there were even complaints that the rents were too high. Its target clientele seeming to include professional people working in the city, suggesting there was in those days less of a stigma against renting your home.

So, did these 'homes fit for heroes', as the Mayor, (quoting Lloyd George), called them, originally have gardens? Is it purely fanciful to think the grass square in the middle of Peckett Square was an Arts & Crafts-inspired recreation of the village green in an urban setting?

I've recently come across the biography of a high-profile, influential landscaper named

Richard Sudell and his mission was 'the beautification of England'. My mother was apprenticed to this man in the 1930s; so it was great to read Richard Gilson's recent biography – 'Behind the Privet Hedge' -showing how this journeyman gardener from Lancashire, and conscientious objector imprisoned during the first world war, became the Monty Don of his day. He was the go-to author for the aspiring gardeners of the private developments of Metroland and the new tenants of local authority properties in the post-war building boom.

Richard Sudell was very active in setting up Garden Groups in the big new social housing estates built after the 1914-18 war – Roehampton, Becontree Heath and others. Addington Mansions seems like a very progressive bit of social housing, and there are discreet suggestions of art deco in its detailing.

Many of the tenants moving into these housing projects would not have had gardens, maybe being re-housed from slum clearance. It seems to me Addington Mansions was exactly the sort of development Sudell would love to have helped beautify.

It would great to have any information as to what the Metropolitan Borough of Islington provided in the way of gardens for the early tenants and how these gardens fared before reaching the dereliction of the 1970s. Can anyone tell me what the Taverner Estate looked like in its early days?



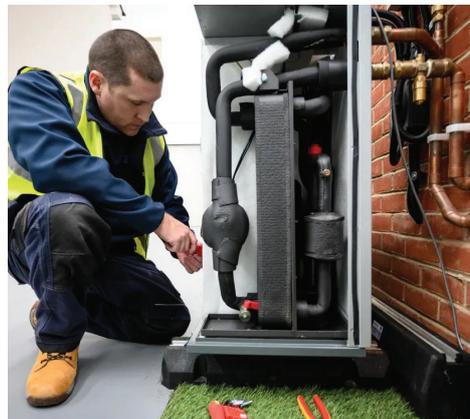
David Fenton

Our one-time HCA Committee member, David Fenton, has sadly just died. His partner Derek died seven months ago, and David was clear from the first that life without him was simply not worth living. He rapidly became depressed and confused, and after a stint in the Whittington, he was moved to Priscilla Wakefield House in Haringey, a nursing home specialising in dementia care. Here he died on 18th February.

Heat pumps: star turn or failure?

Gill Shepherd

About 18 per cent of Britain’s greenhouse gas emissions are produced by home heating, predominantly the gas boilers which we use in 85 per cent of our homes. The government’s plan to solve this is electric heat pumps, which capture energy from the air or ground. But their adoption has been very slow. At the start of this year, only 260,000 of the 28 million homes in Britain had installed one, despite subsidies of up to £7,500 on offer.



The problem, according to green energy tycoon Dale Vince, is that heat pumps are far too expensive. He believes energy policy should be used to lift people out of poverty and that the least best way to do that is currently heat pumps. Many people have had trouble with badly installed heat pump systems, and despite promises of lower bills, customers often report that they end up paying more. Many installers ‘don’t know what they don’t know’, leading to poorly calibrated systems.

Tom Whipple, science writer at The Times, argues that this reveals a problem not with heat pumps, but with economics. ‘These devices are a miracle of physics’, he wrote. ‘They don’t so much make heat as farm it. They take heat from a cold place, outdoors, and put it in a warm place, indoors. In some cases you get four times more energy than you put in.’ The problem is electricity markets. In the past 20 years Britain’s price has become one of the highest in the world. That’s a catastrophe for industry – and for net zero. And with electricity so expensive, shifting consumers from gas to electricity is difficult.

Ed Miliband, the energy secretary, believes he can shift Britain’s economy in a way that will drive down the cost of power. As Tom concluded, ‘If we have a technology audacious enough to mock the laws of thermodynamics, the least we can do is ensure the laws of economics make it worthwhile.’

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Local Gardens to Enjoy This Spring and Summer

Sarah Potter



Local gardens – New River Walk

Drawing on Kirstin Von Glasow’s beautifully illustrated book, *111 Gardens in London That You Shouldn’t Miss*, there are some local gardens here in Islington which are well worth a visit.

The first is **Canonbury Square**, the oldest garden square in Islington, where George Orwell lived from 1944 at no.27b, which is marked by a plaque, and where he wrote parts of *1984*. Evelyn Waugh moved into no.17a when his first satirical novel *Decline and Fall* was published in 1928 and allowed him to get married. In the 1950s, Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant lived at no. 26a. Vanessa Bell, painter and designer, was the sister of Virginia Woolf, and a member of the Bloomsbury Group. The artist Duncan Grant was likewise a member of the Bloomsbury Group. At no. 39a there is now the **Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art**. You can access Canonbury Square by turning left on Upper Street down Canonbury Lane.

The New River Walk in Islington is, according to Kirstin Von Glasow, “hard to find, and locals who know about it jealously guard its secret location.” One way to find it is to

cross St. Paul’s Road and walk down Compton Road, continue straight on down Alwyne Villas, then turn left into Alwyne Road. When you reach a right turn into Willow Bridge Road, you will see the New River Walk on your left. It is lined by great variety of trees and used by ducks and moorhens.

Spa Fields Park, just off Rosebery Avenue, was the site of a major political event in 1816, when 10,000 people gathered to hear Henry Hunt seeking support for a petition for universal suffrage, annual general elections, and the secret ballot. This event led him to be awarded the title Orator Hunt, although a second demonstration attracting 20,000 people turned violent. Nevertheless, his tactic of mass pressure radicalised many, bearing fruit in the long term. Today the park is a popular green space, with facilities for children and sport, and is very near **Exmouth Market**, where people enjoy a cup of coffee sitting outside. To reach Spa Fields Park, take the 19 bus, and dismount near Sadlers Wells Theatre. Turn left when Exmouth Market is on your right.



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