

HIGHBURY COMMUNITY NEWS

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What has been going wrong at Thames Water? Gill Shepherd



We report on an interview with Clifford Roney (in *The Londoner*, 2 September 2026), a recently retired engineer who worked for Thames Water for years. He has been working with Feargal Sharkey, the water campaigner, to bring Thames Water back into public ownership. In his view, these were the main factors leading to the company's collapse.

Privatization and Asset Stripping The privatization of Thames Water in 1989 led to a culture of selling off essential infrastructure (e.g. pumping stations, booster plants). This short-term profit-driven approach reduced the company's operational resilience and capacity, especially now heatwaves have driven much higher demand than in the past.

Chronic Underinvestment and Neglect Years of insufficient investment in infrastructure maintenance and upgrades have left the network decaying, with Victorian-era mains frequently failing and not enough funds for meaningful repairs or replacements. The network is fighting a thousand leaks a week and spills raw sewage into the Thames and its tributaries 25 times a day on average.

Pressure to Meet Regulatory Targets Management prioritized meeting leakage reduction targets by lowering water pressure, slowing the leaks. This did not address the underlying causes and actually worsened wear
(Continued on page 2)

STOP PRESS

We will hold the Highbury Community Association Annual General Meeting on

Friday evening 30th October at 7.15 for 7.30, at the Gillespie Park Ecology Centre.

We have chosen a Friday evening to avoid potential clashes with Arsenal men's and women's football matches.

Our speaker this year is Caroline Russell, who has just retired as a Highbury Ward Councillor to concentrate more fully on her important work at the London Assembly. Her talk will be followed by a social over food and drink.

We hope to see you there – please put the date in your diary!



What has been going wrong at Thames Water? – continued from front page

on old pipe joints, leading to more frequent leaks. Old Victorian mains consist of cast-iron pipes with lead joints. When you get dry periods in London, the London clay dries out and you get cracks in the clay. This enables old cast-iron pipes to move by a millimetre or two and they crack. If you keep reducing and increasing the pressure on a lead joint, in the end it breaks. Reducing pressure to mend one leak, and then increasing it again can generate other leaks on other joints.

Mismanagement Post-Private Equity Ownership

Before privatisation, Thames Water was run like a military operation - indeed lots of the engineers came from the Army or the Navy. Everything was meticulously maintained. Ownership by the Australian asset management firm Macquarie, and similar firms, focused on cost-cutting, divestment of assets, and large dividend extraction—leaving the company poorly equipped to handle operational challenges and deeply in debt.

Workforce Challenges and Expertise Loss

Experienced engineers and skilled staff have left amid difficult working conditions and lack of recruitment, resulting in a loss of institutional knowledge. This has created a 'brain drain' and further undermined the company's capacity to recover or improve.

Dysfunctional Management Culture

The management's repeated "turnaround plans" have done little to address root issues. Staff morale declined as management failed to acknowledge or act on engineering concerns. Gradually qualified, skilled water workers, who had learnt their trade through years of experience, disappeared.

Impact on Public and Environment The result has been frequent leaks, flooding, and significant pollution events (such as raw sewage discharges) affecting communities and the environment.

"We were once the finest water company in the world, but now unavoidable infrastructure aging has been hugely exacerbated by a systemic decline rooted in poor financial, operational, and management choices".



Not another match?

How to find out what's happening at Arsenal's Emirates Stadium

Richard Smith

If you're not sure when the next Arsenal men's or women's match is taking place, or if there's a major event at the Emirates Stadium, there is now a single place to find out. Go to: <https://help.arsenal.com/support/solutions/articles/101000594163-fixture-and-event-timings-for-local-residents> This location is different from the one being used last year.

Not exactly memorable, but save that on your mobile or computer and you'll see everything that's planned. And the club promises to keep it up to date when fixtures and times change. (Often the case – though it's not Arsenal's fault: it's the TV companies, rearranging the original schedules because they fancy a match for broadcasting, and they take their time in deciding).

The club will also send you a regular email about fixtures if you register on <https://www.arsenal.com/local-residents-information> though the group of local neighbours and councillors who lobbied the club to make all this

information available, is aware that the emails don't always arrive, or if they do, it's too close to the event for people to change their personal arrangements. The best bet is to keep checking the above 'fixture and event timings for local residents' webpage.

Unusually, one set of fixtures has been nailed down well in advance this season - those around Christmas. Supporters nagged the Premier League about needing to plan for holiday arrangements, so those games immediately around the festive season won't change. But, again, it's still always advisable to keep checking, to be sure.

You can also see the upcoming fixtures on a board outside Arsenal tube station, if you live near there. There is a list of regulations around road closures and parking, on <https://help.arsenal.com/support/solutions/articles/101000594179-important-matchday-travel-information-for-local-residents>. You probably know all this already! But just in case...

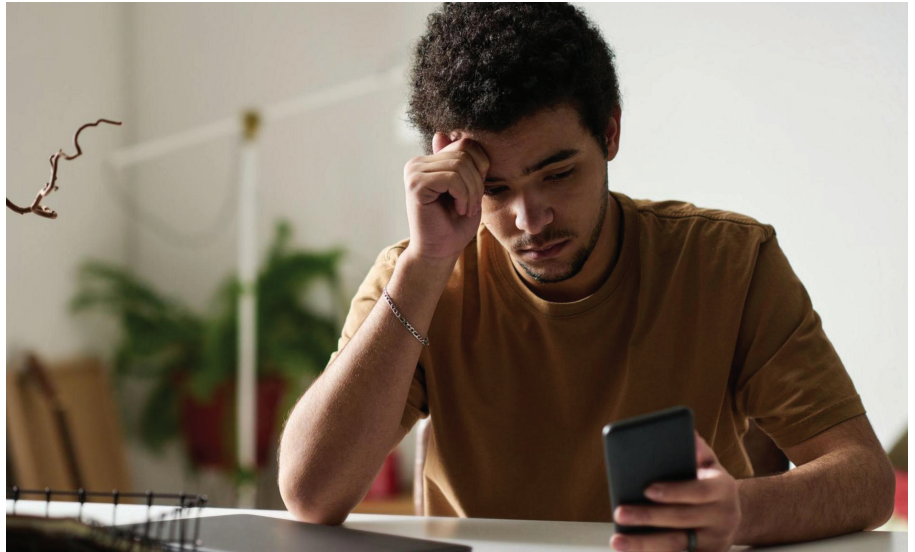
What are the main drivers of the Neets problem

Sarah Potter

In November 2025, Alan Milburn, a former Health Secretary, was asked to review the evidence on Neets – those not in Employment, Education or Training – and consider the policy options. In the UK, there are a million plus young people aged 16-24, that is 13.4% of the age group, the highest since the 2010s, and we are well down the international league table in this respect. Milburn produced his interim report in May. In an article in the London Review of Books on 13th August 2026, William Davis reviews the evidence now available on our Neets problem.

Many of us will be aware of the problem from press reports, but what brought it home for me was an email from a local Islington charity saying that “recent research shows that young people in Islington are more than twice as likely as the national average to be out of education, employment or training”, and proposing a meeting to explore this issue, the better to support young people.

What is different about Neets now is that is that they are not unemployed as they were in the deindustrialisation of the 1980s. They are economically inactive, receiving support from disability benefits or their families. It is in part the rise in youth disability, doubling since 2016, which accounts for the rise in the number of Neets, especially anxiety, depression, autism and ADHD.



In his interim report Milburn writes that a fall has occurred in the ‘functional capacity’ of young people. William Davis also cites research by the University of Manchester and UCL, which suggests first that economic insecurity is linked with indicators of stress and disability. Second is the reduction of services for children and young people. Third, there is a link with phones and social media. Lastly, worsening sleep quality apparently figures in much of the evidence on Neets and mental health.

A recent survey of the problem by the Department for Work and Pensions (‘Young people and work report’, August 2026) also looks at the challenges which young people now face, regardless of their own

personal situation, in entering the world of work. Findings suggest that educational attainment alone is no longer sufficient to secure positive outcomes. Many respondents, including graduates, reported difficulty accessing suitable opportunities because there were so few entry-level vacancies. Employers asked regularly for previous experience, but this was very hard to obtain. Many felt that the education system had not adequately prepared them for employment.

It is clear, as both Alan Milburn and Andy Burnham have stated, that work experience now needs to be built into the secondary school curriculum and that proper apprenticeship schemes need to be revived and supported by government to a far greater extent.

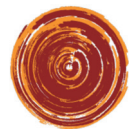
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Preparing for next year's El Niño

Gill Shepherd

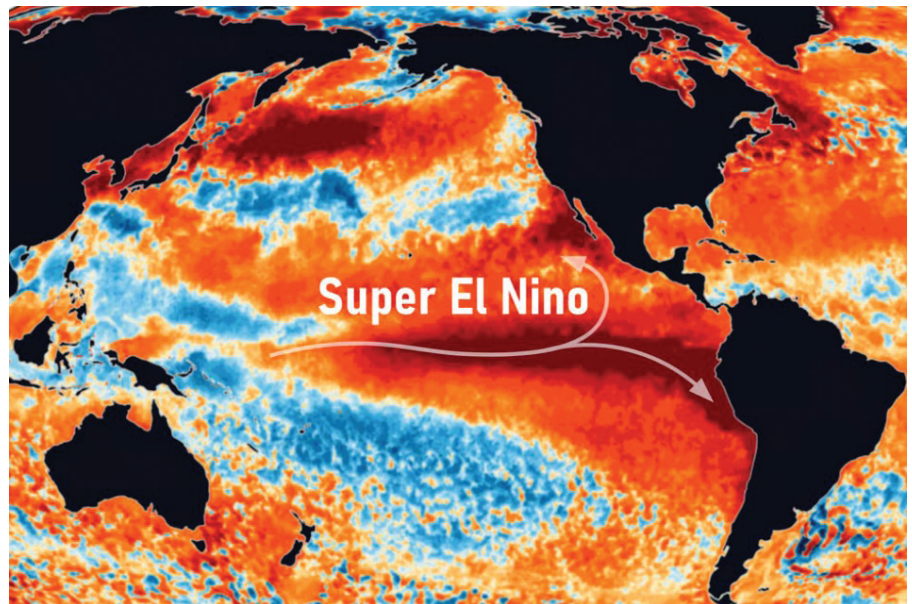
The El Niño phenomenon

El Niño is a phenomenon occurring every few years in which the westerly trade winds which normally blow warm water currents in the Pacific towards Asia slacken, and warm water flows back towards the Americas. (The warmer water arrives around Christmas-time in South America and so was christened 'El Niño' – the Christ child- by Peruvian fishermen). The heat stored in the ocean rises into the atmosphere instead, changing weather patterns around the world.

The El Niño which will occur this Autumn and throughout next year is described as exceptionally strong, potentially unmatched for at least a thousand years. El Niño, this time, is unfolding on a much hotter baseline caused by fossil fuel pollution. This combination intensifies heat extremes, drought, wildfire conditions, floods, and other hazards. The effects extend beyond weather to threaten food supplies, water availability, public health, trade and livelihoods. Experts frame this as evidence of escalating climate risk, emphasising that continued fossil fuel use raises the baseline temperature on which future El Niño events will occur.

The global food system and El Niño

The current global food system is poorly adapted for dealing with El Niño, composed as it is of long global supply chains, and animal-feed-oriented agriculture. Modern agriculture's dependence on fossil fuels and synthetic fertiliser intensifies greenhouse gas emissions, and in the long run a shift must take place towards more agroecological, plant-centred food production that improves resilience, cuts emissions, and prioritises feeding people.



However, fossil fuel interests have promoted weak climate responses because they conflict with short-term financial gains.

Implications for London

The city will be exposed to flooding from North Sea storm surges and swollen rivers, and intense rainfall that overwhelms urban drainage. Subsidence, drought and high temperatures over a long period of time are other risks. Practical adaptations urgently required include rain gardens, landscapes capable of holding water in the soil, and climate-adapted upgrades to transport, homes, and hospitals. Climate resilience will depend on the taking of long- term urban-design responsibility.

Action at household level

Household action is important but this is not a full solution. It is recommended, in case of an El Niño -related emergency, that long-life foods are stockpiled: tinned beans, vegetables and fish, oats, dried staples, and modest treats such as chocolate and crisps. Ideally water should be stored at the rate of 7 to 12 litres per person per day.

Some people are also adding to their emergency supplies battery-powered torches, power banks, camping stoves and analogue radios. Others have decided to stockpile cash in case of Internet or electricity breakdowns. Such personal reserves buy time during an emergency.

Action nationally

Our government has so far offered only limited guidance on these matters, compared with the more detailed preparedness advice given in countries such as Switzerland, Germany and Sweden. But it is clear that food security requires much greater government foresight and much stronger food system resilience. Perhaps next year's El Niño will be a wake-up call for the longer-term planning now required.

(Sources:

'Godzilla El Niño: what should Londoners do to prepare?' *Standard* 10/3/26. 'Worried Britain's prepping for major disruption' *Guardian* 9/5/26. 'A jaw-dropping El Niño bursts through temperature records months before peak'. *Guardian* 21/9/26).

Archway Campus Development

Highgate Society

The Mayor of London is now consulting on revised plans for the Archway Campus, after calling in Islington Council's decision to refuse the development on 14 separate planning grounds.

The revised proposed scheme from developers still includes a 27 storey, 82 m high student tower and 242 student rooms, while at the same time the number of homes has fallen from 178 to 167 and affordable homes have fallen from 91 to just 39.

The original scheme was refused:

- ◆ because the 27-storey tower is completely out of scale with Archway and with adjacent buildings. Standing at the bottom of Highgate Hill, it is a structure which will reach higher than Highgate Village itself. The tower conflicts with both Islington's local plan and with the London plan as far as tall buildings are concerned, and it sets a damaging precedent across London. The tower would not only harm the historic Holborn Union Infirmary Buildings and Conservation Area; it would intrude on important and protected views towards St Paul's Cathedral.
- ◆ The number of affordable homes has been slashed from 91 to just 39, on a site which was expected to deliver significant affordable housing.
- ◆ The scheme retains all 242 student rooms although there is no demand for so much student accommodation in this location. Islington already has the second-highest quantity of student accommodation of any London borough, and there is no arrangement with a university or any other higher education provider for these rooms. Indeed, none of the 242 rooms are affordable, and they will be rented out at market rates. Conventional housing is Islington's most urgent need, not yet more student accommodation. Unfortunately, developers often prefer to build student flats to escape high traditional building costs and stringent affordable housing requirements.
- ◆ Nearly 70% of the 167 proposed homes would be one- or two-bedroom properties and the scheme remains overly weighted towards smaller homes rather than the family-sized housing that the borough needs.
- ◆ A lower scheme could still provide a large number of new homes, restore the historic buildings, and deliver regeneration without inflicting such extensive and permanent harm. This is what 13 local Residents' Associations, led by the Highgate Society and including the Islington Society, have been campaigning for.

The opportunity for local objections ended on 5th October. GLA officers will now prepare a report and there will then be a public Mayoral Representation Hearing towards the end of this year.



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The Draft New London Plan

Sarah Potter

The London Forum, where local amenity societies such as the HCA meet to discuss key planning issues affecting life in London, organised a session on 14th September at which three members of the planning team for the New London Plan explained its key aspects. The Plan sets out how London's housing needs over the next ten years will be met. The aim is that the Plan should be adopted in early March 2028, after a consultation period and a public examination.

The target is to build 850,000 new homes, of which 50% should be affordable. Of these, there is a 60/40 split in favour of social rent. There is also provision for key-worker living rent. The plan has good growth objectives, which are making the best use of land, delivering the homes and neighbourhoods that Londoners need, growing the economy in a way that benefits all, and creating a greener, more resilient and healthier city.

The spatial strategy, identifies locations for growth and new types of opportunity areas, and prioritises brownfield sites and transport hubs. It aspires to maintain the sustainability of the Green Belt, minimising its release for housing.

Accessible green space policies provide that there should be no net loss, and that major developments must prioritise the provision of green space.

Accommodating this growth in housing in London will rely partly on pre-existing planning permissions, on using small sites more effectively, and on only using Green Belt sites near railway stations. There will be



heritage-related policies to protect UNESCO- designated sites. Our speakers emphasised that realistic targets are needed in local boroughs and that in the next five years, delivery of new housing will be slow; this seems a very fair conclusion.

The London Forum meeting was followed, as it happens, by a meeting of the London Real Estate Forum two

weeks later. Speakers stressed that public-private sector development was the way forward and indeed the New London Plan seeks to place public bodies in the master developer role. However, whatever the mechanism, if materials are too expensive and people cannot afford to buy the homes being built, the funding arrangements are irrelevant.

Furthermore, it was noted that some proposed greenbelt developments simply do not marry up with reality. High density levels within 400 meters of stations in outer London, akin to those found in high-rise inner London are hard to visualise. Who would want to live in a tower block in a semi-countryside area? And will the stations selected be able to cope with large numbers of new passengers in the morning peak, without competing with the needs of existing passengers further down the line towards central London?

The London Plan is a draft for a reason. It provides a wide range of bodies – and the general public – with a chance to discuss what London needs, and to work out the difference between the essential and the ‘nice to have’.

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NOCTURNAL BAT ACTIVITY SURVEY REPORT

Aubert Court Estate Gardens, Highbury, London

Prepared For: Highbury Community Association

by Ecologist Charlotte Pink (Natural England Class 2 Bat Licence)

Introduction

A nocturnal bat activity survey was conducted at the communal green estate grounds of Aubert Court Estate, Highbury, London, N5 in August 2026. The assessment was commissioned to establish the presence and spatial foraging patterns of bat species.

The target survey location contained the communal lawns and structural mature trees linking Aubert Court and Drakeley Court. Despite its inner-city location, the site was shown to serve as part of an essential local ecological corridor. It provides a clear foraging and commuting stepping-stone across the built environment, connecting directly to major wildlife habitats nearby. Specifically, the site sits approximately 250 metres northeast of Highbury Fields (an 11.75-hectare tree-lined area) and 400 metres south of Gillespie Park Local Nature Reserve, providing high-value structural integration for regional bat populations.

All UK wild bat species and their roosts are granted strict statutory protection under national legislation. This comprises the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. Under these, it is a criminal offence to capture, injure, or kill a bat, or to damage, destroy, or obstruct access to any ecological roosting feature.



These bats are tiny, each weighing about the same as a 20p piece. And each consumes about 3,000 insects a night.

The two main bat species identified were the pipistrelle and the soprano pipistrelle. These bats are tiny, each weighing about the same as a 20p piece. And each consumes about 3,000 insects a night.

Methods and Results

Field methods were used in strict compliance with the Bat Conservation Trust (BCT) Good Practice Guidelines. Batlogger M and Echometer Touch bat detectors were used to record bat calls and to gather data bat passes at the location in the middle of the south lawn and under tree canopy. Active edge foraging along the tree line and over the grass was noted, and also commuting corridor movement. Acoustic data sonograms were subsequently extracted, filtered, and verified utilising full-spectrum audio processing software (Kaleidoscope Pro) to track pass rates and spatial habitat utilization.

Evaluation

The data confirms that Aubert Court Estate supports active urban populations of Common Pipistrelle and Soprano Pipistrelle bats, with minor commuting usage by high-flying species like Noctules. No active roosting behavior was identified within the canopy zones during the active tracking window, though the site represents vital foraging infrastructure supporting nearby colonies at Highbury Fields.

How to report Urgent Road-Related Emergencies

Occasionally, road emergencies such as burst water pipes or major road accidents, which make it hard for drivers to get out of the LTNs where they live, have necessitated interaction with the Council out of hours or at the weekend, so that normally closed camera filters can be opened. Until recently the only option was to call councillors for help. However, a new call service has now been set up.

This Street Works call-out number is to cover urgent/emergency issues relating to temporary works that cannot be deferred to the next working day. Residents need to call the main Council number, **020 7527 2000**. They will hear an announcement explaining that the Council is closed, but will then be presented with a range of options, including **option 6** for road-related issues.

During the working day, emails to streetworks@islington.gov.uk and mark.wilson@islington.gov.uk are the way to report such problems.

Queries related to more general issues regarding the day-to-day function of LTNs, will be responded to during working hours by Matthew Bonomi (Mathew.Bonomi@islington.gov.uk) or one of his team.

Dusty Knuckle arrives in Highbury

Gill Shepherd

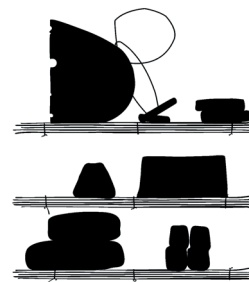
The celebrated bakery 'Dusty Knuckle' will shortly be opening a new branch in Highbury in premises at 81 Blackstock Road more or less opposite Ambler School. Their first shop was in Dalston, and their second in Haringey on Green Lanes. More recently they have been running a van café on Highbury Fields.

The enterprise, created by three childhood friends, began in 2014. The brand is regularly named among the best bakeries in the country, not only for its delicious sourdough loaves and pastries, but also because it has, from the start, aimed to mentor and train as bakers, young people who face barriers to employment.

What distinguishes Dusty Knuckle from traditional artisanal bakeries is its core commitment to helping young adults aged 18 to 25 into a viable career pathway. The program accepts referrals from prisons, youth justice partners, charities and mental health services and aims to help young offenders, young people exiting the foster care system, those in insecure housing, refugees and asylum seekers. It's youth programme offers immersive, real-world training for young people facing severe systemic barriers to employment. The initiative has so far provided life-altering support to over 250 individuals.

The bakery uses its extensive employer network across London to place those who have completed their 12-week training course, and is successful in helping over 70% of its graduates into long-term paid work, training, or further education. The bakery embeds dedicated caseworkers into daily kitchen operations, to help young people progress into stable hospitality careers.

Owing to its immense social impact and the quality of its bread, Dusty Knuckle was awarded Time Out's 'Best Bakery in London' and also won a prestigious Kings Enterprise Award in 2025



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