

# Highbury Fields Association

Founded



in 1975

Affiliated to Living Streets - Islington  
and the London Forum  
[www.highburyfieldsassociation.org](http://www.highburyfieldsassociation.org)

## Newsletter - November 2014

### Chairman's Report

The French have a catchy phrase for it – roughly translated as ‘The more it changes; the more it stays the same’. As the years pass there are always fresh topics but they resemble situations and problems we have faced many times over the years.

Criticised buildings: we are greatly concerned, Page 3, about the new threat of dug-out basements. It is good news, Page 6, that the Highbury Leisure Centre is to increase its space and improve its facilities but not the way they plan. The new plans for Lad-broke House are, in many ways, an improvement on the previous plans, but why no social housing?

Welcomed buildings: Highbury Roundhouse does seem, at last, to be ‘Getting There’ Page 4, in its long campaign to find funds for a fine new community centre; The new tower, Page 3, in the playground promises to be a great attraction for children – will we oldies be allowed?

Perhaps one day soon buildings: A long wait already Page 5, for a solution to the tired out Oasis and Bandstand buildings, but please, no pavilion.

Last but not least. A building Marathon that will have enormous impact, probably until 2018, on how we move around in our area – the Holloway Road

Bridge and Highbury Corner Gyratory changes Page 2. Perhaps the Council and TfL will manage to find reasonable solutions to the many technical problems that face them in tackling this vast £15M project, but they will not be able to avoid delays and frustrations in the southern end of Highbury.

Over the years we have worried and fretted and often fought over buildings we felt would be wrong in some way for our area. Yet, I have to admit that many have turned out far better than we feared. The Channel Tunnel vent shaft in Corsica Street had seemed, in prospect, to be a monstrous carbuncle – now it sits there benignly. Similarly our fears over 52 Holloway Road; Aberdeen Works; Robin's Garden, even some of the Arsenal buildings have not turned out as bad as feared.

But we are correct to fear the worst, to query, check, harry the architects, planners and politicians to try to ensure there are no carbuncles in the future. Our latest concern: the spate of ultra-tall buildings in the wrong places.

Our two speakers at the AGM do not outrage us with their work. No skyscrapers. Note the intriguing title of their talk.

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### AGM - All Welcome

On Monday, 24th November, 2014

7.15 for 7.30pm

at Christ Church, Highbury Grove, London N5

Guest Speakers: **Roger Mears and Sarah Khan** of Roger Mears Architects, will speak on “Conservation - from Medieval to Modern”.

But life is not all about buildings. The Council has had its budget drastically cut. The heavy winds in the last week of October brought down huge piles of leaves, which the Council is unable to collect immediately. The tree service cannot do all the maintenance they would wish to.

There have been irritations. Losing the Post Office at the station was bad enough – but they did not have the sense to at least provide a postbox there. And the “420 metres” to the Post Office in Upper Street is more like 650.

*Martin Jones*

## Two years bridge-rebuilding

Although most people probably realise that the ‘Overground’ trainline runs underneath Holloway Road, few of them recognise that it needs a bridge to hold up the road, buildings, water and gas pipes and electricity cables. Nor, perhaps, that the bridge, over 100 years old, made of stone and cast iron, may well be in need of more than merely regular maintenance.

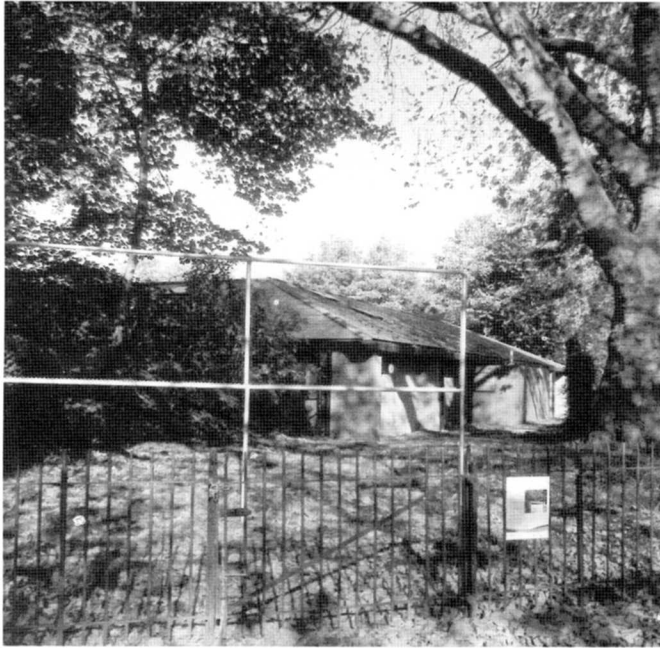
The bridge runs at an acute angle from the entrance to Highbury Place across the Pelican crossing to the area to the right of the station exit. The problem for the engineers was to find a method of removing the old bridge and replacing it while maintaining two-way traffic on the Holloway Road and allowing the trains to run and the passengers to come and go.

At a meeting of the Highbury East Ward Partnership it was explained that during the coming winter the old, redundant Post Office will be demolished. The large area of cycle racks will also have to be removed but, because Highbury Station Road will be closed to traffic, then the majority of cycles can be stored there, protected by new lighting and CCTV. The first task will be to remove a narrow section of the bridge, close to the station, to allow the utilities: gas, water, electricity, telecoms, to find and reroute their

services. That alone may take many months. Then, narrow sections, slivers of the bridge at a time, will be dismantled and rebuilt. When I questioned how two-way traffic could be maintained, it was explained that the road would be made to snake round the area being rebuilt, for example over the ground now used by the Post Office, until the road would have had a series of routes around the construction work.

Transport for London (TfL) and the Council officers still have some difficult decisions to make. They have not yet found ideal places to use as site compounds for storing equipment and will probably close the part of Highbury Crescent that runs between Ronalds Road and Highbury Place to use the carriageway for storage. The paths either side would remain available. An alternative, closer to the site, might be the southern end of Highbury Crescent. Cllr Russell stressed the need for a ‘Banksman’ to accompany heavy lorries going through the Fields to ensure compliance to safety regulations. The exit and entrance from Highbury Place to Highbury Corner would be closed, even to cyclists, who would have to use Corsica Street. No decision has been made on how best to handle the football crowds.

The meeting discussed the problem of traffic leaving the Fields via Fieldway Crescent, and exiting on to Holloway Road and whether TfL could help exits there with a temporary traffic light. The HFA reminded the officer of the need for a thorough Impact Assessment of the hinterland roads and that the statistics collected would be needed also when the Highbury Corner Gyratory project eventually came to be consulted on. Traffic would be slowed and some of the displaced traffic might permanently change their routes. The bus stop at the station has already moved outside Tesco's. The Pelican crossing will be moved to opposite the Garage while the Post Office is being demolished, but will return to the station by the summer. The engineers think the work will continue until the summer of 2017, and will be followed immediately by what almost certainly will be extensive changes to the Highbury Corner Gyratory, already being studied by TfL and by Islington. We face a long period of disruption.



*Metal frame used for Highbury Pool banners. Highbury Fields Forum objects to such banners and large Funfair posters page 8.*

## Digging out Basements

Until very recently, the fashion of enlarging houses not only upwards - attic conversions, extra floors, but also downwards, by digging out to build basements where they had not existed before, had not spread from ultra-expensive houses in West London to Highbury. But now, a house in Calabria Road has managed to create one. No.55, built on a corner, has had to create lightwells front and back which look bizarre in a street where all the other houses have short front gardens.

One month ago neighbours and the HFA joined forces to persuade the Planning Committee to turn down an application for 71 Calabria Road, on the basis that the lightwells do not match the other houses in the Conservation area. We only now discover that a third house in the street applied for and was refused permission and we have now to write to persuade the Planning Inspector to turn down the Appeal.

New basements are bad news. It is sometimes possible to create one which does not badly affect either the house concerned or its close neighbours. Below is an article, earlier this year, from 'newsforum' the

journal of the London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies.

*"Just when Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea thought it had found a way to discourage basements, by applying the rules on community infrastructure levy (CIL) and Section 106 agreements to secure income from wealthy owners wanting to extend their basements, the Government decided to change the rules. It has removed the CIL on self-build properties, including all extensions, family annexes and home improvements and also intends to seek to remove housing levies on such annexes and extensions. Ministers called it a 'stealth tax' slowly being introduced by town halls.*

*However the UK housing industry itself is beginning to realise that basements are a problem. The National House-Building Council (NHBC) insurance provider for new-build houses, is facing soaring claims from home-owners with botched excavations. In two recent surveys of 1700 sites, they highlighted key problems surrounding the construction of basements; they present an ongoing risk which needs to be effectively managed. NHBC figures reveal that claims on basements built since 2005 have cost the industry a total of nearly £21 million – affecting nearly 890 homes.*

*The vast majority of new basements (72 per cent) are registered in London. 28 per cent of sites surveyed reported high or unknown water tables but still used methods and materials which may not be suitable for the site. The majority of the large claims from 2012 were as a result of water ingress and incorrect installation of the damp proof membrane. NHBC is now looking to revise its standards and guidance to help improve basement design and construction. Its advice includes carrying out ground investigation reports before construction".*

## Exciting new Playground Tower

Children at an Islington primary school and visitors to the playground have been consulted on to help choose a new piece of play equipment to replace a highly popular one that has had thousands of young visitors over the last 30 years, but is now in a terminal state of repair.. Three specialist playground equipment builders were asked to de-

sign a more modern version. The children picked a winning design, but liked exciting elements of the other two, so the winner has been asked to incorporate some of those features in the commissioned tower. It will be the most expensive piece of playground equipment of any park in Islington and it is hoped will last as long and will give as much pleasure as its predecessor.

## Getting there ....

Last year I wrote a lengthy article for the HFA Newsletter, revealing the design of the Highbury Roundhouse. We had just received Planning Permission for a wonderful fit-for-purpose centre which we are confident will meet the needs of the Highbury community for the next three or four generations.

I expressed the hope that the problems which have beset the Roundhouse in recent years would be resolved in 2014. Well, some have. But with only a couple of months in the year to go, it's clear that some will not.

The work of the Roundhouse goes on unabated, albeit in several venues. Our Pensioners' Club, based in Sotheby Mews, continues to offer lunches and a wide range of social, cultural and fitness activities for older people. Our Youth Club thrives at Aubert Court, our Under 5's still enjoy the facilities at 71 Ronalds Road, where our offices occupy the top floor.

Our holiday Playschemes at Aubert Court and Whittington Park have never been so well attended. We now operate six After School Clubs across the borough. Recently Ofsted judged our provision at St Joan of Arc Primary School to be 'Outstanding' – the only award of its kind in the borough – not just a feather in our cap but a logo on our stationery.

But it's amazing how slowly the wheels of bureaucracy turn when money is involved. Our fundraising campaign for the new building is making good progress but it is taking longer than we wished. The response of local individuals has been tremendous. With some notable exceptions, businesses have been a little less responsive, though that is only to be expected in the current economic cli-

mate. The large institutional funders, from whom we are seeking the bulk of the construction costs, work to their own timetables. We have to synchronise our applications by their annual cycle. And it all takes time.

One difficulty we have encountered, is a reluctance to be an early contributor. We have been told by several favourably disposed donors, to come back when we have obtained more than a target figure or achieved a certain percentage of the total requirement. It is understandable that funders have reservations until they know that the project is risk free and will definitely reach completion.

Now we are able to give them the assurance they need and break the log jam. In the past month, we have had a series of meetings with councillors and council officers. The outcome is a renewed commitment by the Council that the new centre will be built on the rear part of the Ronalds Road site and that it will be the design which we successfully piloted through the planning system. Most crucially, the Council is prepared to offer matched funding, so our donors can be certain that the building will be built. This is a very significant step.

Next year I'm hoping that I won't need to write an article like this. I'll just submit photographs of the new centre emerging.

*Tony Miller, Secretary to the Highbury Roundhouse*

## Action against Barbecues

Since the barbecue ban was lifted in May 2011, residents along the upper part of Highbury Place have been bothered by smoke entering their homes, exacerbated by the natural draught that further encourages ingress of smoke. As the number of users of barbecues has increased so has the amount of smoke pollution, fires, litter and burnt patches.

The Barbecue Action Group (BAG) made a complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman particularly about smoke nuisance. The outcome of this was the institution of an action plan by Isling-

ton Council to manage the problem. We were encouraged to complain more.

Thus, the Council has increased the monitoring and education of users this summer. They have placed more signage, including four A-boards in Highbury Place, which explain the "Seven Barbecue Tips", and how to decrease the risk of fires. Also, there are A4 sized posters tied to benches and the Council has also placed four ash bins in mid-September to receive hot material. At the same time, members of BAG have also made many complaints to the Council about smoke nuisance, fires and litter.

The Council had intended to report back at the end of September.

*Barbecue Action Group (BAG)*  
*highburyfields@ymail.com*

## Do we want a Pavilion on the Fields?

We have been aware for several years now that both the Oasis Café and the Bandstand buildings are in a poor state of repair. It has been decided finally that in both cases rebuilding makes more economic sense than continuing to get by badly with repairs.

At meetings of the Highbury Fields Forum we have been told that there have been discussions within Greenspace on the possibility of providing one building – termed a pavilion – that could incorporate the café, the Bandstand for toddlers, room for the tennis officers, toilets and a community hall. We have seen a plan that shows a large rectangle, positioned quite close to the Church Path railings but beyond the tree roots, set between the current locations of the café and the present Bandstand building. The idea is that the southern end of the building would be for the Bandstand toddlers with direct access to their current fenced off garden area.

At the bottom of that Field, close to Highbury Grove, is the fenced off ruin that had been the Groundsman's cottage. It has not been demolished because Greenspace are aware that they can take advantage of the *footprint* of that building to in-



*Heavy barbecue smoke on a summers day*

crease the square metres of any replacement building and the plan we have seen is labelled "Maximum 266 metres". Now 266 metres would be a very large building either as a single storey, or worse still if split over two storeys. We have been assured that it is only a maximum figure and that the location in that plan is not definite.

The funds presently available would not stretch to an elegant architect-designed building. They are looking instead at finding a suitable "modular" building. We are very concerned that any modular building in that central position would cut off the splendid vista of the lawn, used for the tables and chairs of the café and would be a great mistake. We are not persuaded that there is any need for a community hall – there are ample meeting rooms already in the area. We feel there is a simpler solution. Firstly, save money by not including a community hall. Install a Portakabin for the toddlers within the existing fenced-off area – if necessary extending for a time the area slightly to the east and north – while the old building is fenced off; demolished and rebuilt in the same or similar place – designed by an architect?

It may be more difficult to find a suitable temporary position for a similar exercise for the café – perhaps just across the east/west pathway, but it would be worth making an effort to ensure the two new buildings are not a blot on the landscape.

## Disappointing plans for Highbury Pool

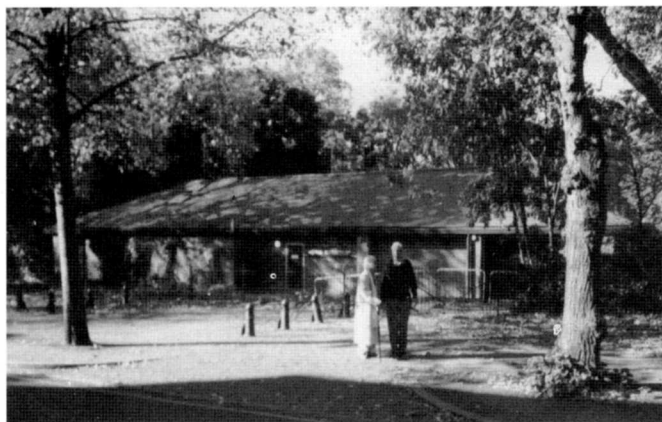
At the end of September, Greenwich Leisure Ltd (GLL) gave a presentation to the Highbury Fields Forum of their plans for creating new gym and studio space in the Highbury Fields Leisure Centre. The present building cannot accommodate the increasing numbers of clients and they hope to increase their present membership of about 3,500 by a further 1,000 and to greatly improve the gym equipment and changing facilities. The plans include building over the staff car park and replacing the one-storey building facing on to Highbury Place with an ugly and bulky, two-storey elevation, to contain two larger studios.

The HFA and others have opposed the plans because there has been little attempt to make the 2-storey structure attractive and GLL continue to show the plans at various presentations without yet managing to produce an acceptable new design. It has been suggested that the higher structure could more reasonably be built at the other, western, end of the site, but they claim that the tree team have said the building there would impinge on the tree canopies.

They intend to have two public consultation events for residents to be announced 'very widely by letter' and then hope to go for planning permission at the end of the year but did agree they should avoid the Christmas period.

### News from the past – 2000 Newsletter *from the Chairman's Report.*

"Imagine that H.G. Wells had been able to resurrect his Time Machine and kindly parked it on Highbury Fields. Suppose we climbed aboard and set the dial for 1980. Wheeeeh! What would we see? At first glance, nothing has really changed. The Fields seem much the same; although the grass is badly worn in places and there is a large blackened ring where a bonfire has been. Mind you, the asphalt paths around and across the Fields look clean and smooth. Wait a second: the lower Field seems bigger; instead of



*The current one-storey eastern end of the Pool facing Highbury Place.*



*Mock-up of the proposed two-storey façade facing Highbury Place .*

the line of trees and bushes, there is only a long wire fence with a small, old-fashioned playground. Half the swings are broken and we wouldn't let Jimmy go on that slide. But we are glad to see that both sets of toilets are in good working order.... Safely back in the year 2000, it is hard to remember how much has changed in our area over the last twenty years..... The huge, decrepit, icy outside pool and paddling pool have been swept away. By the end of July we shall have a new larger Premier gym."

*And from the Manager in 2000 of the Highbury Pool*

"As you are all probably aware, there has been some building work happening at Highbury Pool. This work is for the new gym extension which, when complete, will double the size of our existing gym facility..... Other news from the pool includes our normal gear-up for the summer months when we are one of the busier pools in London. We still operate our paddling pool on the rear patio on hot days and during the summer holidays"



*Plane trees over the Highbury Pool car park.*

## Kiss Smoothie

Our names are Keah and Semir. We are a young, ambitious pair from Islington and former pupils of Highbury Grove School. This year we have been on an exciting journey, opening our first business: Kiss Smoothie. Over the summer we had the honour to sell in our childhood park, Highbury Fields. Securing the pitch was far from easy as it is very unusual for the Council to agree to let people trade in a park. So, as we emailed back and forth, the Council's decision began to sway from a 'No' to 'Maybe', sparking hope and motivating us further to push for securing the pitch space.

Kiss Smoothie is all about making a positive change in Islington. As we both attended an Islington secondary school we were profoundly aware of the unhealthy diets of our community's children. Each day many children are in local shops filling up on unhealthy snacks and fast foods: crisps, sweets, chocolates, KFC and so on, to the point where they are no longer treats, but rather a daily routine. As part of the commu-

nity, we strongly believe this should change and we are the people for the job.

As kids, we both went through this unhealthy stage, of an afternoon choice of kebabs, McDonalds or KFC. It was what everybody did. We wanted to show children how to have healthy, enjoyable snacks on the go such as smoothies, to love our yummy, natural smoothies but, more importantly, to live a healthier lifestyle. Being healthy shouldn't be forced on children but be something which comes naturally and is part of their daily routine. It's about keeping the right balance. The odd treat here and there won't hurt because, let's face it, who doesn't like some chocolate on a rainy day?

We are now both at university in Birmingham, but still actively pursuing new opportunities for Kiss Smoothie to spread healthiness. We intend to set up assemblies and workshops in primary and secondary schools to increase the awareness and importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Setting up pop-up stores, interacting on social media and handing out leaflets are all ways we intend to promote healthiness and also communicate with older members of our community.

Operating in Highbury Fields was a fantastic experience for us, as we were constantly being challenged and being pulled out of our comfort zone in order to make Kiss Smoothie a success on the Fields. For example, we had to ensure that we always had the right amount of fruit and veg to make the amount of smoothies required, without having large stocks left over. This was very challenging and a learning curve for both of us, but it was very exciting at the same time.

For us operating on the Fields was a success. We gathered a lot of positive feedback. Parents were more than happy to buy their children a healthy treat 'on the go' and see their chosen fruits whizzed into smoothies. Gym members loved one after a tough work out. We hope very much that we may continue to operate on the Fields during the summer period and that Kiss Smoothie will have a positive influence over our community's children, teens and adults.

*Keah & Semir*



*Large advertising board for the Funfair.*



*Enjoying the sunshine in Olden Garden.*

## Olden Garden – become a member

Do you know Olden Garden – sitting above the railway embankment, with an entrance in Whistler Street? It is one of the hidden jewels of Highbury; well worth a visit.

This last year they have achieved Charity status, which will help their fundraising. They got funding from the previous local councillors for improvement works to the Garden House kitchen and to replace the old door in Whistler Street and funding too from Cripplegate and LBI Section 106 funds. This is just sufficient to be able to continue to employ Andrew and Laura, who do the vital regular maintenance work for the garden every Tuesday and are on hand to guide the volunteers who wish to get involved. Lettings (it is a lovely place for a party) are another source of funds but are restricted to a maximum of two per week.

So, make a visit, become a member, volunteer!



*Desire line path across the Fields; getting wider and deeper.*



*Fenced-off area in north-west corner of the Fields – open to the public soon.*

## HIGHBURY FIELDS ASSOCIATION COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Martin Jones, *Chairman*

David Boniface, *Vice Chairman*

Anita de Lotbiniere, *Membership Secretary*

Maryse Jones, *Treasurer*

Jeannie Burnett

Victoria Ellington

Carrick James

Ernestas Jegorovas

Ian Kelly

Robin Mabey

Jennifer Purchase

Paul Williams

Nicholas Witter

Ginny Worsley

Paul Magrath, *Legal Consultant*

Tony Miller, *Web Consultant*

**Nominations for new members (proposed and seconded by members of the HFA) should be made to Martin Jones by Friday 21st. November. Appointments to the Committee will take place at the AGM on Monday 24th November. Please advise the Membership Secretary if you wish to receive Minutes by email.**

*membership@highburyfieldsassociation.org*

Members of the Association are welcome to raise and discuss any particular concerns they may have. We like to hear your views. Please telephone Martin Jones or via our website: [www.highburyfieldsassociation.org](http://www.highburyfieldsassociation.org)

Do join the HFA, and keep in touch with developments in our area.

*Editors: Martin & Maryse Jones*