



Your independent community newspaper

WALTHAM FOREST ECHO

Free
Nov 2022, No. 92

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Credit Patrick Dowse



Syrian refugee facing deportation to Rwanda

by Victoria Munro

Campaigners are fighting to stop a 24-year-old Syrian refugee being ripped away from his family and deported to Rwanda, only months after he arrived in Waltham Forest.

On 6th November, protesters with the “Hussein Must Stay” campaign will gather in Walthamstow Town Square at noon.

Hussein’s family fled their

home in 2015, when he was 17, after his father died opposing the Assad regime and he was ordered to join the army.

He spent five years in Istanbul, constantly in danger of being sent back, before making the perilous journey to the UK in the hope of a better life.

Hussein finally reached the UK in June but, last month, received a letter from the Home Office giving him two weeks to decide whether to relocate to Rwanda or return to

Syria, in both cases alone.

Speaking to the *Echo* on 25th October, Hussein said: “I ran all this way and over all that time – it took years – and now they want to send me to Rwanda when my family is here. It’s a country that’s worse than Syria, much worse.”

“I thought I could finally start a new life and now I don’t think it’s going to happen. I would have loved to open a shop fixing bicycles or maybe computers because I have experience with that.

“I wanted to be at rest and not have to move to another country again, just be here safe with my family because we are tired.

“As a teenager in Syria, I saw a lot of people die, whether in front of me or in jail. The authorities changed my school into a prison and we could hear all the screams from people inside.”

Hussein’s father died in jail after he was arrested for protesting and, not long after, Hussein fled to Turkey.

He said: “It was difficult to get out of Syria, I got lucky. If the Syrian army catches me, I will go to the army or jail – either way I will end up dead.

“The five years I spent in Turkey were not a happy time. If people there heard you speak Arabic they would tell you to go back to your country and they gave you half the wages of a Turkish person.

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NEWS



FELLOWSHIP IS LIFE

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New support for struggling residents this winter

by Josh Mellor,
Local Democracy Reporter

Waltham Forest Council announced new measures last month to help residents survive the cost-of-living crisis this winter.

An estimated 11,000 residents currently rely on food banks, while 25,000 children live in families “struggling to make ends meet”.

At a full council meeting on 20th October, council leader Grace Williams announced key pledges like breakfasts for vulnerable children, heated community “living rooms” and extra funding for foodbanks.

Addressing residents directly, she said: “We understand, we know there’s a crisis, your crisis is our

action. We’re on your side. We’ll act, we’ll act together and we’ll act now – when it is most needed.”

Cllr Williams slammed the “failed government” for cutting the council’s budget by 66% in the last decade, which had left her “scared” about the council’s future.

She added: “Public services save lives, they’re not things to be cut as though they’re inefficient. They have been cut to the bone just when people need them most.”

Conservative group leader Emma Best provoked laughter in the chamber by suggesting a general election would cause “instability” but praised giving £300,000 to nurseries and schools for vulnerable children’s breakfasts as “the way forward”.

To make sure residents are aware of what practical help is available a “wellbeing directory” is being set up and a pamphlet will be posted to “every household in the borough”.

Wider measures announced at the meeting include £600,000 to help residents retrofit homes through measures such as energy-efficient lightbulbs, reflective radiator panels and loft insulation.

It is hoped that 2,000 households will be able to cut their bills by up to £175 a year through the measures, provided by local non-profit The HEET Project and the council’s own company ServiceStore.

Find out more about the support available here: walthamforest.gov.uk/Yourcrisisouraction

Charity Secret Santa returns for fifth year

A local charity drive collecting Christmas presents for women and children spending the holiday in domestic violence shelters is returning for its fifth year.

Local mum Jules Carey started Waltham Forest Secret Santa five years ago with a friend and now has ten volunteer “elves” whose homes act as drop-off points around the borough.

Volunteers collect presents from the community, pack them into gift bags and distribute them to Solace, Refuge, Kiran Support Services, the Ashiana Network and modern



Presents collected last year
Credit Waltham Forest Secret Santa

slavery charity Medaille Trust.

Last year, the Secret Santa raised £2,000 – spent on presents mostly from local, independent stores – and donated nearly 1,000 gift bags.

Jules told the *Echo*: “The idea is

to give these women something a little bit luxurious, brand new and just for them, to remind them they are worth it and that their community loves them.”

The project is also currently looking for storage space as every year it “takes over [Jules’] house, making it somewhat unlivable” but she added that this is “a lovely problem to have”.

Collections for the Secret Santa are open now until 20th November.

Find out more on their Instagram @[walthamforestsecretsanta](https://www.instagram.com/walthamforestsecretsanta) **or email them:** WalthamForestSecretSanta@gmail.com

Bumper incinerator profits handed back to council

by Josh Mellor,
Local Democracy Reporter

Millions in bumper profits from the Edmonton incinerator are set to be handed back to the seven North London councils who pay it to burn rubbish.

The incinerator – which burns rubbish from Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Hackney, Haringey, Islington and Waltham Forest to produce electricity – is run by the North London Waste Authority (NLWA).

This year, the NLWA was set to charge the councils a £57million levy to cover the costs of processing their waste but plans to waive November’s £4.7m charge thanks

to the soaring cost of electricity.

The authority says this “windfall dividend” is partly thanks to “strong market demand” for recycling waste, such as aluminium and plastic, and that there will likely be more to come if energy prices remain high.

Waltham Forest deputy leader and NLWA chair Clyde Loakes said: “During this extreme cost-of-living crisis and rising inflation, we’ve decided to act now to return this money to the public by helping to ease the monetary pressures on their local councils.

“This shows that the public ownership of utilities can bring direct benefits to communities, instead of just the shareholders of the big

energy companies.”

Waltham Forest was due to pay £841,000 of November’s levy and, at a full council meeting on October 20th, Cllr Loakes said £500,000 of this will go towards “small-scale energy saving measures and retrofitting households”.

Local community groups will be handed £240,000 to help with the cost-of-living crisis and £120,000 is earmarked for “hyper-local cost-of-living support”.

The levies the NLWA charges councils are expected to rise in coming years due to the £1.2bn cost of building a new incinerator and waste processing facility, rising to an estimated £66m next year and £90m in 2025/26.

Almost 2,000 bin collections missed in July

by Josh Mellor,
Local Democracy Reporter

Almost 2,000 local bin collections were missed this July after “exceptional” heat and staff shortages.

Figures published by Waltham Forest Council show hundreds of collections were missed every month between April and September.

The service was worst in July – when around 1,900 collections were missed – and August, when 1,400 were missed.

However, the borough’s waste contractor Urbaser has exceeded its target limit of 556 missed collections every month in this period.

Urbaser is currently in dispute with its own workers, who are demanding paid sick leave and better wages and are considering strike action.

In a written statement prepared for a full council meeting on 20th October, deputy leader Clyde Loakes claimed the spike in missed collections was seen “not just in Waltham Forest but nationally”.

Responding to a question from Conservative councillor Kay Isa, he wrote: “The national driver shortages and fuel shortages during summer 2021, coupled with the extreme weather this summer, has led to well-documented spikes of missed collections.

“The heatwave this summer impacted this primarily manual-based service significantly. It also coincided at the peak of the holiday season, when replacement crews were hard to come by, to help pick up the rounds that weren’t completed.

“However, following these incidents, we can clearly see the service improving again and missed bin numbers falling.

“Despite all of that, less than 0.2% of bins were not collected on their scheduled collection day in July when we experienced an extreme heatwave.

“We have managed this contract in a fiscally responsible way despite the economic challenges and inflation rises.”

NEWS

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"I left Turkey in 2020 because it got worse there; I saw a lot of my friends sent back to Syria. They would be walking on the streets when police would ask for ID and then they would be put in a van and back in Syria the next day."

Hussein spent at least a year travelling across Europe in a series of trucks, including a six-month period spent living in a forest in an unknown country.

He finally crossed the English Channel by boat this summer and was placed with his mother and two siblings in Waltham Forest, where he began taking a course to improve his English.

However, since receiving the letter from the Home Office, he is afraid to go outside in case he is seized by the police and has stopped attending the course.

The Hussein Must Stay campaign is supported by Care 4 Calais, Waltham Forest Stand Up To Racism, Walthamstow Migrant Centre, Walthamstow Anti Raids Network and more.

Amnesty International activ-

ist Ulrike Schmidt told the *Echo* the campaign is a matter of life or death, adding: "Hussein will most likely get tortured and killed if he returns to Syria."

"I cannot see the anguish and despair in his and his mother's eyes and stand by. We hope the Home Office will be persuaded to let him stay and have his valid claim for asylum heard."

When contacted for comment, a Home Office spokesperson said: "Rwanda is a safe and secure country with a strong track record of supporting asylum seekers."

"We remain committed to this world-leading Migration Partnership, which will see those who come to the UK through dangerous, illegal and unnecessary routes relocated to Rwanda to rebuild their lives there."

"Everyone in scope for relocation to Rwanda will be individually assessed, and no one will be relocated if it is unsafe or inappropriate for them."

Sign the petition to support Hussein Must Stay here: change.org/p/hussein-must-stay

Borough's new tallest tower proposed

A CGI depiction of the scheme
Credit NEAT



By Victoria Munro

Outline plans for up to 1,800 new homes in Blackhorse Lane have been submitted by the world's largest investment manager.

American company BlackRock, which bought 11 acres of the Walthamstow industrial area for £51million in 2017, is partnering with housing developer NEAT on the project.

Waltham Forest Council has

received detailed plans for one 18-storey block of 119 flats in Uplands Business Park and outline plans for eight further blocks, ranging from just over 22metres high to 145m.

This means the largest tower could be almost half the height of the Shard, which is 310m tall.

This project forms a key part of Waltham Forest Council's "masterplan" for Blackhorse Lane, with the area also set to receive a £60,000 rebrand.

Brian Reynolds of NEAT Developments said: "Following close to two years of engagement with the local community, we are delighted to have submitted our plan for a new neighbourhood on Blackhorse Lane."

"Our proposals will ensure that modern, industrial floorspace is provided for local makers and creators, combining with new homes and a wide variety of cultural uses to create an exciting new future for Uplands Business Park."

"We look forward to working with Waltham Forest Council over the forthcoming months as we progress towards a planning committee date."

A website dedicated to the development insists the project will create over 1,000 new jobs, cement "the borough of cultural [sic] legacy" and create a "major new waterside park open to all".

Of the initial block of 119 homes, 35% "will be affordable to rent and buy", although this can include flats only 20% cheaper than local market rates.

Find out more on the developer's website: futureofuplands.com

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NEWS

New king visits Walthamstow

King Charles III and Queen Consort Camilla came to Walthamstow last month to visit a youth centre fighting to stop young people dying from violence.

The royals arrived at Project Zero in Grange Road, Walthamstow, on 18th October and were met by a crowd of students from Barn Croft Primary School.

Project Zero was founded in 2019 by Stephen Barnabis, who

has worked in youth engagement for decades and lost two young relatives to violent crime.

It hosts a weekly youth club and holiday programmes to keep young people off the streets and helps older teenagers find jobs through apprenticeships or support to enter higher education.

The king spoke with young people that use the centre and was shown around its facilities, which include spaces for music production, gam-

ing, sports and counselling.

He also met with Leyton Orient footballer Omar Beckles, an ambassador for the centre, who later told the *East London Guardian* he hoped Stephen would one day receive a royal honour for his work.

Omar added: “[Thanks to Project Zero] these kids are getting access to footballers, they’re getting access to royalty, and I think it’s going to play a massive part in their aspirations and what they can achieve in life. I think that’s priceless.”

Project Zero moved into its current home early last year after outgrowing a small space in CRATE nearby and being offered “a very reduced rent” by Waltham Forest Council.

It has since become an invaluable part of the local community, with centre staff even racing into a burning building a few doors down in July to safely evacuate residents.

Last year, Stephen told the *Echo* how losing two cousins in 2004 and 2019 inspired him to found Project Zero – so-called because of



Children from Barn Croft Primary School welcome the king **Credit** WF Council

his goal to see zero young people die from knife or gun crime.

Speaking at the time, he said: “I had empathy and understanding for why young people might carry a knife or commit a crime but it was quite a difficult process.

“One perpetrator was a 16-year-

old boy, who had been excluded from school, and his home life was tense. It got me thinking that the need to provide support for young people was greater than ever.”

Find out more about Project Zero or donate on their website here:
projectzerowf.co.uk



King Charles III with Project Zero founder Stephen Barnabis **Credit** WF Council

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SCAN ME



NEWS

Community centre saved...



Sean, Melissa and Michael (left to right) in the Forest Community Centre

An 80-year-old community centre sent an eviction letter by Waltham Forest Council has won the fight to keep its home.

Last month, the *Echo* reported on the plight of Forest Community Centre in Guildford Road, Walthamstow, who were told in August that the council wanted them gone by March [91, p1].

Chair Michael Michael was shocked to learn the council had decided to use the building as its new hub for food bank donations, currently based in Chingford's soon-to-be-redeveloped Assembly Hall.

However, after rallying the community behind the centre, Michael received another letter on 14th October, stating the council had backed down and would use another location.

Vicky Ashworth, cabinet member for jobs, social inclusion and equalities, told the *Echo*: "We recently contacted the Forest Community Association to confirm that the Forest Community Centre will not be used to host the Food Distribution Hub."

"We are working hard to ensure all residents have the support they need

this winter, which includes food distribution, and we will confirm more details as soon as we are able."

The centre, running since 1962, is home to two drama groups, karate classes, table tennis and more and is used every day and by at least 150 people a week.

Speaking to the *Echo* while they still feared eviction in September, Michael said he worried for the wellbeing of locals that use the centre if they were forced out.

He said: "We sent the council letters from our members and some were saying they would be lost without the centre and wouldn't be going out at all."



"[Some members] would be lost without the centre and wouldn't be going out at all"

"There are some table tennis players who have been playing since the 1960s and we also have a lot of local kids that come here because there's no youth groups. If we're going to be moved away, what happens to them?"

According to the most recently discussed plans, the Assembly Hall and neighbouring Chingford Library will be knocked down and rebuilt with around 40 flats.

While the proposals have been debated for years, planning permission is not yet granted.

A performance at Gnome House
All images courtesy of Gnome House CIC

... As another shuts forever

A much-loved community arts centre in Walthamstow announced its shocking closure last month.

Gnome House in Blackhorse Lane was a community space with a print-making studio and a pop-up cafe that ran a nationally-recognised youth club called Ratpack.

It opened in 2015 in a disused factory building and was run by non-profit Gnome House Community Interest Company, which will also be permanently dissolved.

On 11th October, a spokesperson for Gnome House announced they were closing with "great sadness" and that their volunteer directors were standing down "for personal/medical reasons".

The centre was at that time closed for repairs "due to flood damage" but a recording on its voicemail said they expected to reopen "in mid-to-late October".

In July last year, Waltham Forest Council's leadership agreed to acquire the site for a price of £1

from owners Me Ventures Ltd, although in a statement to the *Echo* council leader Grace Williams confirmed the purchased is still not yet completed.

The report prepared for the council's cabinet last summer notes that Gnome House CIC had "not as yet entered into a lease for the property" despite occupying it since 2015.

Responding to a request for comment, council leader Grace Williams told the *Echo*: "The directors of Gnome House have decided to wind up the community interest company and we thank them for their hard work and dedication over the years."

"Over the last year, the council has engaged with the owners of 7 Blackhorse Lane – the building in which Gnome House CIC is based – on the opportunity to purchase the building."

"These discussions are continuing and, should the purchase be completed, we will work with the community on options for the ground floor space that Gnome

House currently occupies."

In their statement, the Gnome House spokesperson gave their thanks to organisations that "provided project-based funding" to the centre, including Arts Council England, The National Lottery, London Catalyst, William Morris Big Local and Waltham Forest Council.

They added: "We would also like to thank the many, many volunteers who devoted huge amounts of their time and expertise to the community centre."

"In particular we would like to recognise Anna Alcock. She has been the lynchpin of the organisation and made Gnome House work for almost ten years despite working through cancer, chemotherapy and surgery."

Anna's art studio Inky Cuttlefish, which the spokesperson said "provided a constantly joyful, supportive and nurturing presence to the artistic community in the Blackhorse Lane area", will now relocate elsewhere in London.



The building before it was transformed



Gnome House in Walthamstow

NEWS

Cop died in crash leaving 'unfinished' cycle lane

PC Chris Miller
(courtesy of
Met Police)



by Josh Mellor,
Local Democracy Reporter

A police officer died in a motorbike crash after his wheel clipped the divider of an “unfinished” cycle lane in Waltham Forest, an inquest found. PC Chris Miller, 35, crashed just after 5am

on 15th September 2020 in Woodford New Road, while commuting to central London.

The father-of-two lost control of his motorbike while riding in an “unfinished and unbarriered” cycle lane, separated from the carriageway by a row of 10cm-high black and white road dividers, known as “orcas”.

Waltham Forest Council’s highways con-

tractor JB Riney had recently installed the orcas but its workers were “unaware” they also needed to install reflective wands to ensure drivers could spot them, the inquest heard.

Last month, a jury concluded that PC Miller, who was driving at 48–55mph in a 40mph zone, clipped “at least one” of the orcas as he rejoined the carriageway and lost control of his motorbike, crashing into a lamp post.

Senior coroner for East London Graeme Irvine said the tragedy revealed a “break-down of information” between the council and its contractor but stopped short of issuing a prevention of future deaths report.

He added: “Even at the time of this tragedy in September 2020, there were agreements in place about how works would be undertaken[...] unfortunately, due to human frailty, it would appear one thing didn’t happen as it was supposed to.”

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE), which carried out an investigation after the accident, issued the council with two official warnings about roadworks safety in January this year.

Representing Waltham Forest, Laura Johnson KC, said the council took the HSE investigation “very seriously” and has since overhauled its “entire process”, including hiring a new health and safety compliance officer.

She added that JB Riney’s site supervisor

knew that wands should have been installed but that there had been a “disconnect that happened further down the chain”. She said: “As a matter of process, the responsibility on-site for the management of health and safety is that of JB Riney, and that is for good reason.

“They are experts who plan work, they have the expertise and knowledge to do that safely and under the regulations that responsibility rests with them, that isn’t to hold up our hands and say that this isn’t us.”

In August this year, the council carried out further changes to the cycle lane at Woodford New Road to replace the orcas and wands with a “stepped” cycle track that is higher than the road and a different colour.

Speaking after PC Miller’s death, Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Commander Jane Johnson said: “Chris was a police officer, a fitness fanatic and a motor-cycle enthusiast.

“He joined the Parliamentary and Diplomatic Protection Command last year and made an instant impact on those around him.

“He was committed to serving the people of London and latterly Parliament and the diplomatic community.

“Chris had a strong sense of duty and was a loved and valued member of his team. He will be missed.”

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ARTS & CULTURE

Local artist wins prestigious grant

Brian (centre) with David and Yuko Juda **Credit** Alison Wright



At the age of 74 and after a career spanning more than half a century, Walthamstow-based artist Brian Dawn Chalkley has no plans to slow down.

Indeed, the artist, who has lived in the borough for the last eight years, recently won a £50,000 grant to support future work from the David and Yuko Juda Art Foundation.

Born in Stevenage, Brian left school with no qualifications but managed to get a job as an architect's assistant, an experience which inspired them to apply to Chelsea College of Arts.

In their 50s, they began embracing an alter ego called Dawn and came out as transgender, although they told the *Echo* they have "no preference" when it comes to their pronouns.

The work that won them the prestigious grant is inspired by dreams, using bed sheets and pillowcases as canvases and aiming to capture "a childlike naivety and accessibility" through materials like felt-tip pens.

Brian said: "I want to make work where anybody can walk in and maybe, hopefully get something out of it. I'm trying to avoid an artistic hierarchy: this is not for people who know about art, it's for people that just want to look at something."

"When I was shortlisted, I thought I had no chance and was expecting to be a bit upset and emotional when I lost but then they read my name out and I started crying."

Brian currently teaches at Chelsea College of Arts and says the "terror and fear" they felt towards their own teachers as a child has motivated them to "change that kind of behaviour".

They said: "[I grew up in] completely different times, very segregated times. There was no encouragement to develop, they had already made their minds up about you when you came in."

"The school was training us to get apprenticeships at the missile factory but I failed at that, thank god. I remember me and another student said we might want to go to art school and they said 'don't be so stupid' – but we beat them in the end."

"When I was 16, I got a job as an architect's assistant, which changed my life. Just imagine, a working class kid in that role. It wasn't something I wanted to do – all that maths wasn't for me – but it introduced me to a completely different world."

"I want to create a bursary at Chelsea in my will so that working class kids can get grants to get into art school and experience that education."

Brian's alter-ego Dawn first emerged in 1996, although they noted she "has always been there... covered up".

They added: "I was pretty depressed and struggled to care about art anymore because, though I was a pretty good painter, I felt like I was leaving so much of myself out of it."

"When you become a new personality, it allows you to do a lot of things you never would have done. Dawn didn't like art and didn't have the same history as Brian."

"I did a lot of performances [as Dawn] and eventually started going by the name Brian Dawn Chalkley. I don't perform anymore because I think I'm now much more integrated."

"There was a 'death of Brian' and a kind of 'death of Dawn' and now both work together in a way neither of them could have done on their own."

Despite admitting they "don't really engage" with the local arts scene, Brian said they would "love to do a show at the William Morris Gallery" and have no plans to retire.

They said: "What's the point? What the hell would I do? I wouldn't say I was obsessed with art but it is what I do and you do have to make a lot of sacrifices for it. Winning the award at this age is just the icing on the cake."

Book review: *My Husband's Lover* by Jess Ryder

Sarah Fairbairn reviews a Walthamstow-based author's latest thriller

To many people, waking up early in an unheated, off-the-grid cottage two hours' hike from the nearest road would already be a pretty challenging start to the day, even without plans to jump in an ice-cold loch before breakfast. But for the cast of Jess Ryder's non-traditional whodunnit, hypothermia in the Highlands is only the tip of the iceberg.

Our heroine, Sophie, has been having a bad time in general, having recently discovered her husband's affair, and is now desperately trying to patch things up for the sake of their two young sons. For reasons that I, frankly, find baffling, she seeks comfort in the frigid embrace of a local wild swimming spot and forms a group of mismatched female friends to snuggle under dryrobes with. In true 2022 style, all that's left is for our cohort of cold-water addicts to take off to a secluded house, where they will be staying in isolation for a week of digital detox.

The catch comes here. One of these friends, the inner circle of frostbite fans who share Sophie's sacred ritual, is a traitor. Not only is Sophie about to spend a week in the company of her husband's lover but there's also a cache of deeper, darker secrets waiting to be revealed. The

book reads like a classic locked-room thriller; we know one of the women around the dinner table is the secret wrongdoer – but who is it, and will our heroine discover her identity in time to save herself from a grisly fate?

My Husband's Lover is a timely take on the competing pressures of modern life, in which Walthamstow-based novelist Jess Ryder confidently combines a thoughtful depiction of the importance of female friendship with a well-paced and intriguing mystery storyline. Only a few moments of real peril take place over the course of the book but these are mixed effectively with explorations of Sophie's escalating paranoia and obsession as she desperately tries to discover her tormenter's identity. Cleverly structured with a switching viewpoint, the novel gives us moments of insight into the secret swimmer's motivations and plans, hinting at the dark history that lies just underneath the surface of Sophie's world. The usual conventions of the mystery thriller are all present – a love affair, a sinister secret, a remote location with no way to call in help from the outside world – and fans of the genre will enjoy Ryder's signature slick writing and watertight plotting.

'My Husband's Lover' was published by Bookouture and is available from Amazon.

THE LUNCHTIME LIMERICK



by ANGRY DAN.

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FEATURE



Soleman, Satvinder and Hikmet (left to right) at the Branches hostel

Homeless charity turns 25

by Victoria Munro

To celebrate 25 years helping the homeless, charity Branches invited the *Echo* to speak to current and former residents of its Walthamstow hostel.

The project began when seven local churches joined together to create a winter night shelter, offering a place to sleep and a hot meal to ten homeless people.

The charity quickly grew and, in the early 2000s, bought a former factory building in Forest Road to use as a day centre, supporting up to 300 people a year.

In partnership with Waltham Forest Council and the Christian Action Housing Association, Branches then won government funding to redevelop the site, opening its current 27-bed hostel in 2011.

Trustee Winston Reid explained Branches is now a referral-only service, housing homeless people for “about 12–18 months... to help stabilise them” until they are ready to move on elsewhere and offering continued support for at least six months after they leave.

Current resident Martin*, 44, is one of those ready to move on and waiting to be rehoused by the council after getting his alcoholism under control.

He told the *Echo*: “I lost everything because of alcohol, including my house and my job of six years as a chef. I was on the streets for a couple of weeks before I ended up in a mental health hospital and they brought me here.

“Life on the streets is cold, people are fighting all the time for food or alcohol and they will even steal your jacket while you’re sleeping. Because my eye is damaged, some

people look at me like I’ve done something wrong but I was just born with it.”

Martin hopes to return to his old career and has enjoyed cooking for the other residents, adding: “Before I was so down and now I’m finally taking some steps up. Without Branches I would be dead, 100%. They have helped me to have a life.”

Also helping in the kitchen during the *Echo*’s visit was Hikmet Pala, a 66-year-old “Marxist revolutionary” from Turkey, who notes he has “lived in the borough longer than the council leader”.

Hikmet moved to the UK after the 1980 Turkish coup because he was unwilling to live under a military government and had “always wondered about the British way of life”. After separating from his wife Sarah, who he met through left-wing activism, he ended up on the streets after his Universal Credit was cut off when he reached pension age.

He told the *Echo*: “During winter, I would move from one church to another and in the summer I was just hanging around, either on friends’ sofas or by the side of the railway.

“The staff looking after us here are absolutely extraordinary, they’re so caring, very careful and attentive to details.

“I have a feeling pretty soon I’ll be able to move on but I’m not looking forward to it because I’m pretty content here.”

Unlike Martin and Hikmet, ex-resident Satvinder Singh Riyat, 60, has always lived in the borough and is now safely settled in sheltered accommodation in Leyton.

Despite leaving Branches five years ago, he says the charity still supports him and thanks them, outreach service StreetLink and the council’s rough sleeping team for where he is today.

After a “family situation” forced him to leave home, Satvinder slept on the streets from January to November one year, on two wooden pallets covered with carpet and cardboard.

He told the *Echo*: “I never thought I would be homeless and didn’t realise how it would affect me, mentally and physically. I still have flashbacks about once a month where I wake up thinking I’m on the streets.

“You always have to have one eye open: I was robbed 13 times and got beaten up three times. Alcohol became a problem because it was the only way I could sleep.

“For the first eight months, I didn’t ask for any help but, when it started getting cold, someone from StreetLink left a card with a number. I phoned them up and they got on the case straight away.

“When I came to Branches, it was a shock: the bed was made, I could shower properly, it was like moving into a Premier Lodge. They got me mental health support and helped me with my application for benefits.”

Fellow ex-resident Soleman Chummun, 34, also grew up in the borough and spent a total of three years sleeping rough after being kicked out by his father.

He told the *Echo*: “I was not daddy’s good boy, I was a little rebel, and he didn’t like it so I couldn’t stay home.

“[Sleeping rough] was the worst, really bad. By the time my housing officer got me into Branches, I was at my wit’s end, I was thinking of stepping in front of traffic just to get help.”

However, even Soleman’s time at Branches became difficult when he got into a relationship with a woman struggling with a crack cocaine addiction, who introduced him to the drug.

Soleman said: “I didn’t ask for help because

my pride got the better of me and, when Branches found out, I was facing eviction. Literally a week after that, I ended up getting into trouble with the police.

“My flat got raided when my friend was here and he had a BB gun stuffed down his jacket. I had no idea he had it on him but I got a conspiracy charge and a five-year suspended sentence.

“I thought it was game over and I would get my marching orders but Branches didn’t give up on me. I spent the next year in the kitchen cooking food as a thank you for not kicking me out. That point was where my life started coming back together.

“Now I work in the security industry at stadiums and stations across the country. I love my job, it’s the reason I have everything I have on me, because I bought it with my hard wages. I’m trying to get back into cycling and get some normality back in my life.

“If it wasn’t for the opportunities I had here, I’d probably be on the streets involved in drugs and gangs. I’m thankful I got out of that life when I did because I have too much to live for, getting off crack and away from that girl is one of the best things I have done for myself.”

Despite how far Branches has come from its humble beginnings, the charity already has plans to expand again.

Winston explained they have raised £1million to buy a five or six-bed property in the borough, which they hope to use as a “move-on accommodation” for residents not quite ready to live independently.

Find out more about Branches and donate here: wfcbranches.org.uk

*not his real name

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LICENSING ACT 2003 Application for the Grant of a Premises License

Notice is hereby given that **Orion Harriers** has applied to the London Borough of Waltham Forest for the grant of a Club Premises Certificate under section 71 of the Licensing Act 2003 Premises Licence at Jubilee Retreat, Bury Road, E4 70J.

• The nature of the application is to permit the sale of alcohol to be consumed on premises: **Wednesday, 19:00–23:00; Friday, 19:00–23:00; Saturday, 15:00–18:00 & 19:00–23:00**

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, Town Hall, Fellowship Square, Forest Road, Walthamstow E17 4JF or via email: licensing@walthamforest.gov.uk

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

It is an offence knowingly or recklessly to make a false statement in connection with this application. A person is liable to an unlimited fine on conviction should such a false statement be made.

LICENSING ACT 2003 Application for the Grant of a Premises License

Notice is hereby given that **Nourished Communities** has applied to the London Borough of Waltham Forest for the grant of a Premises License at 12 Blackhorse Ln, Walthamstow E17 6HJ. The nature of the application is as follows:

• **Supply of alcohol for consumption off the premises every day between 10am–8pm**

The licensing register listing full details of the application is kept by the Licensing Services 3 The Square, Leyton 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 License Service, 3 The Square, Leyton, London E10 5NR or via email: licensing@walthamforest.gov.uk.

Representations must be received no later than: **16th November 2022.**

It is an offence to knowingly make a false statement in connection with this application. A person is liable to an unlimited fine on conviction should such a false statement be made.

HOUSING

Residents facing eviction
Credit Stewart Caine



Walthamstow Stadium residents evicted due to building faults

by Josh Mellor,
Local Democracy Reporter

Almost 30 households living in the poorly-built Walthamstow Stadium development are being evicted through no fault of their own.

Earlier this year, social housing giant London & Quadrant (L&Q) admitted a range of faults in the 290-home development that will take years to repair, while assuring residents they would be temporarily decanted from their homes as work was carried out.

But, in recent weeks, the housing association told residents it planned to issue two-month “no fault” eviction notices to 28 households that privately rent flats in Goodwood Apartments, a taller building on the site.

Following pressure from residents and local councillors, L&Q pushed the eviction date to next March but will only offer “discretionary” compensation to tenants that agree to leave within two months.

At a housing scrutiny committee on 19th October, ward councillor Catherine Suarez said: “Announcing the eviction of 28 families over the Christmas period at two months’ notice, having told them repeatedly for 18 months they would be rehoused, is bafflingly

tone-deaf and irresponsible.

“They have made no effort to find out each resident’s needs or circumstances before announcing their eviction and seem astonished that they are distraught. They would have forced vulnerable people to search for scarce and expensive rentals in the middle of winter, [some] while dealing with chemotherapy and looking after newborn babies.

“Any landlord should be ashamed, let alone a ‘socially responsible’ one. Pushing the evictions back by eight weeks doesn’t make up for the fact that L&Q have behaved in an arbitrary and callous way.”

The estate was completed in 2017 but numerous issues have since emerged, including “inadequate” cladding, “incorrectly installed” windows and problems with the roof.

Cabinet member for housing and regeneration Ahsan Khan promised to do all he could “to pressure L&Q to find homes for all the households facing eviction”.

When contacted for comment, L&Q told the Local Democracy Reporting Service: “Upon meeting with residents at Goodwood Apartments and understanding their concerns, we are now working closely with them to seek alternative

housing options in the local area.

“We understand how upsetting this situation will be for the privately rented tenants at Goodwood Apartments.

“We’ve reached out to everyone affected to support them with their move and are providing a discretionary payment to each resident for the inconvenience.”

However, residents facing eviction said the only support offered is one-to-one advice on open market rental properties, identifying removal companies and how to redirect post.

They said the “discretionary payment” is only on the condition that residents sign a tenancy release form and vacate their property within two months.

Sarah Chaney, chair of the residents’ association, said: “For the past two years[...] we have been repeatedly promised that L&Q will improve communication with residents and involve us in their planning.

“It is extremely disappointing that it would make such a drastic decision without first speaking to residents to understand how they will be affected and to explore alternative options with us.”

Private tenants in other blocks on the estate are now fearful that they will also be evicted, Sarah added.

Overshadowed neighbours blocked from delaying Leyton towers

by Josh Mellor,
Local Democracy Reporter

Waltham Forest Council has taken steps to stop existing residents delaying a controversial development near Lea Bridge Station that will overshadow their homes.

The council and development partner London Square are building 345 homes in towers of up to 26 storeys on three plots of land at the junction of Lea Bridge Road and Orient Way.

A confidential “right to light” report found the towers will overshadow properties in Elm Park Road, Lea Bridge Road and flats in the recently-built ‘Motion’ development.

In order to “provide certainty” that the estimated £125million development progresses as planned, council leaders agreed on 13th October to use “appropriation” powers to stop residents holding up construction.

By appropriating the land under the Housing and Planning Act 2016, the council will “remove the risk” of a neighbour starting a legal battle or demanding “ransom payments” in compensation.

Although the predicted loss of light is described as “minor”, a report prepared for the cabinet meeting claims eliminating any overshadowing would mean cutting the overall buildings down by “circa 70%”.

The report adds: “This level of reduction would not only significantly reduce the public benefits of the scheme – including the level of much-needed affordable housing – but would also make the proposed development financially unviable meaning that the redevelopment

could not be advanced, meaning that all the benefits of the proposed development are eroded.”

Controversy around the Lea Bridge towers has centred on the threat to Orient Way Pocket Park, which contains more than 100 trees that will be removed to make way from one of the buildings.

The council insists 95 of these trees are “low quality” and twelve “cannot realistically be retained” for longer than one year, promising to plant more than 250 replacement trees, but environmentalists have threatened “non-violent action” to stop the park being cleared.

Former council leader Clare Coghill attracted condemnation for taking a job as vice-chair of London’s Square’s subsidiary Square Roots in September 2021, after the council-developer partnership was approved by her cabinet the previous year.

Current council leader Grace Williams later insisted there would be “no question of any impropriety or conflict of interest” in the former leader’s new role and claimed she would not work on the Lea Bridge scheme “whilst she remains a local councillor”.

Clare did not run for re-election as a councillor during May’s local election.

According to the council, the benefits of the regeneration scheme include 750 square metres of “high-quality public green space”, a “plaza”, a community and cultural hub, 50% affordable housing and 1,800sqm of children’s play space.

A new entrance will also be built for Lea Bridge Station, which was reopened in 2016 using £5m in funding raised by the council from other large developments in the area.



An artist's impression of the two tallest towers in the scheme Credit Hawkins Brown/Exterior Architecture

CRIME

Chingford dad's killer given life sentence

The 15-year-old boy who murdered Chingford dad James Markham was jailed for life at the Old Bailey last month.

The boy, who cannot be named due to his young age, will serve a minimum sentence of 15 years before he is eligible for parole.

James Markham, a 45-year-old father of three, died on 9th August last year outside his Churchill Terrace home.

The court previously heard he confronted a group of teenagers loitering outside and approached them with a drill bit in an apparent attempt to scare them off.

His killer pulled out a knife and the pair swung at each other. James was struck three times – in the back, armpit and chest – and the last blow pierced his lung.

Detective Inspector John Marriott, from the Met Police, said: “James was a loving family man who leaves behind a partner and three children. That day they



James Markham Courtesy of Met Police

were met with a horrific scenario that no family should have to endure.

“I hope this conviction will provide them with a small measure of comfort as

they continue to grieve James.

“The teenager in this incident was subject to a Criminal Behaviour Order that he had flouted on a number of occasions and should never have been in the area

“The knife he used was never recovered, indicating he went to some lengths to try to distance himself from this horrific crime. He will now, quite rightly, spend a substantial amount of time behind bars.

“I’d like to thank the skill and determination of my team in working to deliver justice to James’ family. My thoughts are with them today.”

James’ killer was quickly identified after dropping his mobile phone while he ran away from the scene of the crime and arrested two days later.

Despite his lawyer attempting to convince a jury he had acted in self-defence, he was found guilty of murder in July this year.

Young man killed in Leytonstone ‘street fight’

A young man died on the streets of Leytonstone last month, while another was badly injured.

Police were called to Church Lane, near Leytonstone Station, at just before 11pm on 16th October to reports of a fight.

They found 27-year-old Zeqja Lumturi, from Barking, and another man in his 20s with serious injuries.

While the second man was taken to hospital with “non-life threatening” injuries, Zeqja sadly died from his wounds while still at the scene.

At the time of writing, there have been no arrests but the investigation is said to be “moving at pace”.

Chief Superintendent Simon Crick, lead for policing in Waltham Forest and Newham, said: “My thoughts and sympathies are with Mr Lumturi’s family and friends for their tragic loss.

“I can understand that this incident will have caused concern and shock in the local community and would like to reassure residents that we will have local officers patrolling in the area.

“Please speak to these officers; they will help allay any concerns you may have.”

Detective Inspector Adam Callaghan, who is leading the investigation into Zeqja’s death, added: “Our investigation is moving at pace and we are pursuing a number of lines of inquiry.

“Our priority is to find the person responsible and get justice for the victim and his family.

“I would appeal to anyone with information – no matter how small – to call police. If you don’t feel comfortable speaking to us, call Crimestoppers anonymously.”

Anyone with information is asked to call police via 101 quoting reference CAD 7352/16Oct. To remain anonymous please contact Crimestoppers.

Advertisement

LICENSING ACT 2003

Application for the Grant of a Premises License

Notice is hereby given that **Devil's Botany Ltd** has applied to the London Borough of Waltham Forest for the grant of a Premises Licence at **Devil's Botany Distillery, 16a Heybridge Way, London E10 7NQ**. The nature of the application is as follows:

- To permit the sale of alcohol between 12pm–9pm Monday to Sunday.

The Licensing register listing full details of the application is kept by the Licensing Section, Town Hall, Fellowship Square, Forest Road, Walthamstow, London E17 4JF. 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 Section, London Borough of Waltham Forest, Town Hall, Fellowship Square, Forest Road, Walthamstow, London E17 4JF.

Representations must be received no later than: **21 November 2022**.

It is an offence to knowingly or recklessly make a false statement in connection with this application. A person is liable to an unlimited fine on conviction should such a false statement be made.

Primary school fined £50,000 over kitchen infestation

by Josh Mellor, Local Democracy Reporter

A Walthamstow primary school that failed to deal with a mouse infestation in its kitchen has been fined £50,000.

Food hygiene inspectors from Waltham Forest Council found “ingrained dirt and mouse droppings” in the kitchen of St Saviour’s Church of England in Verulam Avenue during a visit in October 2020.

The inspectors found mouse droppings on the floor, inside machinery and on a shelf, while a chef working in the kitchen told them the school had not taken action for four months.

Representatives of Genesis Education Trust, which runs St Saviour’s, appeared at Thames Magistrates’ Court last month for sentencing after pleading guilty to breaking food safety laws in August.

Magistrates’ bench chair Reverend Abraham Lawrence ordered Genesis to pay a £50,000 fine, plus £4,109.50 in prosecution costs and a victim surcharge.

He explained that the large fine was due to the duty of care the school owes its young students, the risk to the “352-plus staff” and the school’s knowledge that “something was going wrong”.

He added: “We find that there was knowledge, a member of the school team was at least aware that something was going wrong. We also noticed that the school office was informed, there was also knowledge at management level.”

The school agreed to pay the fine in instalments of £4,000 for the next 13 months.

The school’s caterer The Pantry UK admitted breaching food safety regulations for the mouse infestation in August and was previously ordered to pay £41,478 in fines and costs.

At that hearing, The Pantry’s head of operations Anthony Swaby told magistrates the infestation was “terrible” but that the company had “accepted responsibility”.

He added: “It is worth saying the concerns were reported [to Genesis] and not actioned. The responsibility of the pest

control is contractually not The Pantry’s responsibility, but we should have highlighted it at the time, there’s nothing much to say to excuse that.”

Genesis is an “independent church multi-academy trust” that also manages St Mary’s Primary School, Walthamstow, and St Margaret’s, Barking.



Mouse droppings found in the kitchen Credit WF Council

Four men charged after Walthamstow shooting

A Leyton 24-year-old is one of four suspects accused of murdering Kacey Boothe in Walthamstow this summer.

Kacey, a 25-year-old from Stratford, died in hospital shortly after being shot in Forest Rise at around 9.30pm on 13th August.

Last month, police arrested four men in connection with the crime, including Kammar Henry-Richards, of Cambrian Road.

Henry-Richards was arrested on 16th October and is being held in custody while he waits to appear at the Old Bailey this month.



Kacey Boothe, 25 Credit Met Police

The three other suspects are Ka-Amni Brightly-Donaldson, a 22-year-old from Enfield; Jeffrey Gyimah, a 20-year-old from Hackney and 30-year-old Kadeem Brightly-Barnes from Romford.

All four men are charged with Kacey’s murder, while Brightly-Donaldson and Gyimah are also charged with possession of a gun and ammunition.

A post-mortem examination of Kacey’s body found he died from gunshot wounds to his neck and chest.

Detectives from the Metropolitan Police continue to investigate.

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HEALTH

Leyton residents 'most likely to die early'

Residents in Leyton are the most likely in the borough to die a preventable death before age 75, a new interim report reveals.

The UCL Institute of Health Equity, led by Professor Sir Michael Marmot, is researching local health inequality for Waltham Forest Council and will present its final report later this month.

The council hopes to use the report to gain "a deeper understanding of the specific impacts the pandemic had on residents" and guide its future plans.

On 10th October, councillors on the health scrutiny committee received an "interim" version of the report, containing some shocking statistics about health inequality in the borough.

These include the fact that a resident in Leyton or Lea Bridge is 50% more likely to die a preventable death before the age of 75, compared to those living in Chingford or Chapel End.

Given the "stark link between deprivation and early death", the draft report considered at length the local rates of poverty and unemployment.

It notes that, as of 2020, almost a quarter of local children were living in relative poverty and there were around twice as many working-age residents as there were local jobs.

Last year, almost half the women employed in Waltham Forest earned less than the London Living Wage.

Overall, residents living in Leyton and Leytonstone are more likely to be deprived than those in Chingford.

For example, in 2019, half of the borough's electoral wards had more than a quarter of their elderly residents living in poverty – with those worst affected all lying in the south of the borough.

Interestingly, given the borough's celebrated green spaces like Walthamstow Marshes, Waltham Forest has the lowest percentage among comparable London boroughs of its population living close to a green space.

However, councillors were told that the statistics presented "represent a small proportion of the overall findings of the report".

The health scrutiny committee is expected to discuss the final report – and any recommendations for future initiatives that result from it – in January next year.

Polio survivor urges parents to vaccinate kids



Mahfuzur Rahman
(courtesy of NHS NEL)

A polio survivor is urging parents to vaccinate their kids after signs the virus is spreading in the borough.

In August, the local NHS began offering free booster vaccines for all children aged one to nine years to protect them from the potentially fatal disease.

The government first revealed the virus was spreading locally in June, after mutated strains were found in East London sewage earlier this year.

While the risk to the overall population is low, vaccination is the only way to protect people from rare complications like life-long paralysis or even death.

East London polio survivor Mahfuzur Rahman, 35, said: "Any parent offered a booster or catch-up dose of the polio vaccine by the NHS should take it – we don't want to see any polio cases in London."

"Otherwise, you risk them catching polio and living a limited life with limb damage, pain, fatigue and

muscle weakness. I wouldn't wish that on anyone."

Mahfuzur, who is a member of the British Polio Fellowship, contracted the virus in Bangladesh at around two years old and has lived with a shorter and weaker left leg ever since.

He added: "Walking is difficult, and I've never been able to run or take part in sports like football. Though I'm only 35 now, I can already see new polio symptoms starting to develop, like fatigue and muscle pain."

Parents are being contacted by the NHS via letter or text, asking them to book an appointment with their GP. Some sites are also offering pre-booked or walk-in vaccinations for children ages five to nine.

Find out more here: north-eastlondon.icb.nhs.uk/your-health/polio-booster-vaccination/

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COMMENT

COUNCILLOR COMMENT

Rhianon Eglin, Leyton, Labour

Earlier this year, I was elected as a local councillor for the first time to represent my neighbourhood of Leyton. I was driven to apply because of how important community is to me, which is why I'm so proud of the fantastic community initiatives my ward has seen throughout this year. What many people might not realise is that some of these projects were made possible by grants from the council's community ward funding scheme.

Previous projects funded in Leyton through this scheme include the East London Shakespeare Festival – which staged *Twelfth Night* in Leyton Jubilee Park this summer – and Aso Oke Cultural Weaving, celebrating the Yoruban heritage of some of our local residents. As someone who runs community groups and events myself, I know that they can often



Cllr Rhianon Eglin

need support to get off the ground so to have this pool of funding available for hyper-local projects is great. I'd encourage anyone to apply in the future if you have an idea that will provide joy, skills and opportunities for your neighbourhood.

My day job is working as a teacher, which nourishes my love for learning and there is definitely a lot to learn within my new role as a councillor! I was assigned to sit on the council's pension committee and have learned a lot about investments since being elected in May. I'm proud to have sat on this committee as Waltham Forest became the first council to stop investing its pension fund directly in fossil fuels – something that is vital to protect the environment for future generations.

Protecting the environment is another hugely important goal for me as a councillor, especially having grown up in the borough and had the amazing Epping Forest on my doorstep. It wasn't until I settled in the area as an adult that I properly reflected on, and truly appreciated, what I had growing up.

The council is rolling out a number of new initiatives to try to cut the borough's emissions down to net-zero and I want to do everything I can to support these in my area. One of the council's key aims is to help residents save money by sharing, repairing and reusing items where they can and I am looking forward to working with Leyton residents: gathering their views and ideas around creating opportunities to recycle and reuse. As a teacher, I am especially interested in hearing from young people and I have already had a request from a five-year-old resident for more water refilling stations, which I thought was a fantastic idea!

I'm always very happy to hear from residents so please get in touch with me: cllr.rhianon.eglin@walthamforest.gov.uk

'In times of crisis, East Londoners take to the streets'

Social historian Esther Freeman on joining a long history of East London activism

On a gloriously sunny morning, I stood outside Walthamstow Library wearing more layers of clothing than I needed. I was there with the E17 branch of the Don't Pay campaign and, while wriggling out of jumpers and jackets, saw one of the day's organisers Heidi arrive, laden with banners and flyers.

Gathered around us was a mixed crowd, ranging from young students to older, more experienced activists. After some brief introductions, Heidi began: "I saw my energy bills double in a month. I'm 25 and it feels like I can't save and I can't plan anything because I'm spending all my paycheck on rent and energy bills."

Not everyone was there because of financial hardship, however. "I don't personally have a problem paying my bills," Roland told the crowd,

"But I'm angry at the way money is being transferred from those who can least afford it, to a small number of billionaires."

Our group set up shop by a picket line of transport workers from the RMT union at Walthamstow Central Station and was soon joined by local campaigners opposing immigration raids and the hostile environment. We had common cause in fighting the cost-of-living crisis and our lack of faith in the government to solve it. The activists out that day instead believed in solidarity movements; solutions coming from the community itself.

"The best way to build any kind of movement is by talking to your neighbours," one campaigner, Holly, said. "They're exactly the same as you; they go to the same shops and they live in the same area. Whether or not you know it, you're connected through the same struggles."

As a social historian, I know solidarity movements have a long history in East London. In 1888, a small group of women were sacked from the Bryant and May match factory in Bow after speaking to a journalist about their appalling work conditions. Within a day, 1,400 of their fellow workers, mostly young women, had walked out in



solidarity. They were told a strike would never work, that other more desperate women would be shipped in to take their jobs, but they stood firm. Within two weeks, the women won all their demands.

In 1939, women in the Langdale and Brady Street mansions organised a five-month rent strike against their unscrupulous landlords. To prevent bailiffs from entering, the women erected barricades and barbed wire, while guards patrolled the entrance.

Even the milkman had to secure a permit to enter.

Don't Pay should take a lesson from our area's history. As the economy collapses, things will get worse and millions who can't pay their rising bills will find bailiffs knocking on their doors. This will be the time for neighbours to act together. As Heidi says, many of us share the same struggles.

To read more about Esther's research visit: eastlondonwomen.org.uk

LETTER

Dear WFE

WHILE THE COUNCIL leader is right to draw attention to the tenth anniversary of the William Morris Gallery, it is important to put on record how a campaign by the local community was instrumental in saving its William Morris collection. In 2010, visitor numbers were low, the displays looked tired and the building needed maintenance. The council, seemingly unable to appreciate this cultural asset, was making radical plans to sell the collection to a South London museum and turn the Water House into a venue for weddings and similar events.

Grassroots movement Anti-Scrap was quickly formed to vigorously oppose the plans and the campaign culminated in a petition signed by more than 16,000 people worldwide, delivered to both Downing Street and the council. The collection was saved, lottery funding was granted to refurb and extend the gallery and, in 2013, it won the Art Fund Prize. None of this would have happened without the determination of the campaigners and the support of the local community.

Attention must now turn to the Vestry House Museum, in which the beautiful long gallery has been changed into a café "with a bit of a museum attached". The museum houses a huge archive of documents, maps and photographs but both the archive and displays need to be updated. There is to be a consultation on this and other cultural "destinations" in November, which may call for further action.

Linda Green,
Walthamstow resident

AROUND THE BOROUGH

WALTHAMSTOW

Pub reopens after controversial makeover



The Bell **Credit** Leisure PR

The Bell reopened under new management last month following a controversial £418,000 makeover.

The pub in Forest Road closed for refurbishment on 15th September and reopened its doors on 21st October.

The local favourite is now managed in-house by landlord Stonegate Group, the UK's largest pub company, which forced out long-standing manager Andy Potter.



The Bell, interior **Credit** Leisure PR

Andy and his wife Louisa took the pub on in 2012 and saw it become highly profitable, going from taking £3,500 a week to £30,000.

In a press release sent to the *Echo*, Stonegate introduced the new general manager, Dave Morrish, his son Joseph and "his English bulldog Bonnie".

Dave wrote: "The Bell has had a great past as one of East London's best pubs and now it has a great future ahead too. It is good to be here and meet so many locals.

"The warmth and character of The Bell is still here, just as it has always been. We have refreshed the décor and furniture and it's a brilliant place for everyone to come in and meet up.

"It's not just about the quality food and drinks we have, it's about being the social hub of the area. Pubs are the original and best meeting place for communities and The Bell is a classic example of this."

While some have been cautiously optimistic, many are angry their local could turn into a "spit and sawdust sports bar", particularly after leaked plans showed Stonegate intended to install 14 TV screens.

The press release notes new booth seating, which includes some of the screens, describing them as "perfect for any sports fans looking to catch the next big match".

HIGHAMS PARK

Growing fears for women's safety

Local police have promised to increase patrols in Highams Park due to growing fears about women's safety.

At a public meeting on 13th October, chaired by local MP Iain Duncan Smith, residents expressed their concerns after recent high-profile attacks.

These include the reported rape and sexual assault of two girls near Highams Park Lake in August and a series of attacks on customers, including a young woman, at the Tesco Superstore on 5th October.

One resident – who asked not to be named – said: "I've lived here all my life and expect muggings but I don't expect to hear about rapes or attempted rapes.

"I've got teenage girls, I don't want them to go out but I have to let them, so I want to know what level of service we can expect from police."

Sergeant Rob Sewell replied that there is currently an "influx" of new officers into the local force but that numbers are still not where they "need to be".

He added: "You will see an



increase in police presence but the challenge is – we have to be honest with everybody – that I have 96 police officers on the Waltham Forest neighbourhood policing team.

"I have police officers in Chingford but I can't tell you those police officers are going to be in the area at the current time, we don't know what calls we're going to get."

A Waltham Forest Council staff member urged residents to report any concerns about safety through the recently-

launched Safe Streets app.

They added that schools in the borough do work to address male violence by teaching students about relationships, appropriate behaviour and gender violence.

However, towards the end of the meeting, one mother-of-two said: "I came here looking for reassurance that something was going to be done, but actually I feel more scared.

"You haven't said what you're doing and all this is happening. I'm really angry and really upset."

LEYTONSTONE

Feedback sought on 'South Leytonstone' masterplan

Waltham Forest Council is asking for views on a new masterplan setting out how South Leytonstone "can grow, adapt and thrive in the coming years".

The "area framework" will shape future development in the "15-minute neighbourhood" from Draper's Field to Leytonstone High Road Station, which encompasses Langthorne Park.

After asking residents last November to describe "the challenges the area faces", the council has created a list of "projects that could be delivered to make [it] an even better place to live".

The council is now seeking feedback on these plans, with surveys open now until 18th November.

The key themes of the council's consultation are "creating a vibrant and attractive" High Road, improving public space with funding from housing developers and making it



Leytonstone High Road "easier, safer and greener" to walk or cycle around the area.

South Leytonstone is home to three sites the council has earmarked for future homes in its draft Local Plan, which government planning inspectors have so far refused to approve due to "significant concerns" about the rate of new homes planned.

These sites are the Cathall Leisure Centre, earmarked for 245 new homes; B&M, for 150 homes; and Avenue Road Estate, for "around 600" homes.

Find out more and fill out the council's surveys to have your say online here: southleytonstoneframework.commonplace.is

LEYTON

Pub hopes to reopen despite forfeiture

A pub is hoping to win back its lease and reopen "as soon as possible" after the landlord changed the locks.

On 10th October, a legal notice appeared on the doors of Leyton Technical in the High Road, announcing landlord LBC Leyton Ltd had ended the lease and seized the property.

The pub was leased through Pubola Ltd to the chain Antic London, which runs the Red Lion in Leytonstone and ran the now-closed Mirth, Marvel and Maud in Walthamstow's EMD cinema.

The Leyton Technical website shows a letter from Pubola director Anthony Thomas to the landlord stating the company plans to fight the forfeiture using the Commercial

Rent Coronavirus Act 2022.

This act was introduced to help settle rent arrears from the Covid-19 pandemic, when the letter notes the pub was "unable to trade or[...] permitted to trade only with significant restrictions".

A statement on the website from Antic adds: "We are temporarily closed due to matters currently out of our control. We hope to reopen as soon as possible."

LBC Leyton Ltd is a subsidiary of Leytonstone-based developer Lee Valley Estates, which also owns Blackhorse Mews in Walthamstow.

The pub is not the only local business to be hit with a forfeiture notice in recent months, with Walthamstow cafe St J's also having its locks abruptly changed in August.



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