



Your independent community newspaper

WALTHAM FOREST ECHO

Free
June 2022, No. 87

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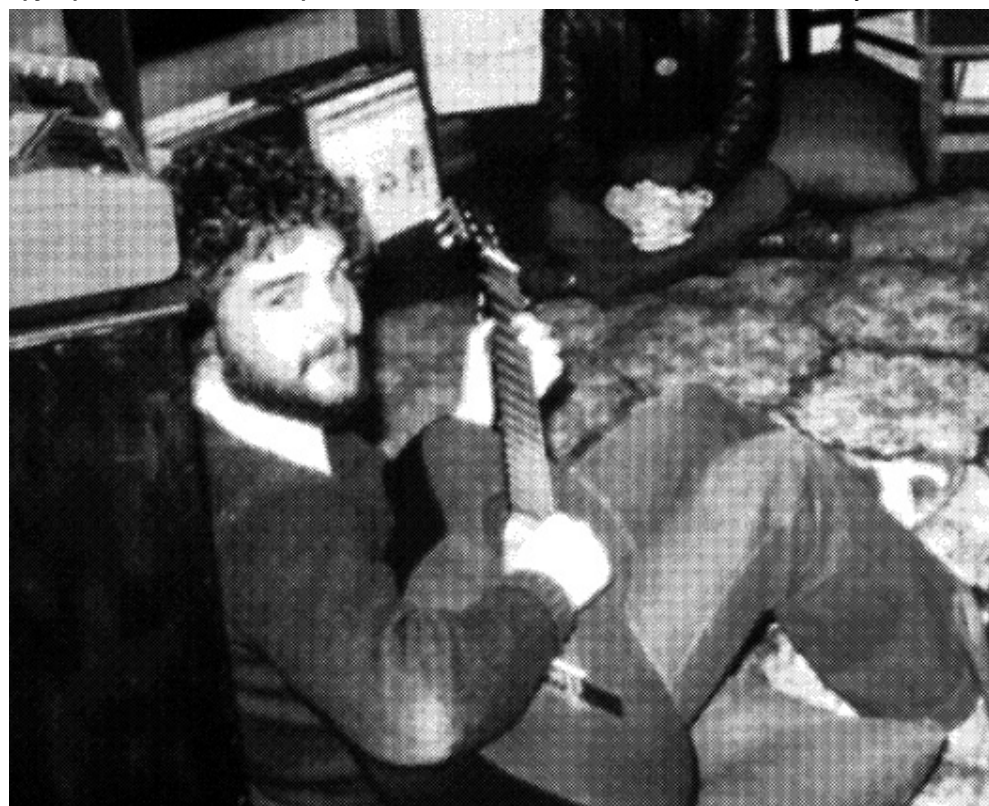
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Julia Poynter as a young woman with spy cop "Phil Cooper" Credit UCPI/courtesy of Julia Poynter



Spy cop "Vince Miller", who slept with four women while undercover Credit UCPI/courtesy of "Madeleine"



The sordid story of Walthamstow's spy cops

by Victoria Munro

Until recently, Julia Poynter remembered the cop who spied on her for three years in the late 1970s as "one of the loveliest people [she'd] ever met".

In 1977, the Leytonstone 65-year-old was a young woman chasing Nazis out of the East End when she met "Vince Miller", a new member of the Walthamstow branch of the Socialist Workers Party.

Vince was immediately popular in the small group of 20 to 30 activists, which met regularly in Ye Olde Rose & Crown pub, and was eventually elected treasurer, giving him access to members' bank details.

None of the activists he befriended – least of all a woman

identified only as "Madeleine", who he dated for months – suspected for a second he was reporting back to a highly secretive unit within the Met Police, tasked by the Home Office with infiltrating "subversive" groups.

As revealed by the Undercover Policing Inquiry, which concluded its latest round of hearings on 20th May, he and later another undercover officer, "Phil Cooper", spent years reporting on the meetings and personal lives of the borough's left-wing activists.

Speaking to the *Echo*, Julia said: "I'm not 'subversive' at all, I've never been arrested. When you think how much it cost the taxpayer for them to spy on us, it's just pathetic."

"It was a really cushy job, spying on a group of nice people.

They didn't go to spy on the [fascist group] National Front, did they?"

"They wrote in lots of the reports that the meetings were very tedious and boring but then why were they bothering? They had 62 reports on me and I was not a leading light or anything, I was very shy back then."

"It needs to come out in the open and the Met needs to be exposed for what they have been doing for decades. We were in a legitimate protest movement and we were spied on."

So far the inquiry, which began in 2015 and is not expected to finish until 2026, has heard undercover officers infiltrated at least 1,000 mainly left-wing groups since 1968, including environmental campaigners and the families of murder victims like

Stephen Lawrence.

Numerous female activists, including Madeleine, have given evidence about being seduced by spy cops, including some who lived with or even had children with these officers.

Madeleine previously told the inquiry she now views her months-long relationship with Vince, which started shortly after the breakdown of her abusive marriage, as rape and that she felt "physically sick" after learning his real name.

Vince was really Vincent James Harvey, who went on to become director of the National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS). Last year, he admitted having one-night stands with at least four women while undercover, although Julia remembers his

relationship with Madeleine as far more serious.

In her statement to the inquiry, Julia wrote: "It was clearly not a one-night stand. I recall 'Madeleine' telling me how disappointed she was when Vince ended the relationship after a few months."

"I knew she had grown fond of him and she seemed very sad following the break-up. It was clear to me at the time that it had been a significant relationship for her."

Phil, meanwhile, insisted he never slept with any women while spying, although Julia finds this doubtful and hopes press attention may encourage any former partners to come forward.

She says Phil clearly "went off the rails" while infiltrating the group,

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NEWS



FELLOWSHIP IS LIFE

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An SUV targeted by the group
Credit: Tyre Extinguishers

Activist group targets Walthamstow SUVs

An activist group deflated the tyres of 40 SUVs in Walthamstow as part of the fight against climate change.

In a press statement sent to the *Echo*, "The Tyre Extinguishers" said their goal is to make it "impossible to own a huge polluting 4x4 in the world's urban areas".

They "disarmed" the cars overnight on 19th May, adding that they are a "disaster for our health, our public safety and our climate".

A spokesperson for the group said: "Waltham Forest has some of the worst air pollution in London and we won't solve this air quality crisis with more and more unnecessary gas guzzling SUVs clogging up our streets."

"People might say that drivers have the right to drive whatever car they wish but, let's be honest, their right comes at the expense of everyone's right to breathe clean air, to be safe on our roads and have a liveable climate."

"We all know which is more important and it's not flaunting your wealth in urban areas in an off-road vehicle that has never seen a speck of mud."

Since March, the group claims to have "disarmed" over 3,000 SUVs in at least five countries.

GP hopes to almost double patients in new £1.4m home

Walthamstow GP practice moved into a new £1.4million building last month with the goal of almost doubling its patient list in the next 15 years.

The Lime Tree and Sinnott Healthcare practice moved from Sinnott Road into a new "state-of-the-art" building in the Sutherland Road development on 30th May.

The local NHS states that the goal of the move is to allow the practice, which currently has 6,500 registered patients, to expand to up to 10,000 patients over the next 15 years.

They also state the practice will "benefit from investment in digital technologies to facilitate self-monitoring, allowing patients to take greater control of their own care".

William Cunningham-Davis, director of primary care for the North East London NHS, said: "[This] is the first of many planned projects to transform the healthcare system in Waltham Forest."

"Our vision is to provide local residents with healthcare facilities that are fit for the 21st century and provide our practice teams with modern buildings to future-proof for increased demand on primary care."

Thousands invested in borough's Covid recovery

Tens of thousands of pounds are being invested in Waltham Forest by the London Recovery Board, tasked with helping the city bounce back from Covid.

The board is co-chaired by Mayor of London Sadiq Khan and the chair of London Councils and features leaders from business, health, education, unions and the police.

At least £70,000 is being poured into regeneration projects for the north of the borough, while a Walthamstow non-profit received £9,000 to explore the impact of Covid on young people.

Meanwhile a number of industry "hubs" will help residents from the borough struggling to find work in their chosen field.

A spokesperson for London Recovery Board said: "As a city, we are facing the most challenging period in recent history. The economic, social and health impact of coronavirus cannot be overstated."

"We need to restore confidence in the city, minimise

the impact on London's most vulnerable communities and rebuild the city's economy and society."

The biggest chunk of funding announced is £50,000 given to Waltham Forest Council to spend researching how to make Chingford Town Centre more child-friendly.

The funded study is "testing a range of new ways... that children and young people can directly help to shape local policy and development" and will inform future plans for Chingford Mount.

A further £20,000 has gone to Highams Park CIC, a community organisation set up by residents in 2017 "with the aim of delivering projects for local people".

It will be used to reimagine the high street "to better suit the needs of the growing, younger and more diverse population... creating an active community space as a base for regular craft and food markets".

The Mayor of London also funded a "creative

industries hub" in the borough, run by the council and Walthamstow arts school Big Creative Academy.

The hub, based in the academy's new £21million building in Clifton Avenue, will help residents from the borough and surrounding areas "into roles in theatre, film & TV, craft skills and animation".

Last year, MVP Media, a social enterprise based in Walthamstow's CRATE, won a £9,000 grant to create "Break Bread and Build - The Podcasts", a public conversation between local young people and a series of experts.

Six teenagers from disadvantaged backgrounds investigated social issues and created a series of podcasts giving their view, with relevant experts creating reaction videos in response.

In January, MVP were awarded a further £1.5k to continue to expand on this work via a Top Up grant.

This article is the first part of a project supported by the Greater London Authority's Civic Futures programme. In part two, we will talk to local people about their views on and experiences of the GLA's work on Covid recovery

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INTERVIEW



Hughie and Gunel in the salon Credit: Harness & Mane



The salon's shibari-inspired wall Credit: Harness & Mane



The cage in their toilet Credit: Harness & Mane

Inside Europe's only 'fetish-themed hair salon'

by Victoria Munro

As far as its owners can tell, Walthamstow's Harness & Mane is the only fetish-themed hairdresser in Europe – if not the world.

Husband and wife Hughie and Gunel Kelly first opened their business in 2019 with some understated nods to the kink community but, following a refurbishment early last year, have more fully embraced its aesthetic in their Forest Road space.

From an entire wall inspired by shibari – Japanese rope bondage – to padded stocks and a cage in the toilet, their decor, Hughie explains, is meant to be obvious to those “that know the scene” without alienating their more buttoned-up clientele.

Meanwhile, their openness to all life and hairstyles, plus a gender-neutral pricing structure, makes them popular with those on the fringes, whether that's

dancers from Hackney strip clubs or the transgender community.

Hairstylist Gunel, 34, who her husband describes as a “card-carrying goth”, definitely looks the part but Hughie, 44, would not attract a second glance in even the most rural neighbourhoods and admits he “is not really part of any particular subculture”.

The pair met “the traditional way” eleven years ago, in a pub in Stoke Newington, when Hughie spotted her with “purple hair, a black leather jacket down to her ankles” and looking as if she “maybe hadn't gone home since the night before”.

While he had his own interest, Gunel was his proper introduction into the sex club scene, which the pair have been heavily involved in ever since. Speaking to the *Echo* on 19th May, they were getting ready to travel to Berlin to attend the annual German Fetish Ball.

Sat outside the shop and occasionally greeted by passing

acquaintances, including a mum pushing a pram, Hughie said the salon has yet to receive any complaints about their unusual niche.

“I think society has changed, people are more tolerant and open,” he said, “Even though we bill ourselves as a fetish hair salon, we very much have all types of customers, there's professional families that have been coming here for years and are perfectly happy with it.

“That said, definitely a couple of customers I think would thank Gunel for introducing them to the scene. Being a hairstylist is almost like being a counsellor, there's something anonymous about going to a salon that makes people feel freer to flesh out their curiosities.

“Working here requires the right attitude and an openness to accept people for who they are. We make sure staff are aware of things about gender identity and being respectful, plus our booking

system lets people indicate their pronouns if they wish.”

While those less au fait with the scene might imagine a stream of mohawks and other unusual dos, Gunel said most of her alternative clients are “quite length-conscious” because of their work as performers or models.

Instead their self-expression comes in the form of hair dye – “deep, rich colours” in winter and then more “pink, orange and yellow” in summer – and they are certainly in excellent hands, given the salon won Colour Expert at this year's Hair Magazine Awards.

Otherwise, Gunel's main innovation is her pricing, based on the length of a customer's hair rather than their gender. She said: “I had a really tough time when I started because people just couldn't understand how a man's haircut could cost as much as a woman's. But, if it takes me an hour each to do two people's hair, why should the man pay less?

“It didn't sit right with me and I decided to challenge that, I know I'm not the first in the industry to do so.”

Regarding their unique branding, she said: “We didn't want to keep our individual lives almost like a secret, it's definitely not one. I've been on the fetish scene personally for over 15 years.”

The goal, Hughie added, was to have Harness & Mane one day become not just a salon but a “hub for people who feel that they are sex-positive” in the community.

Already they host regular events, including a shibari class planned for later this year, and sell clothing and accessories, a range they hope to expand. Also up for expansion is the space itself, although it remains to be seen whether that will be through moving to a new building or opening a second location.

In the meantime, visit Harness & Mane at 289 Forest Rd, E17 6HD or find out more on their website: harnessandmane.com

NEWS

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given his reputation at the time for drinking and smoking weed, which he has since justified by insisting he “needed to live a ‘full alternative lifestyle’ in all aspects”.

Julia added: “[Through the inquiry, we learned that] the officers used to spend months in the back office growing out their hair and beards. They called the men [they spied on] ‘hairies’ and the women ‘wearies’, although some were quite happy to sleep with these women they found so tiring.

“I never had any suspicions about either of them. The only thing Madeleine picked up on was that Vince always seemed to wear a white shirt when most other people were in t-shirts.

“All of our meetings were open to the public and a few times we did have some shifty bloke come along and think he was probably [an officer]. And there’s bloody Vincent sitting in the middle of us and we didn’t have a clue.

“He was lovely, kind, considerate and easy to talk to... but really there was no such person. I felt quite upset when I found out, I thought he had been a real

good friend. We even had a leaving party for him at my house when we thought he was going to America [when his mission ended] but of course he didn’t really go anywhere.”

In her witness statement to the inquiry, Julia also recalls noticing Vince could always afford full pints at the pub when most other members bought half-pints to save money and that he didn’t share their taste in music, something she recalls he was teased for at the time.

Part of Phil’s cover identity was that he worked for a company delivering marble and she remembers he once gifted her a slab of marble, which she still has in her garden today.

“I’ve got no idea why,” she told the *Echo*, “Maybe I had a conversation

with him and let it be known I liked marble.”

Despite the anger, hurt and betrayal of discovering two of her friends from this period were

lying and informing on her, Julia insists her memories of her youthful activism have not been soured.

Through her involvement in the SWP, she got involved in the Anti-Nazi League, formed in response to a fascist campaign of terror against Black and Asian communities in the East End.

In 1981, she recalls, criminals poured petrol through the letterbox of an Asian family in Walthamstow’s Priory Court estate, killing Parveen Khan and her three children, including her two-year-old Imran.

Julia told the *Echo*: “We were doing what we believed in and we made a difference. We got the National Front off the streets and I’m really proud of that. I still really believe in all this stuff.

“The National Front would go up and down Brick Lane smashing shop fronts. I found my diary from 1979 and nearly every night we were out doing something in East London because they were so active.

“If they had meetings we would protest outside, we would leaflet with anti-racist messaging and we used to go out painting out their slogans on walls.

“It was really scary, a lot of them were used to having a fight. I did get thumped coming back from a Rock Against Racism gig in Islington, a group surrounded us and started punching and kicking us.”

Like many involved in the Undercover Policing Inquiry, which is shaping up to be the longest ever public inquiry in the UK and will not sit again for two years, she is frustrated by how long it is taking and fears the end result will be a “whitewash”.

She also has no doubt police are still infiltrating left-wing groups to this day, particularly environmental campaigns.

She added: “Now it’s probably a lot easier, the police can just hack your phone to track you, they don’t have to move in and live with you.”

Julia’s membership card for the Anti-Nazi League



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JUNE 2-5

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JUNE 2

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FROM MIDDAY

MASSAOKE

7.30PM-LATE

DAY 2

FRIDAY
JUNE 3

CARIBBEAN CARNIVAL

AND REGGAE SOUND SYSTEM
12PM-LATE

DAY 3

SATURDAY
JUNE 4

BRITISH ICONS FANCY DRESS

FT. JAGUAR SKILLS

FAMILY DISCO: 2-5PM

LATE NIGHT PARTY: 8PM-LATE

DAY 4

SUNDAY
JUNE 5

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FROM MIDDAY



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COMMENT

'Tories can't victim-blame their way out of this crisis'

Leyton MP John Cryer on the suggestion food bank users 'learn to cook'

Conservative MP Lee Anderson made headlines last month for his commentary on the cost-of-living crisis. According to him, those who rely on food banks would not need them if only they "learned to cook". I feel extremely sorry for anybody in his constituency who may be struggling with rapid rises in household bills and thinking about reaching out for help.

My staff and I speak to those suffering as a result of the deep-rooted cost-of-living crisis every single day and their problems are far, far larger than a lack of culinary expertise. There is, for example, recent inflation, driven in part by factors like Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Fuel prices have risen massively since the conflict began, with food prices following thanks to both countries' status as massive global exporters of wheat. There is also a labour shortage across Europe,



John Cryer MP
Credit Parliament.uk

America and beyond.

Under such circumstances, we look to the government of the day to provide relief. However, not only has this government failed to respond to these pressures, they have actively contributed to rising living costs by refusing

to cancel the National Insurance rise: more or less the most regressive way of raising revenue you can find short of bringing back the Sheriff of Nottingham.

Meanwhile, housing costs are creating hardship on a massive scale. The limit on the amount tenants can claim in Housing Benefit or Universal Credit towards their rent, known as the Local Housing Allowance (LHA), is frozen and the government refuses to thaw it despite soaring rents. The upshot, in London, is a rent shortfall for over 40% of claimants. Taken together with the devastating impact of longstanding Conservative policies, such as the benefit cap and the Bedroom Tax, this government's choices are having a devastating impact on families in Waltham Forest.

London's Mayor has asked for powers to control rents, which other global cities like New York and Berlin have boasted

for years. The rising rents in our city have been driven for years by artificial house price hikes, themselves the result of investors snapping up properties in central London. The upshot is that many families on average earnings – and even those doing significantly better – are being priced out of the capital entirely.

During their tenure, the Conservatives have overseen a transition in the labour market towards casual work. You will often hear apologists declaring that gig work is popular with some but this can only be the case for a very specific demographic: young people with lower or no housing costs (perhaps still living with their parents) and no dependents. For the remainder, zero hours contracts mean financial insecurity; no pay if you are sick; no paid holidays; and regular headaches if you rely on welfare to top up your income, as millions do.

In short, for millions the

cost-of-living crisis is nothing remotely new. But instead of addressing his own government's abundantly clear inadequacies on the subject, Mr Anderson and others would sooner resort to victim-blaming.

— Advertisement —

LICENSING ACT 2003 Application for the Grant of a Premises Licence

Notice is hereby given that **Hanoi Ca Phe Ltd** has applied to the London Borough of Waltham Forest for the grant of a Premises Licence at **Unit J, 7-9 Argall Avenue E10 7QE**. The nature of the application is as follows:

- To permit the sale of alcohol Monday to Sunday, 12:00–23:00

The Licensing register listing full details of the application is kept by the Licensing Service, 3 The Square, Leyton, London E10 5NR. The application may be viewed Monday to Friday between the hours of 9am – 5pm (except Bank Holidays).

Any person wishing to make a representation in respect of the above activities may do so in writing to the Licensing Service, 3 The Square, Leyton, London E10 5NR or via email: Licensing@walthamforest.gov.uk.

Representations must be received no later than **5th June 2022**.

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ARTS & CULTURE

How to cope when you're expecting

by Victoria Munro

A Walthamstow comedian has created a humorous film about discovering her unborn child might die, featuring an appearance from the ashes of her dead dog.

goo:ga follows Hannah Ballou, 41, from week 20 of her pregnancy, when she received the shocking news, to just before birth and is available to watch online until 11th June.

It tells the story of learning her unborn son had an ultra-rare heart condition called arteriovenous malformation, meaning his heart was not growing correctly, and how she coped with the help of humour.

Hannah told the *Echo* she wrote the film while pregnant and had two sets of filming dates, one three weeks later, in case "something dramatic happened" to give her time to re-write.

She said: "Sometimes people ask why I did the show but it actually would have been harder for me not to. I've been making art for so long that I knew no matter what happened I would have to deal with it artistically."

The film is a direct follow-up to a live show she created in 2016, also titled *goo:ga*, about her first pregnancy, which she



Hannah Ballou performing in 'goo:ga' Credit: Claire Nolan

performed while eight months pregnant.

The first *goo:ga* featured an appearance from Hannah's dog, who she said "would bring the house down" and was "way funnier than [she] could ever hope to be" but who died in April just before she became pregnant with her second child.

She said: "Part of doing this show was to have fun with the fact that it's impossible

to repeat old work, especially if it's autobiographical because your life has moved on.

"This pregnancy turned out to be very different from my first, which was very care-free, and on top of that no one was in the theatre because of the pandemic and my co-star is in an urn.

"At first we trick the viewer using a laugh track but the minute I find out something

is wrong, the camera goes behind me and you see the theatre is empty."

Though the film, which Hannah describes as a "sort of 'you'll laugh, you'll cry' deal", ends on an uncertain note, in the end her son's birth "could not have gone better".

She said: "They whisked him off to Great Ormond Street Hospital and inserted a device to repair his heart. Because his heart was stretched out, there was a danger he could develop a blood clot so we had to give him two anticoagulant injections a day.

"The cardiologist said he would probably have to have open heart surgery later but, exactly a year after we first found out anything was wrong, they did a scan and said actually his heart had remodelled amazingly.

"He's a total medical marvel. They're writing lots of research papers about him because it's such a rare condition and his heart essentially healed itself."

goo:ga is being shown as part of Camden People's Theatre's Calm Down Dear Festival, a showcase of feminist art in its ninth year.

Tickets are pay-what-you-can or free for those on maternity leave, which Hannah said was "important" to her.

Find out more or book your tickets here:
cpttheatre.co.uk/whatson/googa

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LOCAL ELECTION

New Tory leader Emma Best and deputy leader Afzal Akram Credit Waltham Forest Conservatives



Women take the lead

by Victoria Munro

Both of Waltham Forest’s main parties are now led by women following the post-local election leadership votes.

Council leader Grace Williams fended off the sole challenge to her control of the council, from long-standing councillor Terry Wheeler, with reports of a landslide victory.

Meanwhile, in the Conservatives, former deputy group leader Cllr Emma Best, long-rumoured to be eyeing the top job, took over from Cllr Tim James, who chose not to run.

The Tory group elected as their new deputy leader a former Labour councillor and cabinet member, who left the council in 2014 after he was caught trying to influence a planning decision.

Following her election as Conservative group leader on 16th May, Cllr Best said she was “honoured” and “couldn’t be prouder” of the group’s team of councillors.

She added: “I step

into the big shoes of previous leaders who have created the strong legacy of this group. Not least those of our retiring leader, who has been magnificent, both in the council and on the campaign trail.”

Regarding the election of Cllr Afzal Akram, elected to represent Valley on 5th May, she said: “I’ve always benefitted greatly from his experience and advice and look forward to working closely with him.”

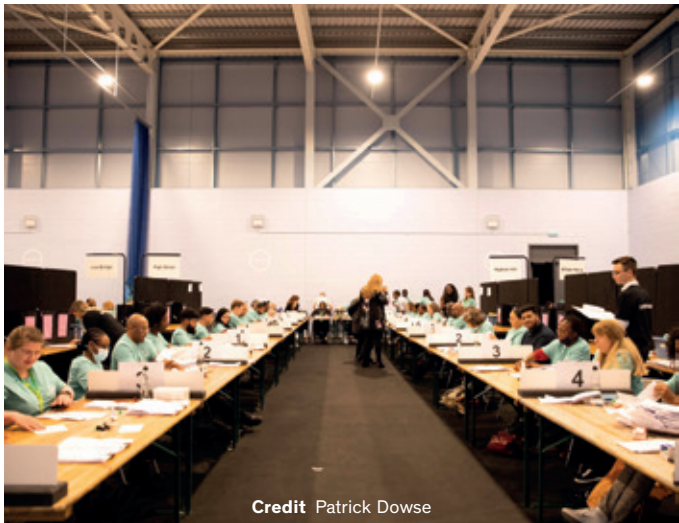
In 2013, then-Labour councillor Akram was banned from sitting on any committees for six months after trying to influence a decision over plans to convert Leytonstone’s Colgrave Arms

pub into a mosque.

He was found to have sent then-planning committee member and Labour colleague Cllr Karen Bellamy, who still sits on the council, a text reading: “I hope you are going to support this one.”

The application was approved but then-chair of the committee, Cllr Peter Barnett, chose to make a formal complaint against him, which was upheld.

After his resignation from the council the following year, Cllr Akram served as the chairman of the Ealing branch of UKIP before returning to the borough to act as the Conservative campaign manager.



Credit Patrick Dowse

First trans councillor elected

by Victoria Munro

Waltham Forest has elected its first ever trans-gender councillor.

Kira Lewis, a non-binary 22-year-old, is a councillor for Higham Hill, alongside existing Labour councillors Karen Bellamy and Alastair Strathern.

They currently work for the Labour party and have been a member since the age of just 15.

Kira told the *Echo*: “The main thing [voters] care about is will you listen to my issues, do you live locally and do you care about the area; who you are is really second to that.

“Nationally, I think there’s an unfair fear of trans people and we’re subject to a bit of

a moral panic but Walthamstow is a really great place to be. I hope people elected in other places get a similar positive response.

“[Mayor of London] Sadiq Khan even came to Higham Hill and gave a really great speech about how important it is to support trans people.”

While Kira has received some harassment on Twitter, they suspect these people “probably don’t live anywhere near Higham Hill”, adding they hope their work as a councillor will “speak for itself”.

They said: “I’m really passionate about making sure this part of Walthamstow gets a good end of the stick. In particular, I want to make sure we’re focused on young people and renters’ rights, as a renter myself.”



Kira Lewis, Labour councillor for Higham Hill Credit Jack Phipps

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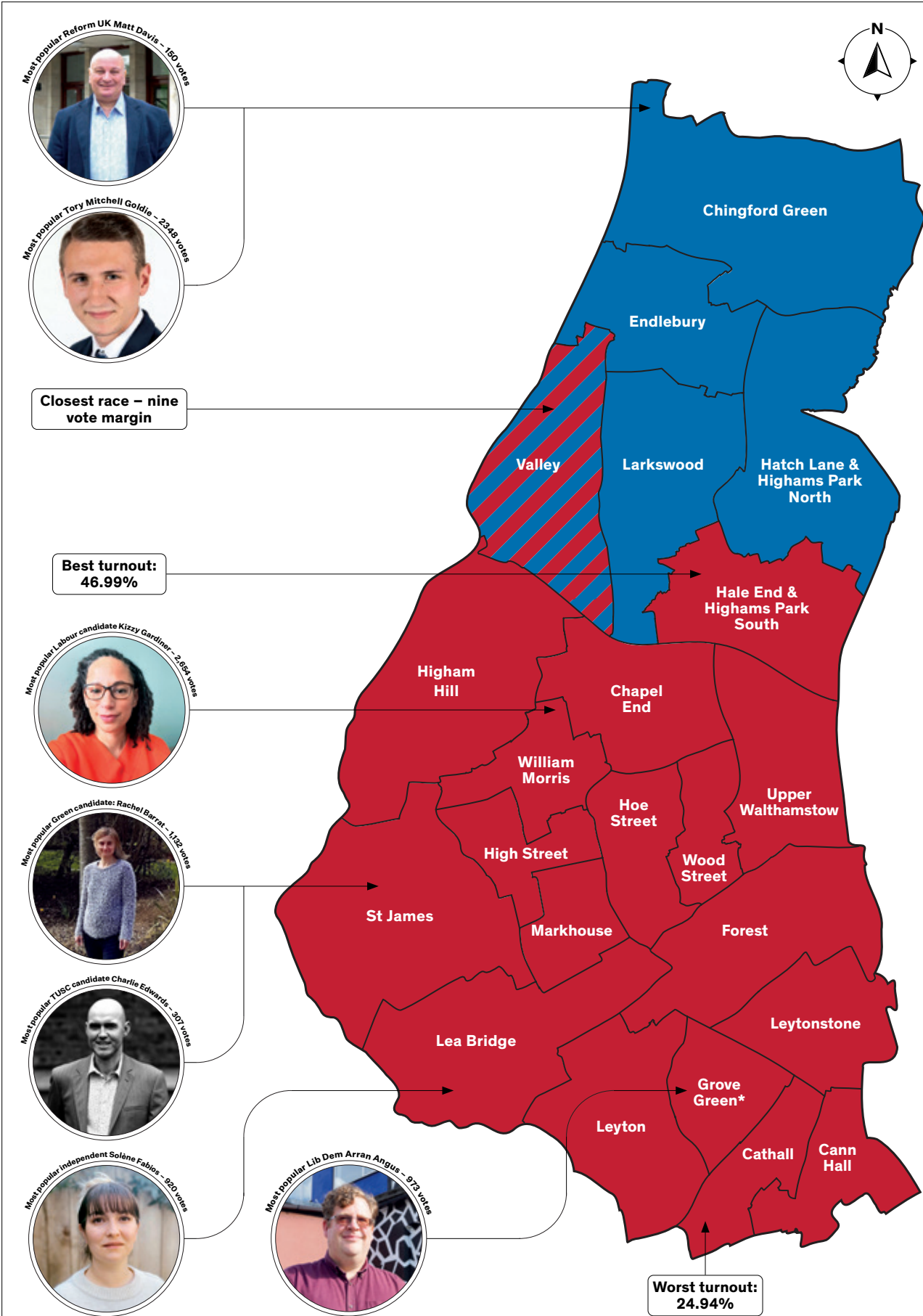
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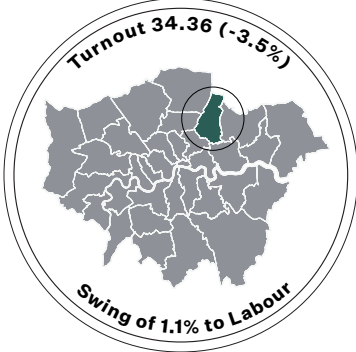
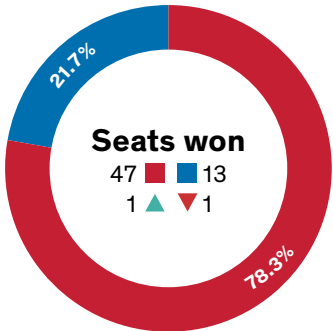
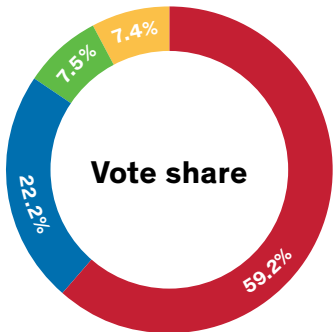
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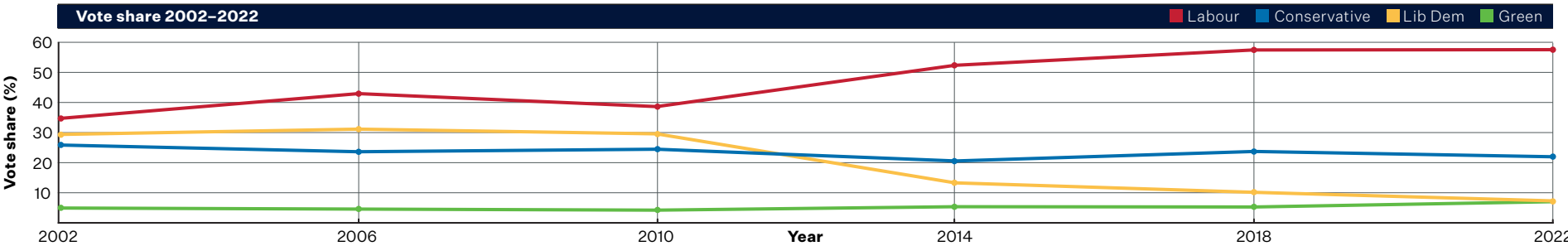
LOCAL ELECTION



Ward	Cllrs elected
Cann Hall	3
Cathall	2
Chapel End	3
Chingford Green	3
Endlebury	2
Forest	3
Grove Green	3
Hale End & Highams Park South	2
Hatch Lane & Highams Park North	3
High Street	3
Higham Hill	3
Hoe Street	3
Larkwood	3
Lea Bridge	3
Leyton	3
Leytonstone	3
Markhouse	2
St James	3
Upper Walthamstow	2
Valley	3
William Morris	3
Wood Street	2



* Grove Green – One of three ward councillors, Anna Mbachu, was not a Labour councillor at the time of the election but has an ongoing appeal



CRIME

‘Think carefully’ about protecting killers, says coroner

East London’s coroner has sent a message to those that know who killed a Walthamstow 16-year-old to “think very carefully” about their years-long silence.

On 2nd April, 2018, Amaan Shakoor was shot in the face with a shotgun just metres away from his Queen’s Road home in the car park of what is now the Walthamstow Leisure Centre.

He died at the Royal London Hospital the following day, while “one of his closest friends” Mohammed Asghar, then 15, was taken to Whipps Cross with a stab wound to the hand.

The two suspects who carried out the “tragic and cowardly attack” drove away in a white Hyundai, which police believe they found burned in Durban Road two days later. The shotgun was never recovered.

Two men were quickly arrested but police did not have enough evidence to bring criminal charges and, despite numerous appeals and a £20,000 reward offered last year, have yet to

break “the wall of silence” surrounding Amaan’s killers.

Speaking at the conclusion of Amaan’s inquest on 5th May, East London coroner Graeme Irvine said: “Unless somebody comes forward and identifies who was responsible... the Met Police are rather fettered in what they can do.”

“This does not mean this investigation is over”

“This does not mean this investigation is over, it simply means that, at the moment, they have exhausted all lines of enquiry.

“I’d be very grateful if anybody reading a report of this inquest thinks very carefully about whether they do have any information that would assist the police in the investigation of this horrific incident.

“I do not think we should lose



Amaan Shakoor, 16
Credit Met

sight of the fact that this was a young man about to embark on his life and clearly his family were very proud of him. There’s no evidence he was involved in criminality to any real extent.”

Addressing Amaan’s father Mohammed, he added: “The grace and dignity with which you and your family have carried yourselves through this investigation needs to be recognised, I do not know how you do it.”

Speaking to the press last year, Detective Chief Inspector Perry Benton said: “There were other people there when Amaan was shot and I’ve no doubt that even people who weren’t there know who was responsible.

“I understand that in some circles, it is seen as a betrayal of trust to talk to the police. But I would say to those people, some of whom were close friends of Amaan, that not doing so is an even greater betrayal.”

The inquest ruled that Amaan’s death was the result of “unlawful killing”.

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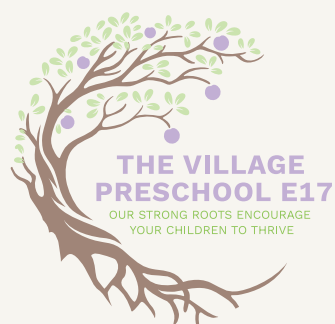
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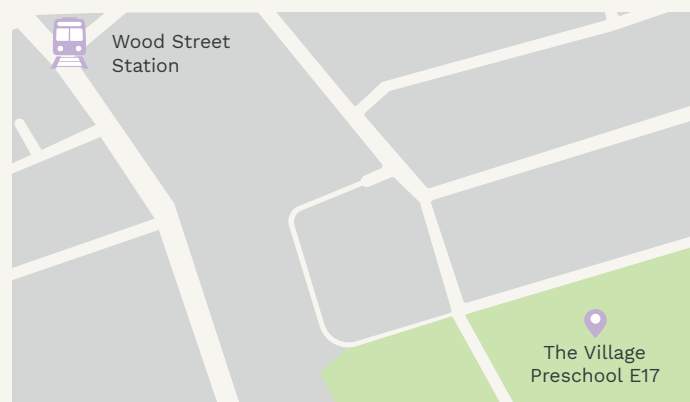
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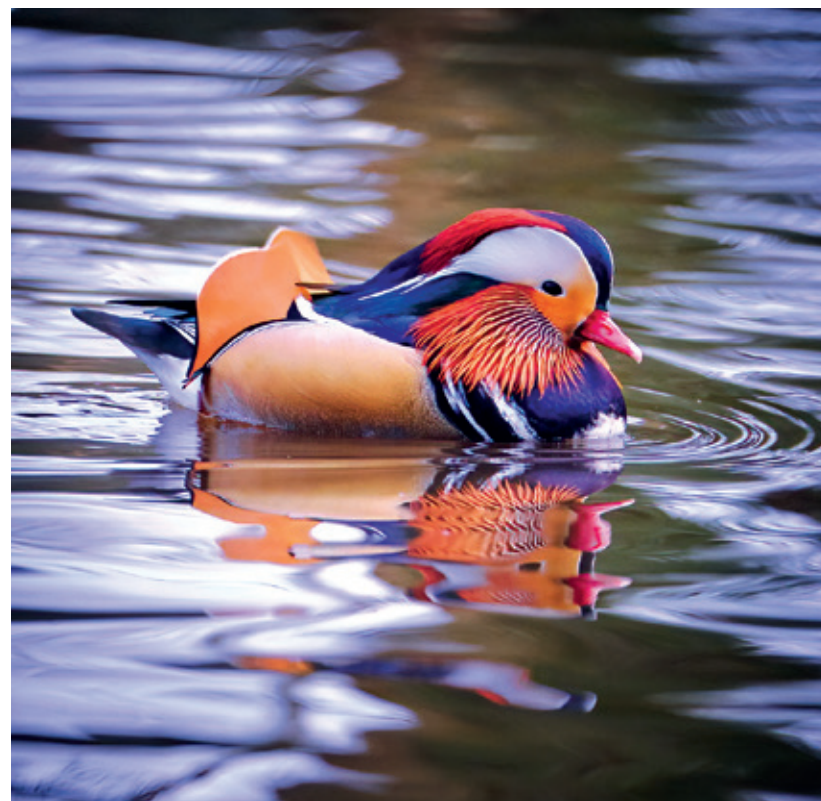
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PHOTOGRAPHY



Photos by Alister Gooding

While I had always enjoyed the idea of taking up photography, I owe my recent involvement – and new relationship with birds – to an unfortunate accident.

Last year, I was walking with my family in Highams Park when I was hit by a cyclist and suffered a bleed on the brain. As a life-long workaholic, going from my fast-paced career as a private chef to lying in bed with no energy to move was excruciating. Taking pictures of the wonderful birds that visited my balcony was a welcome distraction and, even as I begin to recover, I still rely on them as a source of calm and mindfulness.

Unfortunately, my sense of taste has still not recovered and I am now considering switching careers towards food photography to combine my work and passion. Thank you to my loving family for all their support.

See more of Alister's photography on Instagram: [@the.project.photography](https://www.instagram.com/the.project.photography)

We want your photos and illustrations! Please send in your images of people and places in Waltham Forest to penny@socialspider.com

HEALTH



Local volunteer Yvonne Sulola

Charity calls for more 'maternity mates'

by Nadoya Reid

While the physical strain of pregnancy is hard enough on its own, for an asylum seeker, particularly one not fluent in English, it is an even harder experience.

Yvonne Sulola, a 38-year-old doula and mother of three, recalls supporting a woman in exactly that position as part of her volunteer work for the borough's Maternity Mates scheme.

Yvonne has volunteered for the scheme, run by charity Women's Health and Family Services (WHFS) in Waltham Forest, Tower Hamlets and Newham, since last November. The programme pairs vulnerable expecting parents with a trained volunteer from the fifth month of their pregnancy until six weeks after birth.

As the charity calls for more volunteers to sign up for training, Yvonne told the *Echo* about her experience in the role and what made her want to sign up.

"Being the oldest of five girls, I have always gravitated toward supporting my sisters when they were pregnant," she said, "And, as a mother, I know having a child can be a daunting experience, especially for those who have little to no support systems.

"A common thing is that mothers don't feel listened to or that their choices are limited. Even if it is advice, they often feel like they are being told they have to do something by health-care professionals.

"A lot of the women we support have trauma in their past. We don't want to make their pregnancy and birth another traumatic experience."

Yvonne saw this pattern repeat first-hand while supporting the expecting asylum seeker, explaining: "The mother did not have the best understanding of

English and no one really took the time to explain all her options regarding her baby. She believed she had to go along with whatever the medical team said.

"Even when she had general doubts and concerns, she did not feel she could voice them. I had to assist her with finding leaflets and information on other methods of treatment and would sometimes advocate on her behalf and ask questions to healthcare professionals."

The Maternity Mate role entails attending doctor's appointments and weekly meetings with the expecting parent, as well as providing general emotional support.

While Yvonne is able to draw on her experiences as a doula, particularly when it comes to supporting pregnant women from ethnic minority groups, no such experience is required and all volunteers are given full training.

She added: "Even if you think you have nothing to offer the woman you are supporting, anything you can do is appreciated. It is a really rewarding experience."

Karen Wint, CEO of WHFS, said: "Every day, our Maternity Mates support women to have an empowering and healthy pregnancy and birth. It's an incredibly rewarding volunteer opportunity that will enable you to make a genuine difference in your local community.

"But the reality right now is there are many women across East London who are very isolated and without a support system – many more than we are currently able to support. This is why we're encouraging any woman who wants to have a positive impact on the lives of women to join us and train as a Maternity Mate."

You can apply to be a Maternity Mate here:
relationshipsdata.typeform.com/MMJourney?typeform-source=whfs.org.uk

Full training will be provided.

'Whipps won't wait' but its patients will

Whipps commentator Mary Burnett on A&E waits

If you were to spend an evening in the A&E department at Whipps Cross Hospital, what you would hear over the usual beeping machines and unwell patients is the regular sound of a doctor apologising. The wait before being seen is reportedly stretching as long as eight hours on some nights, thanks to staff shortages and a chronic lack of beds. Across Whipps and the four other east London hospitals managed by Barts Health NHS Trust, there were almost 23,000 major emergencies admitted to A&E in April, of which more than 9,000 were still waiting to be admitted, transferred or discharged four hours after their arrival. The most tragic part of this is that Barts Health actually performs slightly better than the national average.

This not only creates a nightmare for patients and

health professionals but also has a knock-on effect for the London Ambulance Service. Ambulances stuck outside hospitals, unable to offload patients because A&E is full, are ambulances that cannot attend to people in need. In many ways, the women I wrote about in my column last month are the lucky ones; they at least made it to hospital in time.

It is in a vain attempt to solve this problem that patients like them are rushed home, which only sees them bounce right back into wards. This is not an accident or a consequence of unreasonable patient "demand". Rather, it's the result of systematic underfunding of our health and social care services, driven by finances and ideology. This will affect the most vulnerable first, who can't advocate for themselves or navigate a complicated system, and their stories will get lost behind closed

doors or explained away as one-off failures.

I really feel for Whipps Cross staff too. They are under enormous pressure and are unable to avoid confronting the consequences of this situation. So many skilled staff are leaving the NHS, not because they've stopped caring but for the sake of their health. The stress of coping during the pandemic has left many traumatised and desperate to get out of an environment where they can't provide the right care.

That's why Action-4Whipps is fighting for a hospital with the bed capacity and services needed for our futures. Although the hospital is only part of the picture, it would be a travesty if millions are spent and, in a decade's time, we have the same problems we have now.

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AROUND THE BOROUGH

WALTHAMSTOW

Taco restaurant wins BBC2's 'top Mexican takeaway'



Erik and Sandra on Britain's Top Takeaways **Credit** BBC/Ricochet

A popular taqueria was crowned the UK's "top Mexican takeaway" on BBC2.

Homies on Donkeys is owned by husband and wife Erik Bautista and Sandra Bello and has been based in Wood Street's indoor market for the last five years.

On 17th May, they competed

against four other Mexican restaurants on BBC2's Britain's Top Takeaways and took home the top prize.

Sandra told the *Echo*: "Even though it was a competition, within the first 20 minutes of arriving at the studio, we were all laughing like we had known each other for years. It was a really

good opportunity to get to know what other Mexican restaurants are doing."

When the couple first opened their restaurant in 2017, Sandra added, Mexican food was not nearly as popular in the UK as it is today.

She added: "We were not sure if it was going to work because Wood Street was totally different then but that year the new apartment blocks started being built and, within 18 months, the area had completely changed.

"From the get-go, the reception from locals was amazing and it has continued to be that way all this time.

"People are always asking us when we will get a spot outside the market and we're hoping the show will let us do that, although we know we definitely want to stay in Walthamstow."

Visit them at Unit 38 Wood Street Indoor Market from 12-5pm Tuesday to Saturday

LEYTONSTONE

Coffee exhibition takes over high street

A photography exhibition documenting coffee production has taken over Leytonstone High Road.

Ten photos taken by local photographer Jake Green have appeared on public buildings from the Overground station to Matalan and will stay up until 9th September.

The exhibition – titled *Drink My Sweat*, based on a Swahili expression about enjoying the results of hard work - documents coffee production in Kenya, Columbia and Honduras.

Jake told the *Echo* that, having grown up in Leytonstone, it was an "absolute honour" to have the "amazing opportunity to share the project with [his] community."

He explained that, as an "obsessive coffee drinker", it became his personal mission to humanise coffee production and illustrate the amount of hard labour it requires, inspiring people to better appreciate the privilege of having access to good coffee.

The installation was supported by Waltham Forest Council, Network Rail and local businesses.



Credit Leyton of London

LEYTON

Filmmaker's home wins architecture award



Leyton House **Credit** Fernando Manoso

A private Leyton home won an architectural award after "bringing a touch of contemporary Mexico" to the borough.

Leyton House in Murchison Road, owned by filmmaker and writer Max Barron, was one of 42 London projects chosen by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA).

The jury wrote that the design by McMahon Architecture "successfully challenges preconceptions about what is deemed appropriate... in a predominantly two-storey Victorian context".

They commended the architect on being "able to navigate the bureaucratic planning sys-

tem" and "steer" Waltham Forest Council's planning department away from a "pastiche" and "pseudo-Victorian" design.

They wrote: "Despite the small size of the plot, the home feels light and spacious, with an exceptionally calm and comfortable interior."

They also praise the "clay plaster finish" which "unifies the scheme", adding: "It possesses a subtly Mexican feel... inspired by the owner's other place of residence."

As with all RIBA's other London award winners, Leyton House will now be considered for its national prize, announced in June.

CHINGFORD

Petition launched against flat block plans

Proposals to build an eight-storey flat block in Chingford Green have provoked outrage among residents, fanned by the local Conservatives.

A developer hopes to build a block of 41 flats in Sewardstone Road, opposite the McDonalds, with 10 parking spaces for future residents.

However, some residents have argued that the planned block is "too high" for the area and that more parking is needed to prevent congestion in surrounding roads.

Waltham Forest Conservatives have created a petition to oppose the plans on their website, stating they have "called in" the decision so



The proposed block and surrounding area **Credit** Sewardstone Holdings Ltd

it must be considered by the planning committee.

They write: "The building proposed would be too dense and out of character with the local area. The low public transport accessibility also makes the 'car-free' element of this design deeply flawed."

The next planning committee – and the first possible date plans could be considered – is 14th June.

SPORT

Local woman learns to fight with Idris Elba



Chanika and Idris

by Nadoya Reid

After losing her newborn son and almost dying from Covid, a Leytonstone woman turned her life around with the help of international star Idris Elba.

Chanika Gayle-Dore, 29, was one of eight young people chosen to be part of *Idris Elba's Fight School* Programme, televised on BBC Two.

Under the guidance of the actor, best known for his role in *The Wire*, participants received an intense five months of boxing

training before competing against one another in the ring.

Chanika told the *Echo* she applied to the show while grieving her newborn son, adding: "I had just recently moved at the time and I was at home for a long time in an empty flat.

"I would just sit and think 'there is nothing here'. I knew I needed to make a change, have direction and get back my confidence and drive."

By the time she heard she had been accepted, Chanika was in intensive care, suffering from Covid-related pneumonia, with doctors telling her mum she "was not going to make it".

However, she bounced back and was still able to take part in the show, despite joining slightly later than other participants, and said it left her with renewed confidence and a newfound passion for boxing

She told the *Echo*: "Being mentored by Idris was very cool. He was a big support, constantly checked in on us and always made himself available... but the highlight of my experience was the transformation within myself and what I achieved.

"Before coming on the show, I used to procrastinate quite a bit. I used to wait for others to do something before I would do it. Being on the show has taught me you miss valuable opportunities waiting for other



Chanika embraces her mum after a bout **Credit BBC2**

people to do things with you.

"I have made the wrong choices in my past but I have learnt that you can choose to make better ones at any age or any point in a time.

"The show has made me become more confident and outgoing and that has helped me to do what I have always loved to do, which is helping others."

Since leaving the programme, Chanika is working towards a boxing qualification and coaching schoolchildren, including at Aberfeldy Boxing Club in Poplar.

She also now runs women empowerment workshops, named "Candid Convos with Chan", and hopes to begin putting them on around the borough.

You can watch Idris Elba's Fight School on iPlayer
here: bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episodes/p0bv813d/idris-elbas-fight-school

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