

Highbury Fields Association

Founded  in 1971.

Affiliated to Living Streets - Islington
Member of Islington Stadium Campaign Alliance
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Newsletter - August 2004

Chairman's Report

As another year goes by it is sometimes useful to sit down and list ones successes and admit ones failures. Yes – I got that promotion. No – I still haven't started writing that children's book. List them also because it is easy to forget how much *has* happened.

This little area, centred on Highbury Fields, continues to have plenty a' happening, though the casual outsider might notice very little. Let us start with the good things. New and more elegant lighting is at last appearing, though at times mighty slowly. Church Path has been followed with parts of Calabria Road and Corsica Street and then by Baalbec Road. It is almost certain that Highbury Terrace and Highbury Crescent will start by the New Year.

The Oasis Cafe re-opened and is very popular when the weather is kind. The illegal ice-cream van has gone (we hope) for good. The new water feature in the playground should be finished by the end of summer.

Those members who didn't manage to come to our Summer Party on the Fields on the 17th July missed a very pleasant afternoon. We will hold it before the school holidays next year.

I think the rules allow us to include in our list of good things those *bad* things that didn't eventually happen and even things that turn out better than we might have expected. In the first category we can include the two sets of recycling bins that were so nearly inflicted on us – on the inner path opposite the new Baptist Church and at the north end of Church Path. A classic case where prompt protest by many residents nipped it in the bud. In a similar way strong opposition seems likely to have prevented the splitting of Parking Zone E into four parts which would have inconvenienced many residents.

Earlier in the year, the owners of Aberdeen Works, the large complex behind Highbury Grove, were threatening a huge redevelopment, which for the moment they seem to have withdrawn. We must keep our eyes on it.

So, where have things *not* gone so well? There have sadly been two examples in the last eighteen months where the Council have carried out road works in our area which have turned out to be fatally flawed.

In both cases they went through a completely inadequate 'consultation process'. In both cases all the local community groups and Living Streets strongly protested in vain. At Leigh Road/Highbury Grove

AGM

On Monday 6th September 2004
At Christ Church, Highbury Grove, London N5
7.30 for 7.45pm

Guest Speaker: Lora Nicolaou - Director of Development Planning at DEGW - will speak on "The role of tall buildings in managing intensification and change".

the speed table they added nearly a year ago has done nothing to make that crossing any safer and for the moment there is no money available to change it. During the day-long survey carried out by Living Streets, the HCA and HFA last autumn, 92% of the very many respondents felt they could not cross the road safely.

The ludicrous closing of Benwell and Bryantwood Roads caused, as widely predicted, massive traffic jams with an impact over the whole Highbury area. After much protest Benwell Road was re-opened and the Council have promised to review the whole scheme again in September.

Lastly, I am personally saddened that many of the people who use and presumably enjoy Highbury Fields do not feel the need to help to preserve it. Many of the trees have branches snapped off and many young trees have been killed because dog owners have actually encouraged their pets to chew off the bark on the trunks. Barbeques may be fun - in theory they are not allowed on the Fields - but is it reasonable to let them burn the grass beneath to cinders? Why do people who bring a picnic or drinks onto the Fields not feel personally responsible for taking a plastic bag and clearing up before they go? Heigh ho.

Thank you to all of you who take the trouble to write to us and call us to task and, occasionally, praise us.

Martin Jones

The Highbury Roundhouse

Search for funding. Ever since Islington Council eliminated its funding of the Roundhouse in September 2000, the community centre has had to emphasize activities that could be funded from other sources or activities that produce income in their own right.

Providing services for children has proved to be a good fit with the need for funding and fees. Today, the Roundhouse devotes much of its time trying to improve the health, well-being and education of children, especially those who are disadvantaged.



Spoiling the fields

Children's programmes The Roundhouse, its management committee and senior staff are now registered with the Office for Standards in Education in what was a lengthy and complex process. This enables us to offer programmes for children whenever they are not in school and a variety of after-school activities, including the youth and homework clubs.

For example, the Summer Play Scheme has been a great success with around fifty children participating over a span of five weeks. This at a time when Islington Council has had to curtail its own summer programmes for kids because of financial constraints.

Outside support The Roundhouse recently obtained a £6,000 grant from John Lewis Partnership to run an information technology course for youngsters, starting in the autumn. On the horizon is the possibility of the Roundhouse becoming a designated "Children's Centre", which is a well-funded initiative of the Government.

Needless to say, all our other activities, such as the pensioners club, will continue. But it is fair to say that the Roundhouse has gained a youthful look.

William Ellington

Down the Vent Shaft

Deeper than a rabbit hole – 220 steps in all. I was recently invited by Rail Link Engineering to see the progress they are making in Corsica Street. I had merely hoped to be able to stand just inside the entrance and take a photo or two and discover when the project is likely to finish.

Instead I was kitted out in protective boots, a natty orange jacket, a hard hat and goggles, given a swift induction course on safety and security and soon we were walking down all those stairs.

I had organised two previous trips to the site for members when we were similarly kitted out but only able to stand at the top and peer down the hole. I was also able to go earlier this year with Anita to a shindig they held at the vast concrete “Box” they have built at Stratford.

This building is not on that scale but is still very impressive, with the bare concrete reminiscent of the Hayward Gallery. At the very bottom, inside the railway tunnels themselves, the last precast sections are being put in place. Soon scaffolders will construct a temporary tower nearly the whole height inside the main shaft which will allow huge extraction fans to be installed.

Above the fans will be a very thick layer of dampers which the acoustic experts promise us will greatly reduce the noise when the fans are in operation. The vent shaft has been built to allow air to come up from the tunnels. The fans would normally only operate when maintenance work is being done and then only at about 20% of capacity.

They would however operate at full power in the event of a fire. The vent shaft is due to be completed early next April and the fans will be tested, in the daytime, during the six-week period before that. They promise to give us prior warning.

Before that they have to clad the concrete with a layer of reddish-brown bricks so it will become somewhat less apparent and also remove the crane – this time they also promise without damaging the trees. Lastly a condition of planning permission was that the site be landscaped and richly planted with mature trees and bushes. Keep your fingers crossed.



Ready for cladding

Kings Cross

Kings Place development

This is a site in York Way which has been given a controversial “minded to grant” approval by Islington Council, despite objections by Camden Council. This is unfortunate as it breaches Islington’s UDP Height policy of a maximum of 30 metres.

The building would include a small concert hall in the basement and would be a particularly ‘green’ sustainable structure. The developer made no secret of the fact that he needed the extra height to make it pay. No figures were produced to justify this although they normally have to be considered as a material fact for a planning decision.

Nice though it is to have a concert hall (there will be many in the Kings Cross development) I think good design and architecture are more important. The plans for the Railway lands will come before the committee in September. On plan the buildings are twice the height that one would wish.

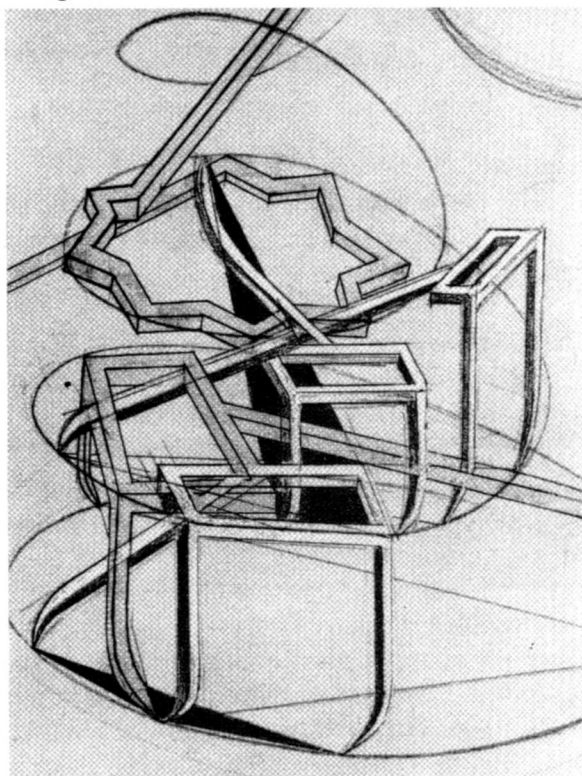
To allow the UDP Height policy to be breached for Kings Place in York Way would have strategic implications for the Railway lands, might set a precedent for other sites along York Way and will have an effect on the character of the Kings Cross Conservation Area, which is newly enhanced by the P & O development.

Jeannie Burnett

Paul Neagu 1938 – 2004

Behind the Holloway Road Waitrose, in Jackson Road, there is a scruffy plain blue door. To the passer by it offers no clue to the extraordinary and now silent world which lies within. This was the home and studio of the artist, Paul Neagu, who died on 16th June aged sixty six.

Neagu, originally from Romania, lived in Islington for many years, initially in Highbury New Park and then Jackson Road, where efforts are now being made to preserve this remaining environmental record of his intense and ascetic lifestyle. The flat, yard and studio contain no single item which does not relate to Neagu's work and scholarship. There is no vestige of unnecessary domesticity: the bed, the table, pots, cutlery, textiles and minimal storage spaces have the spareness and discipline of a monk. The entire location offers an extraordinary insight into the life, values and creative process of this intense and fiercely intelligent man.



Study for sculptural installation

Paul came to London in 1971, by way of France and Scotland, already an established artist in Romania. He had an important one-man exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford and major London shows followed at the ICA and the Serpentine Gallery. He is known primarily for his complex monumental sculpture which continues the work of his countryman, Brancusi, but throughout his life he worked in a wide range of media including performance, drawing,

printmaking and, in his final months, collage and painting. Much of his sculptural work was conceived for specific locations and carries strong messages.

In 2002 the Tate bought the major part of his archive and a number of his best works. The true extent and the importance of Paul's work remains to be fully documented and recognised, but he is without doubt one of the leading international artists of the 20th century.

Liz Lydiate

Out There and Beyond

I was asked whether I would write something for this year's Newsletter – something a little light-hearted, that might distract us from more serious local matters for a while (matters like Planning and the State of the Fields and Crime).

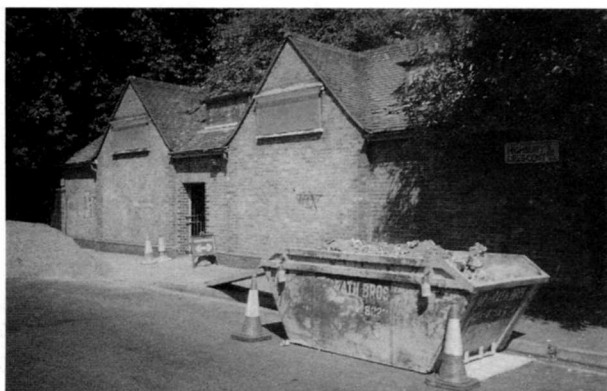
At our delightful HFA Summer Party in Highbury Fields in July, a number of our members asked me about cruising holidays: they knew that I and my partner had been on many cruises, indeed had just returned from a Swan Hellenic holiday in the Mediterranean.

Below is a poem I wrote for an onboard competition last year. I didn't win! It was inspired by the travels we have had with Swan Hellenic, Noble Caledonian, Jules Verne, Martin Randall Travel and many others. I encourage you all to enter this world, out there.

Journeys of Discovery

- D Do you recall your first determined push
I Into a wider world of light and sound -
S Sensations bursting on your eyes and ears -
C Convinced it was all yours to be explored?
O Or, when you took that first tentative step,
V Very unsure, beyond the garden gate?
E Endured, much later, trudging in the hills,
R Rain-soaked and hours before you reached
your goal?
Y Years on, we strolled the High Streets of the
world -
T Thebes and Palmyra, Ephesus and Rome;
R Rose gently in the dawn above the Nile;
A And regained Petra, down the long defile;
V Vision of Eden that we'd wept to leave;
E Endlessly sought our dream - next stop,
perhaps, is Mars?
L Let's pack our bags and go, out there
beyond the stars.

Paul Williams



Highbury Crescent toilets transformed into offices

‘Streetbook’

Borough-wide Streetscape Manual

“Aims to put the improvement of our streets and public spaces high on the Council’s list of priorities” The principal aim of the Manual is to provide a single unified vision for Islington for the upkeep of its streetscape and for the design of new schemes throughout the borough.

The Council had a series of consultation meetings with External Stakeholders. The recurring issues were:

1. *People and Vehicles* – the dominance of traffic at the expense of walkers and cyclists.
2. *Access and Street Clutter* – redundant and superfluous street furniture
3. *Simplicity and Co-ordination* – The lack of a common approach in streetscape design in different parts of the borough.
4. *Maintenance and Safety* – lack of maintenance contributes to the feeling of neglect and an unkempt and threatening environment.

Design of Road Junctions & Traffic Calming

They acknowledge that in theory the pedestrian

environment should not be subservient to the highway, but often is. They admit that insensitively designed traffic calming can harm the nature of traditional streets. Various ways are defined and construction methods clearly specified – build-outs; side entry treatments; pinch points; rumble devices, islands; over-run areas; chicanes; road speed cushions; raised speed tables and road closures.

Street Furniture on the Footway The strict approach should be that nothing is placed on the street unless it is absolutely necessary – superfluous and redundant street furniture should be removed and should be reduced to a minimum by good design. On narrow pavements only lamp columns, sign posts, guardrails and bollards should be allowed and then only in a defined line near the kerb. Parking enforcement and strengthened paving provide the scope for significantly reducing the use of bollards.



Photo: Robin Dormer

Only when the footway is more than 3 metres wide should other items be allowed: trees; bins; post boxes; telephone boxes and bus shelters and then organized to allow a clear passage for wheelchairs, people with children and pushchairs. Lamp columns can double up to hold traffic signs, enforcement and CCTV cameras and telecommunication equipment.

Other Matters The Manual is long and admirably detailed. Other subjects include: the design of standard footways (strict rules on the materials and the sub-bases to be used; clear designs for laying round corners); tactile paving; litter bins and recycling, seating; public lighting; guardrailing; pedestrian crossings and street trees.

The Streetbook has been adopted and if scrupulously implemented should in time greatly improve the streetscene in Islington. We must encourage the officers to act.

My Highbury Adventure

Paranoia, Pedalbikes and a Pair of Red Shoes

On Saturday 10th July at around 8 pm my husband Peter and I left our house on Highbury Place and noticed a woman I didn't recognise sitting on the steps of the house next door. Peter went off to run some errands and I popped across to the recycling bins in Highbury Crescent.

Strangers Less than ten minutes later I returned, noticing the woman was still sitting on the steps. Just as I went to open our door, it opened from inside and a strange man came out, pulling his baseball cap low over his face as he walked past me. The woman on the steps, was saying "hurry, hurry". I immediately sensed something was wrong but thought perhaps the man was a delivery person and that he was, well, simply late for something!

Flight As I stepped inside the door, all I saw was the man and woman getting onto a pair of bicycles and pedalling away. I turned back to go inside and noticed some travellers cheques crumpled up on the entranceway floor. I picked them up and saw, to my horror, they belonged to Peter.

Pursuit I grabbed the cheques and started running (in my fashionable, 3-inch-high red clogs) down Highbury Place to Calabria Rd., where I saw the pair had turned. While running, I called Peter on my mobile and asked him, cryptically, whether he had thrown his travellers cheques on the floor. He said "No", I said "I *think* we've been robbed" and hung up on him.

Cry for Help I immediately dialled 999 and started telling the police what was happening, still running after the pair, who had now reached Corsica St. I was describing them to the police and begging them to hurry up and come. The pair turned down St Paul's Rd. and I kept chasing them, still on the phone to the police. I soon lost sight of them and, furious, turned back to walk home.

Reinforcements Just as I reached Corsica St., a police car appeared and I ran up to it. Realising I was the lady chasing the burglars, they told me to jump in the car. We raced off, catching them up within one minute. We slowed down right next to them and they at first pretended to not notice, but started to speed up. The woman fell slightly behind



Crossroads and Sow Thistle



and the police car pulled up in front of her and the female officer jumped out after her. Coursing with adrenalin, I opened the back door to jump out after her but the other officer yelled at me to stay in the car.

Chase We sped off again after the man, with lights flashing and sirens wailing, weaving through traffic at full speed. The officer was really impressive behind the wheel. The burglar sped into a council estate, at which point the officer slammed on the brakes and jumped out of the car, warning me to stay put this time.

He ran off on foot after the burglar, still on his bicycle, and left me panting on the back seat, siren lights still flashing, the car blocking traffic in both directions. I think everyone who walked by thought I had been arrested! The officer eventually returned, *sans* burglar, but carrying the black shoulder bag the man had dropped during the chase. Adding insult to injury, not only had they stolen our valuables, they had used our own bag, too!

Final score We drove back to the house where two police cars were parked and met up with Peter and the other officers. Our flat door had been kicked to splinters. The female burglar had been caught and arrested. She was found with a bag full of belongings from a flat they had just burgled on Holloway Rd. She will appear in court this summer. The man is still at large but the police now know who he is. He is a notorious and prolific burglar who works in partnership with the woman. They say they will get him sooner or later. I will wear proper running shoes until he is caught, just in case ...

Julie Tomasz

Stop Press - and they've caught him too

Questions and Answers

Questions:

What does 'W' stand for in George W. Bush?

John Maus, Scott Engel and Gary Leeds belong to which band of Brothers?

These are just two of the questions that won't appear in the Quiz Night I'm organising at Highbury Roundhouse in September.

A couple of months ago, I started telling friends in the neighbourhood that my wife, Val, and I would be getting into training this summer, pursuing an elusive physical fitness. The news was greeted with varying degrees of derision and disbelief. At your age? Why? Have you lost the plot?

Val works at Great Ormond Street Hospital and we have committed ourselves to six months of fundraising for their Children's Charity. You may have seen us at the Highbury Festival or raffling enormous teddy bears at school fairs. In November we are undertaking an arduous, high altitude, sponsored walk along the Inca Trail in Peru. Now, Nature has not really equipped us for this sort of venture. To prepare for the ordeal we will have to shed pounds even as we raise pounds for GOSH. So you may even have caught sight of us walking, walking, walking around the Fields.

We are raising money specifically for a Transitional Care Flat, within the hospital, where GOSH children and their families can learn to deal with their long term medical needs. Val and I hope that many fellow HFA members will be able to come and support our efforts at:

A September Quiz Night Saturday 11th September 7.30 p.m. Highbury Roundhouse

We are sure it will be a fun evening. We know it is for a good cause.

Answers: Dubya's middle name is Walker. The band is the Walker Brothers. Do you detect a theme emerging? Or perhaps an obsession?

Tony Miller

For more details about the Quiz Night contact Tony (020 7354 0863) or Caroline at the Roundhouse (020 7359 5916)

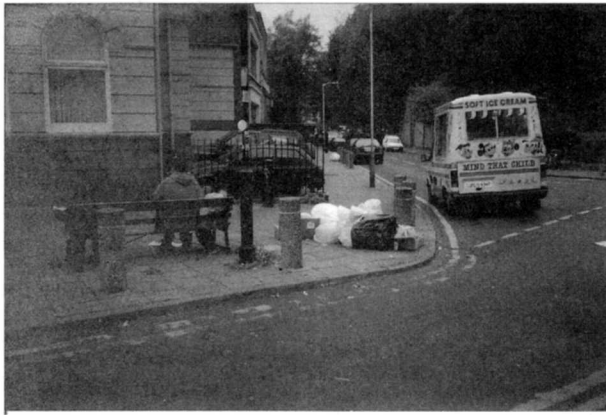
The Meadow

Last year the bottom Field was mowed a few times, early in the year, and then allowed to grow. Perhaps because of the late start and the long, dry hot period the grass did not grow well.

This year has been very different. The grass has grown well, helped by plenty of early summer rain and is a lovely, warm golden colour in the open areas: greener under the trees. The wildness of the tall grass is enhanced by the short-cropped grass in the 'desire line' pathways.

It had been hoped that some rare grasses might be discovered. The Ecology Centre has done a survey and has found 17 varieties of grass. Andrew Bedford, the manager there and also responsible for the Fields, says none of them are rare. One, however, the cocksfoot is the food of the meadow brown butterfly and it is hoped they will be attracted here. There have been very few wild flowers, but a fine specimen of sow thistle near Highbury Crescent.

In the area under the trees, the heavier than usual fall of leaves and twigs have started to make it look rather messy. The meadow will probably be mown in August but we can look forward to it again next year.



Mess and that ice-cream van

A framework for tall buildings

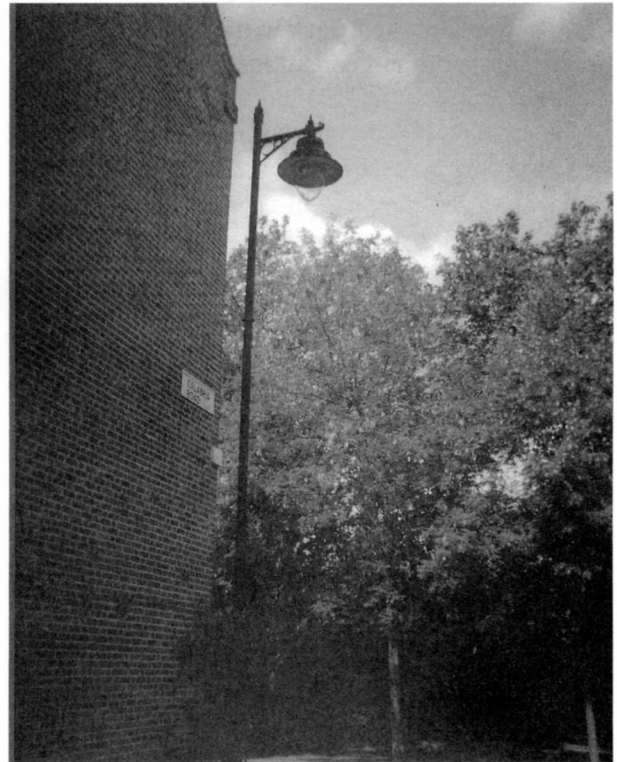
The London Plan requires boroughs to ensure development proposals achieve the highest possible intensity of use and contribute to the development of London as a 'compact' city.

In April this year the Planning Division of Islington Council produced a Consultation Draft called 'Building Heights'. It has been adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) to the existing policies in Islington's Unitary Development Plan by identifying where building heights can be increased whilst protecting the quality of the Borough's environment.

The SPG found that Islington is particularly sensitive to increases in building heights and that high buildings (more than 30 metres - about eight storeys) are considered acceptable on very few sites.

However, sections of some main street frontages (including Holloway Road) have been identified as giving scope for an increase above the prevailing height of surrounding buildings with a range of maximum building height between 5 and 8 storeys. Residents in the lower half of Highbury Crescent are rightly concerned lest buildings in and behind Holloway Road are allowed to rear up close behind them.

To inform debate on this subject we have invited a leading expert to talk to us at our **AGM at Christ Church on 6th September**. Lora Nicolaou, Director of Development Planning at Islington architects DEG W, will speak on "The role of tall buildings in managing intensification and change"



New light in Calabria Road

HIGHBURY FIELDS ASSOCIATION COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Martin Jones, *Chairman*
Anita de Lotbiniere,

Membership Secretary

Maryse Jones, *Treasurer*

David Boniface

Jeannie Burnett

Victoria Ellington

Muriel Feder

Bay Hodgson

Carrick James

Ian Kelly

Randal Keynes

David Knight

Liz Lydiate

Robin Mabey

Paul Magrath

Nicky Manby

Tony Miller

Jennifer Purchase

Caroline Russell

Paul Williams

Nicholas Witter

Ginny Worsley

Jean Engel (*Co-opted*)

Nominations for new members (proposed and seconded by members of the HFA) should be made to Martin Jones - see above by Friday 3rd September. Appointments to the Committee will take place at the AGM - 6th September.