

Nº 34  
Free

# BARNET *Post.*

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BarnetPost

30<sup>th</sup> Jan



Waxing  
Gibbous  
92%/0.54

Full Moon  
1<sup>st</sup> February


27<sup>th</sup> Feb



Waxing  
Gibbous  
82%/0.54

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Barnet communities came together last month to mark Holocaust Memorial Day in remembrance of the Jewish victims of the Holocaust and genocides throughout the world – full story Page-13 

Credit: Barnet Council

## Football stadium campaigners welcome 'constructive' talks with council

BY DAVID FLOYD

**C**ampaigners have backed a decision by Barnet Football Club not to appeal against Barnet Council's decision to refuse planning permission for its new stadium after discussions with councillors.

In a statement last month, the Bring Barnet Back campaign said it had taken part in "constructive conversations with councillors and others" following July's decision by the council's strategic planning committee.

As a result, it has recommended that the club should not attempt to overturn the committee's vote against its plan to build the New

Underhill stadium at Barnet Playing Fields, close to the site of its former Underhill home.

In its update to supporters, Bring Barnet Back said that following the decision "51 alternative sites have now been identified, evaluated, ranked and assessed" by the campaign and "the highest-scoring 4–5 sites have been discussed with councillors from different political parties and have been positively received".

They added: "Detailed work and enquiries are now underway to assess their further suitability before another application is brought forward."

The statement suggests a big improvement in the relationship

between campaigners and the council after some fraught exchanges last year.

The initial breakdown in relations came in July when council leader Barry Rawlings inadvertently provoked outrage from the club and Bring Barnet Back after he claimed in a council meeting that the club had been offered "three or four sites" by the authority as potential alternatives to Barnet Playing Fields: a claim which proved to be untrue.

The situation deteriorated further in October when, in another off-the-cuff statement, Cllr Rawlings told The Barnet Society that the club was in the process of appealing against the planning

committee's decision, when this was not the case.

At this point, a furious Bring Barnet Back implied it may even stand candidates in this year's local election to persuade politicians to give its campaign more attention. It said: "Unless there is a shift towards a more honest and constructive approach, it will be difficult for the campaign not to consider a more direct political strategy ahead of the May 2026 local elections to ensure the matter of the club's return is properly addressed by all who seek public office."

Now though, Bring Barnet Back (BBB) is clear that it won't be running

Continued on Page-2 





ABOUT

Barnet Post is the borough’s free community newspaper: written by and for local people, giving you the chance to learn more about what is going on in your area and to read (and write) stories about what matters to you.

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Barnet Playing Fields where Barnet FC had hoped to build their new stadium Credit David Floyd



Continued from Page-1

in the elections. In last week’s statement it confirmed: “The outcome of the local elections in May will have a bearing on the timeline for the submission of any new application. In the run-up to those elections, BBB will work to ensure that candidates clearly articulate their position on the club returning to the town of Barnet. BBB will not run independent candidates at this stage, for reasons explained below.”

While the tone of the interactions between Barnet Council and Bring Barnet Back has changed, it is less clear whether that has been a major

shift in the underlying situation. It does seem that campaigners have successfully communicated to the council the point that the football club is seeking a new stadium in the town of Barnet rather than just somewhere within the wider borough. However, statements from both Barnet Labour and the club itself suggest there is a long way to go before any new stadium is built.

When the *Post* approached the council for comment on the discussions with Bring Barnet Back, a Barnet Labour Group spokesperson said: “We thank the Bring Barnet Back campaign for inviting cross-party councillors to their en-

agement meetings. We will continue to engage with the campaign as they search for a suitable site.”

In answer to some specific follow up questions, they confirmed that their position remains: “The council administration has always said they would welcome the club’s return to Barnet on an appropriate site.”

When asked about the outcomes from the recent discussion, they said: “Cross-party councillors and the local MP have been invited to and attended meetings organised by the BBB campaign to hear about their aspirations and ideas for the club to return to Barnet. There have been no concrete outcomes from these meetings to date.”

They also confirmed the council has not held any direct discussions with the football club since the planning committee decision in July and that “no potential sites have been suggested by the council to either the BBB campaigners or BFC.”

Barnet FC also confirmed the lack of direct contact. A spokesperson told the *Post*: “Since the strategic planning committee on 14th July 2025, conversations with Barnet Council and their officers have been held directly with the Bring Barnet Back campaign representatives. Whilst we fully support them and their endeavours, we feel that their independent approach better posi-

tions them to carry the conversations forward.”

Asked about the club’s preferred site for a new stadium, the spokesperson said: “Whilst the club does not have a preferred site, we fully appreciate the need to be near the town centre in Barnet. It is imperative that the Barnet community benefits from the return of the club and being near the High Street and in walking distance of residents means a huge boost to the local economy and less cars hitting the roads on a matchday.”

When asked about the potential timeline for a new stadium, they made clear that the process currently has a long way to go. The spokesperson said: “The club is fully committed to a return to the borough of Barnet and have made this very clear with Barnet Council on numerous occasions.

“The amount of physical work and funding that has already gone into this project well exceeded expectations and sadly, the application for our new community stadium was refused planning permission back in July of last year.

“We understand how long projects such as this take and will continue on our quest to return the club to its home. The biggest time factor in all of this is the identification of a new, feasible site from Barnet Council. A lot of stars will need to align but we remain hopeful.”

“There have been no concrete outcomes from these meetings”

# Great North Leisure Park application ‘called in’ by Mayor of London

BY DAVID FLOYD

**C**ampaigners fear the Mayor of London may give the go ahead to a controversial North Finchley development after he “called in” a decision by Barnet councillors to block the scheme.

The council’s strategic planning committee voted in December to refuse the application by developers Arada-Regal to build up to 1,500 homes on the Great North Leisure Park site.

Councillors made this decision on the basis that the proposals were “out of character with the surrounding area” and risked “creating harm to the proposed environment” despite council officers recommending that the plans should be approved.

Following the decision, campaigners from Our North Finchley, whose petition opposing the scheme has attracted over 8,000 signatures, had been encouraging supporters to post on the GLA planning website to make the mayor aware of their views before he decided on the next steps.

Now, the mayor has announced that the decision has been “called in”, which means he will take over responsibility for deciding whether the development goes ahead.

As part of this process, the mayor will hold a public hearing at City Hall where he will listen to the views of Barnet Council, the developers and other objectors and supporters before making a decision.

*Barnet Post* understands that the hearing is likely to take place during February.



Campaigners from Our North Finchley outside Hendon Town Hall Credit Sammi Davis Photography



NEWS

Barnet Labour welcomes drop in crime

BY DAVID FLOYD

Credit Asim Rehman



Barnet Labour has hailed a drop in crime as a vindication of its policies.

Barnet Council’s ruling group says falling crime, both in Barnet and across London, shows that action it has taken since coming to power in the borough in 2022 is working.

They say measures such as revamping the borough’s CCTV system, introducing a Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) and working with the police on “a range of initiatives” have helped to bring about a 35% decrease in mugging in the borough shown in the latest annual figures, alongside reductions in other forms of violent crime, while across London homicides are now at their lowest level since reporting began.

The council’s cabinet member for community safety, community cohesion and ending violence against women and girls, Sara Conway, said: “Barnet Labour have brought drive and determination to our local safety partnership fixing a CCTV system that the Conservatives failed to keep working most of the time, introducing the PSPO and supporting the Metropolitan Police on a range of crime reduction operations across the borough including initiatives such as ‘Clear Hold Build’ that saw more than 300 arrests.

“There is always more to do to bring down crime further, which is why we cannot go back to the

“  
Mugging in  
the borough  
has decreased  
by 35%  
”

days of the previous Conservative administration who didn’t understand or deliver on community safety.”

Barnet Conservatives rejected these claims, telling *Barnet Post* that Labour was attempting to “dress up crime statistics” in order to “distract residents from the reality that they face”.

A spokesperson said: “Barnet residents know that crime on our roads and high streets is rising. Rather than addressing these concerns honestly, Barnet Labour continues to rely on selective messaging that fails to reflect what communities are seeing day to day.

“Several key crime categories affecting residents have increased, including higher levels of hate crime, rising violence and sexual offences, a growth in possession of weapons offences and a sharp increase in drug related crime.”

They added: “Barnet residents deserve transparency and seriousness when it comes to public safety, not political spin. It is particularly troubling that while Labour seeks to present itself as the party of law and order, one of Barnet’s Labour MPs is proposing measures that would remove the right to a jury trial, the Mayor of London has cut the Met Police’s dedicated antisocial behaviour unit, and former Labour councillors in Barnet have been exposed for fraudulent or criminal conduct.

“Barnet Conservatives will continue to stand up for residents, hold Labour to account and press for a genuine, tough and effective approach to tackling crime and keeping our communities safe.

“Barnet Conservatives reject the Labour approach to crime which is pure spin.”

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NEWS

Former leader quits council

BY DAVID FLOYD

**A** former leader of Barnet Council has announced his resignation as a councillor to spend more time with his family in South Wales.

Dan Thomas, who led the council as a Conservative between 2019 and 2022, said that he was quitting his role as Reform UK councillor for Finchley Church End ward having moved away from the borough.

He said: “In 2024, I moved away from Barnet so that my wife and I can raise our young sons in the countryside and live closer to our families in South Wales. I was asked to avoid an expensive and disruptive by-election and so I continued to attend council meetings and assist residents.

“With a desire to start 2026 afresh, I am today stepping down from Barnet Council. As the next council elections are less than six months away, a by-election will be avoided.

“I would like to thank everyone I’ve worked with over the last 19 years as a councillor, and for the support I received whilst leader of the council.”

Cllr Thomas, whose defeat in 2022 saw Labour form its first-ever majority administration in the borough, left the Conservatives to join Reform UK last summer.

He added: “It has been an honour to serve Finchley and I am particularly proud of the personal contribution I made to cutting council tax and keeping it low for over a decade, whilst resident satisfaction with council services improved. I also look back with pride on the role I played in the successful regeneration of council estates, delivery of new housing and community facilities and a well-managed council budget.

“I wish the people of Barnet and Bar-



Former council leader Dan Thomas

net Council all the very best for 2026 and beyond.”

Responding to the news, Reform UK Barnet chair, Mark Shooter told *Barnet Post*: “Dan has been a dedicated and valued servant to Barnet for many years, including his time as former leader of Barnet Council, and I thank him sincerely for the commitment and hard work he has shown on behalf of residents.

“For family reasons, Dan has now moved to an area outside London. He intends to continue supporting Reform and will remain available to provide advice and support to Reform in Barnet.

“Dan rightly felt it would not be

“*I moved away from Barnet so that my wife and I can raise our young sons in the countryside*”

appropriate to occupy a council seat while living a significant distance away. He was never part of the 63 candidates we will be fielding in the May 2026 Barnet local council elections, and he has acted with integrity by stepping down once the relevant period had passed – avoiding an unnecessary by-election and an avoidable cost to taxpayers.

“I wish Dan and his family every success for the future.”

Former colleagues in the Conservative Party were less impressed by Cllr Thomas’s departure. Opposition leader Peter Zinkin, who took over from Cllr Thomas as leader of the Conservative group in 2024, noted that the resignation leaves Reform UK with only one representative at the town hall meaning they will no longer be able to form a group and hold positions on council committees.

Cllr Zinkin told *Barnet Post*: “Former Cllr Dan Thomas, having defected to Reform UK just months ago amid much fanfare about their ‘growing movement’ in Barnet, has moved out of the borough, making it impossible for him to properly represent local residents. His belated resignation only highlights the fleeting nature of Reform’s presence in Barnet.

“This is the end of Reform UK’s group on Barnet Council. We look forward to the former councillor refunding his councillor’s allowance paid to him during his prolonged absence from Barnet.

“Conservatives understand that stable and efficient local government is a team effort and not in the ownership of any individual councillor particularly one who has abandoned the borough, changed parties and let down residents.

“Reform in Barnet is failing, this sorry tale demonstrates that in Barnet they are a transient protest that can’t deliver stable, committed representation for our community.”

Former councillor pleads guilty to sex offences

BY DAVID FLOYD

**A** former Barnet councillor who dramatically quit the town hall last year has pleaded guilty to a series of sex offences.

Liron Velleman, who was elected as a Labour councillor for Whetstone ward in 2022, left his role suddenly and without explanation in April, while also leaving his position at the Community trade union.

At Highbury Corner Magistrates’ Court last month, the ex-politician admitted multiple child sex offences including attempting to engage in sexual communication with a child and attempting to cause a child aged 13 to 15 to watch or look at an image of sexual activity.

The court heard that Velleman sent a 13-year-old girl naked pictures of himself and asked whether she was “at home alone”. He also told her to “show me your bra” and asked “whether she was a virgin”.

He carried out the offences between 3rd December and 10th December 2024 and was caught by a Metropolitan Police sting operation.

Defence barrister, Ali Hussain, told the court that Velleman had been suffering from depression. He said the former councillor was “a person of good character.”

He added: “He is currently unemployed. He is a family man. There is a great deal about his background which will assist the court to see how exactly he came to find himself in this position.”

He will be sentenced on February 10th at the same court.



Liron Velleman

When Velleman resigned in April 2025, a Labour Party spokesperson told *Barnet Post*: “Liron Velleman has resigned from Barnet Council and is no longer a member of the Labour Party” while a spokesperson for Community said: “Liron Velleman no longer works for Community.”

*Barnet Post* approached Barnet Labour for comment following Velleman’s guilty plea. A Barnet Labour Party spokesperson said: “We took immediate action as soon as concerns were raised.”

FEATURES

February fun in Barnet libraries

Catherine Lusted on half term activities

**L**ibraries will be full of fun this February half term. There are lots of events taking place for all ages. For children, there are drama workshops with Starbound, Bubble Magic shows and craft events including decorating tote bags and making insects, owls and flowers.

Discover creepy crawlies with Zoolab and learn how to look after our planet

at Waste Not, Want Not. Teens can take part in a charcoal animation workshop.

For adults, there are jewellery making and meditation workshops and for those taking part in the Barnet Winter Read challenge, a novel evening celebrating books with the opportunity to recommend your favourite titles and get some tips for your next read.

For older adults, there’s life drawing and yoga.

All events are free or low cost.

To explore the full programme: Visit [barnet.gov.uk/creative-communities-events](https://barnet.gov.uk/creative-communities-events)



Credit Guzel Maksutova



NEWS

Residents criticise TfL as Colindale bus stop remains closed after nearly two years

BY DAVID FLOYD

Tube passengers are calling for action from TfL to enable them to catch buses from outside a much heralded revamped station. The new ticket hall at Colindale Station on the Northern Line was opened in December following nearly two years of upgrade work to deliver step free access and additional capacity, which included the station being completely closed for six months in 2024. However, passengers needing to catch the 204 and 303 buses from outside the station have been unable to do

so since the works began in early 2024 and are still unable to while remaining works are completed. While the 125 bus stops close to the station, residents who want to catch the 204 and 303 are forced to walk a significant distance to the nearest stop. Colindale resident Fiona Cameron told *Barnet Post*: “I get a tube back home at 11pm. Where I would normally get off at Colindale with my friends, I now have to get off at Burnt Oak and wait for the 204 bus, because getting off at Colindale tube means crossing two roads and walking down to near Ajax Avenue for the 204 and 303 bus stop.”

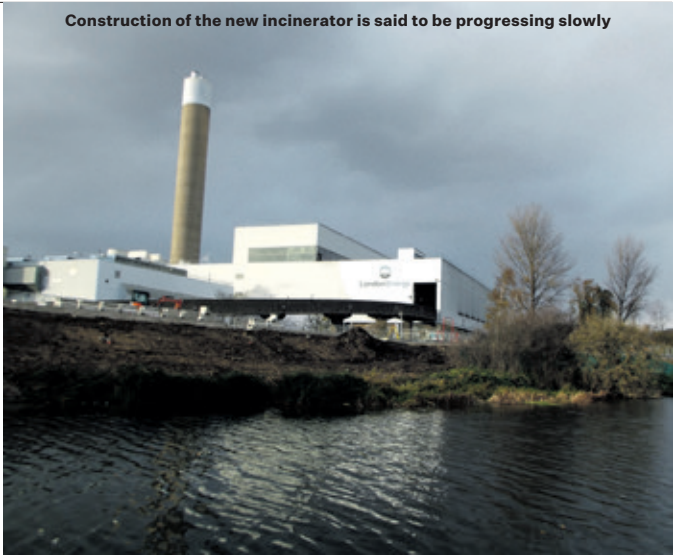
She adds: “This is dark, wet, cold and dangerous as cars regularly speed along this bend and the pavement is crumbling and narrow. In the cold winter snap we have at the moment there is frost and ice which makes slipping a high probability.” Echoing these concerns in an email to TfL seen by *Barnet Post*, Joan Roselie, chairperson of Grahame Park The Strands Residents Association said: “For nearly 22 months passengers arriving at Colindale Station have been forced to cross multiple roads, navigate uneven paving, descend a steep hill and walk through roadworks to reach the nearest bus stop. Many residents describe this route as unsafe, especially at night or in poor weather.”

She adds: “TfL has not demonstrated that it designed a functioning temporary interchange. This is a serious failure of planning.” *Barnet Post* contacted TfL to ask when the closed stop would reopen and why alternative arrangements could not be made for passengers to catch their buses outside the station. A TfL spokesperson said: “We’re determined to ensure that everyone in London can travel safely and easily and as part of our major upgrade work at Colindale tube station, we made temporary changes to bus stops in the area. While the new ticket hall and lifts are now open, the temporary bus stop arrangements will remain in place while we complete the final work on the station.” They added: “We’re sorry for any disruption caused by the changes and are planning to reinstate the bus stop outside the station by mid 2026.”



The closed bus stop Credit @beyondbamboo

“Cars regularly speed along this bend and the pavement is crumbling and narrow”



Construction of the new incinerator is said to be progressing slowly

Outdated incinerator to stay in use ‘past design life’

BY SEBASTIAN MANN, LOCAL DEMOCRACY REPORTER

Edmonton incinerator will stay in use well beyond its lifespan – as progress slows on its replacement. The facility will now remain operational “up to and beyond 2030” according to North London Waste Authority (NLWA), which runs Edmonton Eco Park where the incinerator is based. However, this is “significantly past design life” for its mechanical, electrical and civil infrastructure, according to a report published in December. NLWA is controlled by councillors from Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Hackney, Haringey, Islington and Waltham Forest and is responsible for disposing of waste from the seven boroughs. A replacement ‘energy from waste’ facility was initially slated to begin operation

in 2027, and while construction is ongoing, no clear timeline has been established by the authority. Last August, the project’s overseers said it was being hindered by local and international challenges. They pointed to Brexit, the war in Ukraine, and high interest rates impacting the cost of raw construction materials. Clyde Loakes, chair of NLWA and deputy leader at Waltham Forest Council, said that month that work “had not stopped” despite rumours and “construction progress continues to be made, with over 200 workers on site”. The total budget for NLWA’s ongoing North London Heat and Power Project – which includes the incinerator as well as new recycling facilities at Edmonton Eco Park – has also climbed from £1.2billion to £1.5bn.

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Middlesex apprentices make a real difference and we have an excellent track record in supporting the public sector. Programmes in nursing, policing, social work, and teaching have been joined by newer routes into healthcare science, environmental health and digital roles where demand for skilled professionals continues to grow.

Professor Darryll Bravenboer, Director of Business and Civic Engagement at Middlesex University, said: "Degree apprenticeships provide access to a wide range of professional jobs at no cost to the student. Apprenticeships are vital in supporting the public sector services our communities rely on, while driving economic growth by developing the skills employers need."

## Investment in healthcare and teaching

Middlesex is a major provider of degree apprenticeships and has received substantial funding from the Office for Students (OfS) to train more students for priority public services. In 2024, the University was awarded more than £3 million by the OfS to lead a Healthcare Education Consortium with five other universities to expand healthcare degree apprenticeships, as well as funding to support the development of a Teacher Degree Apprenticeship to meet the needs of school employers.

## Supporting NHS and police frontline services

Middlesex delivers hundreds of apprenticeships that address workforce shortages in the NHS and upskill existing professionals, such as healthcare assistants. Apprentices who began nursing and other healthcare programmes in 2023–24 will collectively contribute over 400,000 hours of work to the public sector in London during their training.

The University also leads a Police Education Consortium, with three other universities, and has trained over 3,300 police constables to date, working with four police forces in the Southeast region to support Home Office recruitment targets. In 2023–24, the University had over 150 police apprenticeship starters, who will contribute over 700,000 work hours during their apprenticeship.

## Addressing teacher shortages

There is a substantial need for skilled and dedicated teaching professionals and Middlesex is committed to help meet this demand with our local school partners. Last year, the University launched a primary Teacher Degree



Apprenticeship to enable teaching assistants to train as fully qualified teachers and to help primary schools meet skills' needs and fill teacher shortages, which research shows is the highest in London. The University also offers a 12-month Post-Graduate Teacher Apprenticeship, focused on employment-based initial teacher training for primary and secondary schools.

## Digital skills for the future

Alongside public sector provision, Middlesex supports businesses with career-ready apprentices in roles such as management and sales, while it is expanding its offering of digital degree apprenticeships to meet growing employer demand for skills in areas such as creative digital design, cyber security, data science, and user experience.

## Improving social mobility

Middlesex University has 1,445 apprentices enrolled on 16 apprenticeship programmes. Over a third are the first in their families to access higher education, and most are aged 25 or over, showing the role that apprenticeships play in upskilling existing workers and supporting career change. The University directly supports local employers through apprenticeship training, with a network of over 450 employer partners. Through our teaching and these partnerships, apprenticeships benefit learners, employers and the local economy.

**Find out more about degree apprenticeships at Middlesex University: [www.mdx.ac.uk](http://www.mdx.ac.uk)**



## FEATURES

# ‘Never again’: daughter fights for step-free access after mother’s fatal fall

After seven years campaigning for a lift at one of Barnet’s busiest stations, Sara Sherrard is asking the Mill Hill community to support the next stage of the fight, Leila Davaud reports

“My mother lay at the bottom of the station stairs for an hour, until she died.”

Sitting down at a table in a busy local café, Sara Sherrard recounts the day her life pivoted: “On November 27th 2018, mum was coming back from Guy’s Hospital, where she was receiving treatment for leukaemia. She was on her way to finally go to bed and rest. Instead, she tripped and fell down Mill Hill Broadway Station’s stairs, the only available exit. It was her only way home and she never made it there.”

As she shares her story, people come and go from the front door. Sara watches an elderly couple ordering a coffee, mothers parking their prams by the counter. “Her death pushed me to fight for other members of my community to have a right to use public transport without risking their lives. I’m saying: ‘never again’, nobody should die like this or even be hurt simply trying to use public transport. Even going up and down the stairs with a suitcase is a risk, imagine with limited mobility or a young child.”

For the past seven years, Sara and her “little army” of volunteers have been campaigning for a lift to be installed at Mill Hill Broadway. She says: “At the time, the step-free access campaign had just been submitted to the government.

We thought mum’s story could help the Mill Hill line to get funding from the Department for Transport’s Access for All programme. It was granted in 2019 with a delivery deadline in 2024 but Network Rail did not do the work.”

Sara believes this lack of action may be because the project proved more expensive than initially expected. The charity worker feels “let down” and points out a “political football between parties and institutions that did not help”.

In November 2025, things finally appeared to be going in a positive direction as Network Rail informed Mill Hill’s Conservative councillors that work on new lifts was expected to start in the new year.

“However, it was quite the misunderstanding,” Sara explains. “What would start, and be completed by the summer, is the Approval In Principle (AIP) design phase. A document intended to

►  
The stairs at  
Mill Hill  
Broadway Station  
Credit: Leila  
Davaud



provide data about how the station is used and how to make it more practical, safe and finally how much it will cost. Then, Network Rail will need to find the money quickly so the construction can begin. It is a start, but the station will not be step-free anytime soon.”

Responding to *Barnet Post*’s questions on the confusion in November, a Network Rail spokesperson said: “We understand how important accessibility at Mill Hill Broadway Station is for passengers and the community. Funding has been secured for the Approval in Principle design stage for step free access.

“The contract for these design works will be awarded shortly, with completion of the AIP designs expected by summer 2026. We remain committed to working with industry partners in seeking further funding for subsequent stages of the

project, including detailed design and construction.”

In order to keep up the pressure, Sara is asking the Mill Hill community to support her campaign: “I need businesses and organisations to help me buy leaflets, signs and banners.”

During a campaign day outside the station last November, Sara says hundreds of leaflets were handed out, resulting in a wave of residents signing up via a QR code to contact the Department for Transport. “The more people who are aware of the situation and willing to push them for action, the more chances we all have to use the station safely.”

Alongside her lengthy ongoing battle for step free access, Sara had some success in getting Thameslink, the rail operator that manages the station to improve its safety guidelines in response to issues raised at the inquest into her mother’s death.

Sara says: “We learnt that not only had her previous fall not been recorded, but that on the second and deadly fall, the access to the station was not blocked, even though people were jumping over her to catch their train, giving her no dignity in her last moments.

“I made it my project to make sure guidelines would be created with the Rail Safety Standards Board. These guidelines are now meant to be national industry standards.”

In order to complete this work, though, Sara is determined to see Network Rail finally fulfil its pledge to make the station safely accessible for all. She says: “Accidents happen but the problem is that there are options and funding to make the station better. We’re not asking for the prettiest lift ever made, just something safe.”

For more information on Sara’s campaign:  
Email [stepfreeaccessmillhillbroadway@gmail.com](mailto:stepfreeaccessmillhillbroadway@gmail.com)

“Accidents happens  
but there are  
options to make  
the station better”



COMMENT

A race to the bottom

Like many people in Barnet, I watched the Sky News documentary *Unseen: A Girl Called Nonita* with a mixture of grief and anger. But sadly not disbelief.

The death of Nonita Grabovskyte, and the subsequent revelations that two more care-experienced young people have died, should have stopped the borough in its tracks. Much like the deaths of five elderly residents who died just weeks after being moved out of Aphorpe House in 2021.

In the days since, we've heard a great deal from Barnet Council about procedures, learning processes and whether statutory duties were technically met. What has struck me most, though, is not just what happened in one case, but the complete lack of ambition that seems to underpin our social care system, for children and adults alike.

Over and over again, we hear the same message: the council didn't have to do more, but it chose to. As if going beyond the bare minimum legal duty is some kind of exceptional moral achievement. In a *Barnet Post* article, cabinet member Pauline Coakley-Webb explains that because Nonita was over 18, the council was not required to carry out certain reviews, but did so anyway. This is presented as evidence of openness and care.

I find this deeply depressing. In a society that genuinely valued children, care leavers, disabled people and older residents, learning from a death would never be framed as optional. It would be automatic. It would be expected. It would be the floor, not the ceiling.

This mindset is not confined to children's services. In adult social care, statutory legal duties have become the entire offer. Anything beyond the minimum required by law is treated as unrealistic, unaffordable or even unnecessary. Need is calibrated to what can be funded, rather than funding being shaped around real, human need. The result is a slow but relentless race to the bottom.

There is also a glaring disconnect between what the council says and what it actually does. We hear warm words about care, learning lessons and putting children first, yet at the same time Barnet Council recently increased the rent on Rephael House, a charity providing vital mental health support to children and families.

Rephael House delivers thousands of counselling sessions each year, often stepping in where statutory services have long waiting lists. If the council truly believed mental health was a priority, it would be doing everything possible to stabilise and promote services like this, not treating them like commercial tenants.

The same contradiction runs through



Charli Thompson of Barnet Greens on why Barnet's social care crisis is about more than one tragedy

<p>▲ Credit Devin Avery via Unsplash</p>	<p>adult mental health services. The council is pressing ahead with plans to close The Network, a preventative service that helps adults stay well and out of hospital, and has failed to resolve a long-running dispute with mental health social workers who are asking for fair pay and safe workloads. These are concrete decisions that undermine mental health support</p>	<p>across the borough. Taken together, these actions tell a very different story from the one presented in council statements and interviews. You cannot claim to be learning lessons from tragedy while simultaneously dismantling the very services that prevent crisis in the first place. Warm words are not enough. There is another uncomfortable</p>	
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*You cannot depoliticise decisions about who gets support, who waits and who is protected*

truth we need to face: the imbalance of power between senior officers and elected councillors.

Officers are paid, often very well, to design systems, write reports and frame options in ways that appear controlled and compliant. That is their role. The problem arises when councillors stop doing theirs. Too often, scrutiny is replaced with deference. Reports are waved through because it is easier, safer and politically more convenient not to challenge them.

We saw this clearly in the way council leaders accepted the officers end of year report without scrutiny and went on to justify their actions by saying "this is how things have always been done" under previous administrations, under different political leadership. But continuity is not a defence. If you are elected to represent residents, your job is not to manage the status quo, but to change what isn't working.

Senior officers do not set the moral or political ambition of a borough. Councillors do. Or they are supposed to. When they fail to interrogate they are not being neutral. They are choosing not to know.

And while Labour and Conservatives now trade accusations across the council chamber, the people I hear from every week are not interested in political football. They are parents of care-experienced children. Disabled adults fighting for basic support. Daughters worried about what is happening to their parents in care homes. Families whose children have lost school transport overnight because eligibility criteria have tightened yet again.

These stories are not abstract. They are the lived consequences of a system that measures success by legal compliance rather than human wellbeing.

We are repeatedly told that these issues should not be "politicised". I disagree. They are political at their core. You cannot depoliticise decisions about who gets support, who waits, who falls through gaps, and who is protected. You either choose to stand with residents, or you choose to stand with bureaucracy.

As a Green, I believe things have to be done differently. That means rejecting the idea that the minimum is enough. It means honest conversations about unmet need. It means councillors educating themselves, challenging officers robustly, and refusing to accept polished reports without scrutiny. And above all, it means putting humanity back into systems that have forgotten who they are meant to serve.

If we do not raise our ambition now after lives have already been lost, then when will we?



# FEATURES

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Volunteering  
at Chipping  
Barnet Foodbank  
Credit: Leila Davaud



## Campaigners push council on living wage accreditation

BY LUC GAUCI GREEN

**C**ampaigners are calling on Barnet Council to take action on low pay as the borough lags behind others in London on wage accreditation. The team at Chipping Barnet Foodbank are advocates of the adoption of London Living Wage, hosting campaigns and events alongside the Living Wage Foundation.

However, currently 29 out of 33 London boroughs are accredited living wage employers, and Barnet remains one of the four not accredited.

In recent years, the foodbank has noticed that demand for their services is outstripping supply, including from people who are currently employed but earning less than living wage.

Bob Bevil, the foodbank's advocacy and campaign lead tells *Barnet Post* "that means there are people subcontracted to the council who are earning less than living wage".

He adds: "They're the types of people that we're starting to see more and more of at the foodbank. These are families where one or two of the adults in a household might be working but they'll be subcontracted to the council for a poor rate."

Barnet is the only Labour-led council in London that is not accredited. In addition, Barnet's primary anchor health care institu-

tion, the Royal Free London NHS Foundation Trust (which runs Barnet Hospital as well as the Royal Free) is not accredited either.

Bob says: "If we can encourage these big organisations to pay the London Living Wage, it would alleviate pressure on the foodbanks."

He highlights that there is both a moral case and a business case for adopting the London Living Wage which is advocated by Middlesex University's research. The university is one of the institutions in the borough that does pay the London Living Wage.

A Middlesex University spokesperson said: "Adopting the London Living Wage aligns with our commitment to be a responsible employer, and our values of fairness and supporting the wellbeing of our staff while also making good business sense."

Dr Andrea Werner of Middlesex University is a researcher whose work advocates for the London Living Wage. She says a commitment to the living wage in Barnet would have a positive impact on individual workers, local employers and the community.

In her research, workers being paid the living wage "can better meet rising living costs"; "avoid getting into debt"; "can spend money on things they couldn't afford before" like better quality food and clothing; "are able to work fewer hours"

and can lead a better quality of life; "feel more valued" and have a positive psychological impact; "are able to save money for the future"; and "are able to invest in their own education".

She adds that employers also gain numerous benefits. Paying the real living wage "helps to attract and retain good quality staff" which "helps save money in recruitment and training costs."

This also translates into "better staff morale and motivation" and the organisation can provide a "more consistent, reliable and higher quality service."

It also has reputational benefits and might even help with grant applications or accreditations. The research has shown that it has a positive effect on organisational culture, atmosphere and some mention "less absenteeism and less sickness".

Dr Werner also suggests that the community can benefit from the "increased purchasing power of their residents" earning London Living Wage, with particular benefits for local businesses and trade.

She also referenced the Living Wage Foundation's work: according to their research, they estimate that "if 25% more workers were paid a real living wage, the economic benefit to the UK economy would be £1.7bn, and to London £208.3m."

They also observe frequent clustering of

living wage employers, "often following the lead" of major local employers like universities and significant purchasing organisations like local authorities.

Both Barnet Council and Royal Free NHS Foundation Trust have now started the process of accreditation.

Zahra Beg, the council's cabinet member for equalities, told *Barnet Post*: "All directly employed council staff are paid at least the London Living Wage and many of our contracts with third-party providers include a requirement for a commitment to the London Living Wage."

"Our manifesto pledged to work with local employers towards becoming a London Living Wage borough, and as a council we have started the process of becoming a Living Wage Employer."

"As part of our work to deliver on our London Living Wage commitment, we have already been able to move to the London Living Wage for our extra care, equipment services, day care, and prevention sectors in adult social care. In addition, all services delivered by our local authority trading company, Your Choice Barnet, including supported living, respite services and care homes, pay staff London's Living Wage."

"We recognise that there are challenges in some areas of our supply chain, particularly within social care contracts, where meeting the London Living Wage can be complex due to sector-wide funding constraints. We are working closely with the Living Wage Foundation to address these barriers."

A spokesperson for Royal Free London said: "We are pleased to confirm the trust is applying for London Living Wage accreditation across our group. This will be an extension to the existing accreditation held by North Middlesex University Hospital, which merged with Royal Free London at the start of 2025."

"Currently, all staff employed directly by the trust receive pay above the London Living Wage. Additionally, as part of our procurement process, any contractors tendering for business with the trust must pay their staff the London Living Wage or higher."

Bob Bevil's concern, however, is that action is not coming fast enough. He says: "Corporate time tends to drag compared to day to day time of residents experiencing poverty."

"When large corporations like councils commit to things, it tends to take time, bureaucracy takes time. Whereas when you come to the foodbank and walk around, there's a much greater sense of urgency amongst people using its services because they really can't afford waiting for these changes to happen."

After getting these anchor institutions accredited, Bob says their next aim is to get as many small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as possible to accredit, especially as Barnet's working population is predominately within SMEs.



FEATURES

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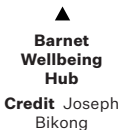


# A community approach to mental health

**T**here’s something powerful about walking into a place where people not only listen but also want to help. I first heard about Barnet Wellbeing Service when a friend described how accessible and understanding it was compared to traditional mental health services. Intrigued, I decided to check it out for myself.

The service, launched in 2018, offers a fresh approach to mental health support. It’s not just about treating conditions but about offering support that meets people where they are. It focuses on what matters to you, not just what’s wrong. This shift in perspective was what really caught my attention.

When I first got in touch, I was invited to the Wellbeing Hub, where the process was simple and human. There were no complicated forms or long waits, just a friendly, informal conversation with a ‘wellbeing navigator’. They took time to listen, asking thoughtful questions that helped me reflect on my needs. It wasn’t about a diagnosis but about understanding

	<h3>Joseph Bikong shares his experience of Barnet Wellbeing Service</h3>	
<div><p><b>▲ Barnet Wellbeing Hub</b> Credit Joseph Bikong</p></div>	<p>what support would work best for me.</p> <p>What struck me most was the sense of partnership. I wasn’t told what to do; instead, I was guided through options like talking therapies, peer support and the recovery college, which focuses on building practical skills for mental wellness. This approach felt empowering, like I was in control of my own journey.</p> <p>I found the recovery college courses particularly helpful. Initially, I was unsure about attending but I decided to give it a try. The course on mindfulness and managing stress was incredibly practical. It taught me strategies I could apply to handle everyday stress and build resilience. I also appreciated how the courses weren’t</p>	<p>about fixing problems but about learning how to cope in a healthier way.</p> <p>The peer support element was another key benefit. Connecting with others who have shared similar experiences gave me a sense of belonging. It wasn’t a formal therapy session, it was a space where people listened to each other and supported one another in real ways. This made a huge difference for me.</p> <p>The Barnet Friends programme, which helps reduce loneliness, was also a great initiative. It matches people with volunteers who check in regularly. For me, having someone to talk to, even just once a week, reminded me that I wasn’t alone in my experiences.</p> <p>What I value most about the</p>

Barnet Wellbeing Service is its accessibility. It’s not one-size-fits-all. The Wellbeing Hub connects people to over 350 different wellbeing services across Barnet, ensuring there’s always something available that suits individual needs. The service is free for residents aged 16 and over who are registered with a GP in Barnet. However, with so many options, navigating it all can feel overwhelming at first.

Ultimately, what makes the Barnet Wellbeing Service so impactful is its holistic approach. It combines clinical care with community-based support, making it not just about treatment but about building resilience and offering ongoing support. It’s a service that empowers people to take control of their mental health journey.

For me, the Barnet Wellbeing Service has been a reminder that mental health is a journey, and I feel grateful for the support that helped me navigate it.

*Joseph Bikong is a freelance writer with a focus on mental health, community services, and personal growth*

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# FEATURES

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## Between shelves and screens



### Youssef Bashir on how Barnet still uses its libraries

**L**ibraries have historically been a site of public access to information. The average person, upon hearing the word library, may tend to imagine a big space with rows and rows of shelves, stacked to the top with books but not much more. The ease of access to and prevalence of the internet in this day and age may leave many unknowing of anything else that libraries, such as our very own in Barnet, may have to offer.

Therefore comes the question: do the residents of Barnet still value these public spaces, or are they viewed as mere relics consigned to history?

As the doors of Hendon Library slide open and its warmth spills out onto the street, the question feels ever present. What, in this modernised world, do local libraries mean to the people who still walk through their doors?

In an age of remote and instant downloads, Barnet’s libraries are often spoken about in terms of budget cuts. Yet standing outside the libraries in Hendon, Colindale and Mill Hill over several days, it becomes clear that public feeling in regard to these spaces is more layered than simple nostalgia or an acceptance of their decline.

At Hendon Library, where the service alternates between staffed and self-

served depending on the day, the mood is practical rather than sentimental.

“I don’t mind the self-service bit, actually,” says Rishab Patel, a university student who uses the library between lectures. “It’s nice to have it as an option, rather than it being shut.”

For him, Hendon Library is not an old-fashioned relic but a reliable workspace; it’s less busy than his university’s study areas and does not require buying a coffee. Still, he admits the non-staffed days feel different: “When there’s someone at the desk, it feels more human.”

That human touch is something many older residents, who made up the majority of library users on the days I visited, said they value. Standing near the noticeboard advertising IT help, cost of living support, and the different community language books across Barnet’s libraries, Margaret Allen, 61, tells me: “I would be lost without places like this. My children tell me everything is online, but someone still has to show you how to get to what you’re looking for.”

Hendon Library’s small but dedicated section for older residents, full of bright posters and straightforward advice, is apparently well used and liked, with several people mentioning it unprompted.

Colindale Library, which also switches between staff days and self-service ones, is slightly bigger

and has a more modern feel. Parents with their children, teenagers on the computers and slightly older visitors just reading, share the same space.

As she leaves the library, Aisha Khan, a local resident who was visiting with her child, praises the ‘Toddler Time’ session that takes place there every Wednesday that she has just found out about, but wishes there was more of it. She says: “I was told it’s only one hour. It would be nice to have something longer, or on different days.” Her son tugs at her sleeve, hoping to go back inside and explore, a small reminder that the next generation is already forming its own library habits.

Mill Hill Library tells a different story. It is only ever staff serviced and feels more traditional and calm. However, the trade-off is shorter opening hours and full closures three days a week.

“They keep reducing the opening times,” says resident Charles Green. “But when it’s open, it’s brilliant. The staff know everyone.”

He gestures towards a staff member while smiling. That scene repeats itself often in Mill Hill Library, reinforcing the idea of it as a place of quiet assistance rather than one that needs to be full to be useful.

Across all three libraries, the question of obsolescence produces mixed reactions.

“Books aren’t obsolete,” insists Margaret, firmly.

Rishab is more neutral, he says: “The books are nice, but it’s really about the space. The computers and printing are also good to have. Those are definitely not obsolete.”

A third space, as urban planners might call it, with useful facilities and information, where no one is expected to spend money, seems to still hold value to many that were spoken to.

Barnet’s libraries may not all be massive, with some more automated and some offering shorter opening hours than residents would like but they are far from forgotten.

They have survived and continue to aim to be useful to the community, and that is what people notice. At the beginning of a new year when resolutions are made, the libraries stand quietly ready, in their visitors’ eyes not as monuments to the past, but as living rooms for a borough deciding what it needs them to be.

“*That human touch is something many older residents value*”

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# FEATURES

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Emily Cass presenting 'The Story of Sala Slater', a tale of how her mother survived the Holocaust as a Jewish refugee Credit: Barnet Council



## Communities come together to mark Holocaust Memorial Day

BY DAVID FLOYD

Communities in Barnet came together at Middlesex University last month for the borough's Holocaust Memorial Day commemoration.

The annual event, organised by Barnet Council, is held in remembrance of the Jewish victims of the Holocaust and genocides throughout the world.

It took place two days before the official nationwide Holocaust Memorial Day on Tuesday, 27th January.

Speakers at the commemoration included Emily Cass, who presented *The Story of Sala Slater*, a tale of how her mother survived the Holocaust as a Jewish refugee.

When the Germans attacked Belgium in May 1940, Sala fled to the south of France with Paul Zlotogorski, who she married in December that year. The pair fled across the Alps to Switzerland in August 1942 after French police began to arrest Jews.

In early 1945, impatient to be with Paul – who had been wounded whilst fighting with the British army in Germany – Sala

smuggled herself out of Switzerland. She finally reached Britain in the summer of 1945 where, reunited with Paul, she made a new life in London.

Also speaking at the ceremony, mayor of Barnet, Danny Rich, said: "I approach Holocaust Memorial Day with a mixture of emotions including, but not restricted to, humility and hope.

"If the Holocaust, perpetrated by the Nazis against primarily the Jews, is the defining episode of the twentieth century, it is also true that the capacity of human beings to inflict cruelty on their neighbours and others remains a stain on civilisation in the following years, not least in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur.

"The aspiration of a better world – rid of the scourge of hatred – begins with persons of good will affirming clearly that racism has no place in our society. That clarity of purpose can then be translated into bringing Barnet together, providing appropriate educational opportunities, and enabling future generations to mould a world characterised by moral clarity and human decency."

## From Baker Street to Nether Street

BY DAVID FLOYD

One of London's most famous detectives is coming to North Finchley as part of a major UK tour.

Arthur Conan Doyle's popular sleuth Sherlock Holmes will feature in two performances at Artsdepot on Saturday, 14th February.

*Sherlock Holmes: The Hunt for Moriarty*, created by the team at Blackeyed Theatre, stars Mark Knightley as Sherlock and Ben Owara as Doctor Watson, with Pippa Cad-dick as Irene Adler and Mrs Hudson.

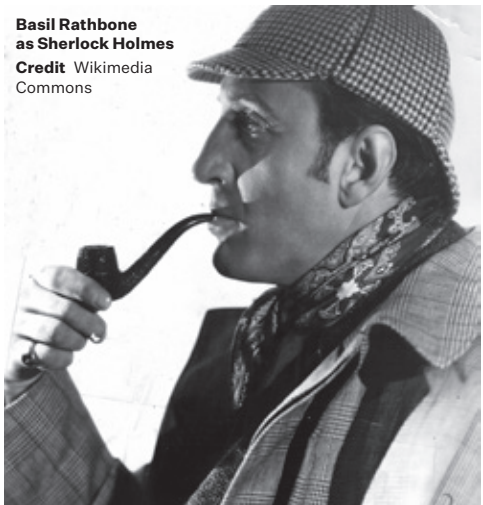
Potentially offering an alternative Valentine's Day treat for couples who prefer historical detectives to expensive restaurants, the show interweaves several of Conan Doyle's short stories into one narrative.

The play is set in London in 1901. As the British Empire wages war in the name of a Queen whose health is failing, a series of mysterious events reveals a crack in the high corridors of power.

This crack threatens to destabilise monarchy, government and the empire. And at its centre, controlling the flow of information and influence, a shadowy figure plans a final deadly move.

Writer and Director Nick Lane said: "After working with Blackeyed on two previous

Basil Rathbone as Sherlock Holmes Credit: Wikimedia Commons



adaptations of Conan Doyle novels (*The Sign of Four* and *The Valley of Fear*) it was really exciting to be asked back to create something a little different for our third Holmes collaboration."

He added: "It's been fun capturing the pace, the spirit and the character of Doyle's original adventures, and our hope is that, like the stories themselves, *The Hunt for Moriarty* will keep audiences gripped – and guessing – along with the great detective himself, right to the last".

To book tickets: Visit [artsdepot.co.uk/event/sherlock-holmes-the-hunt-for-moriarty/#book-now](https://artsdepot.co.uk/event/sherlock-holmes-the-hunt-for-moriarty/#book-now)

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# The medieval village that became a diverse high street

London’s high streets play a vital role in shaping the social and economic fabric of the city. With restaurants, independent shops and long-standing family businesses, each high street offers a snapshot of the capital’s diversity. They serve as reminders of why we choose London as our homes.

These shops are more than just places to eat or shop, they reflect who lives there, who arrived before and how communities continue to evolve and Finchley Central’s high street is no exception.

A lively and well-connected pocket of North London, Finchley Central is shaped by a myriad of intersecting cultures.

With Indian, Persian, Middle Eastern, Japanese, Italian and English restaurants lining Ballards Lane, the area feels distinctly local yet unmistakably London. It is a microcosm of the intricate web of the city’s layered cultures and identities.

High streets are the backbone of London’s economy. Over half of all jobs in the capital are spread across 600 high streets, making them essential not only for the community but for employment opportunities. Local shopkeepers and long-term residents consistently describe the community of Finchley Central as inclusive and welcoming, a sentiment reflected in the businesses that have shaped the area for decades.

One resident who has lived in Finchley central for 27 years explained that the diversity of shops mirrors the needs of the different communities represented in the area.

Originally referred to as Church

## Local resident Rebecca Pattni on the changing face of Finchley Central

▲ Credit Grim23 via Wikimedia

End, Finchley Central is the oldest recorded medieval village in the Finchley Woodlands. During the Norman period, Finchley and Friern Barnet’s large woodland were cultivated to provide fuel and farm pigs for sale in London. By Saxon times, the woodland was cleared and a road connecting Finchley to the North out of London was formed. In the Tudor period, this route served travellers and had many inns.

The arrival of the Great Northern Railway Line in 1851 transformed the area into a suburban hub, which led to its inclusion on London Transport’s Northern Line in 1939. The name Finchley Central also only arrived in 1940, when the station was officially named.

Traces of this past still remain today. St Mary’s Church in Hendon Lane has Norman roots while College Farm which once was a celebrated Victorian tourist destination, showcasing the dairy industry stands as a reminder of Finchley’s past and that it has always been shaped by change.

This change is most visible on the high street itself. One resident who has lived in the area for nearly three decades recalled that “it was a major event when the first proper coffee shop arrived in 2002”.

Today, more than a dozen cafes line the street, which is a clear sign of how the area has transformed in the past 20 years. The resident also remembers when “there was more variety of shops and more choice of restaurants”.

The makeup of the high street has shifted alongside migration patterns. Local residents mentioned that in the early 2000s, “there were more Polish and Eastern European shops, but now, Persian businesses are more prominent.”

Sima’s Grill, a Persian restaurant in Ballards Lane, describes Finchley Central as a very “multicultural area”. The restaurant remarked that 60% of their customers are non-Iranian which demonstrates how food becomes a bridge between communities and cultures.

These shifts reflect the waves of immigration that have shaped and continue to shape Finchley Central. One long term resident who moved to the area in 1974 after fleeing Idi Amin’s dictatorship in Uganda recalls a very different atmosphere. They shared that people were not initially welcoming as discrimination was common and there was only one shop selling Indian food. Today, Indian restaurants and grocers line the streets. “I never want

to leave Finchley”, they said. This viewpoint is shared by longstanding Hindu-owned grocer, A to Z, who said that, “20 years ago, the high street was more balanced”. The owner of the restaurant Rani, a Gujarati restaurant that has served the area for 41 years notes that customer loyalty plays a role in shaping Finchley Central, with families returning to the same familiar places. Finchley’s diversity has been shaped by one of the UK’s largest Jewish populations, as many Jewish people settled in and around the area after the Second World War. More recent changes followed Poland’s entrance into the European Union in 2004 which led to a large influx of Polish residents seeking better economic opportunities. While Brexit has since altered those migration patterns, their influence remains part of the area’s recent history. Today, Finchley Central’s high street is largely defined by Persian businesses, reflecting newer cultural additions to the area, a shift which could correlate to patterns of immigration of Iranian Christians fleeing persecution. Finchley Central is now home to a richly diverse population, with cultures and cuisines woven into everyday life along the high street. For those of us who grew up in Finchley Central, the area represents more than a collection of shops. It is truly a place where different faiths, cultures and backgrounds do not simply coexist but continue to shape one another. It captures the harmony and diversity that defines the city of London itself.



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NEWS



Volunteers work at the Cultivate Colindale project Credit Daniel Mermestein

Getting stuck in

Daniel Mermelstein on Barnet asylum seekers volunteering in the community

On a cold winter weekday a group of volunteers gathers at the site of the Cultivate Colindale community project. The project participants are working to transform a vacant lot at Heybourne Park into a community hub, gardens and allotments. The work today involves clearing an area that will become a wildflower meadow in the spring but is currently overrun with weeds. Soon everyone is joining in, uprooting weeds and clearing the space. Today’s volunteer group includes local residents from a nearby facility housing asylum seekers. “I used to work in gardening and landscaping in my country. So I like doing this,” says Walid, one of today’s volunteers. He has spent several months in the asylum facility waiting for his application to be decided. Their participation was organised by the Barnet chapter of GoodGym, a national charity that aims to combine fitness with volunteering. GoodGym Barnet has been making an effort to encourage asylum seekers to get involved in the local community. “Asylum seekers are incredibly

“They are eager to make a contribution to their neighbourhood”

isolated,” says George Ttoouli, one of the Goodgym organisers. “They get put in these facilities after often dangerous journeys, and have very little idea of where they are. Often they get moved around without warning. Some of today’s volunteers came from the Barbican area a few weeks ago and have no idea how to get around Barnet.” Their opportunities to engage with the local community are minimal because of a combination of language barriers, suspicion and simply lack of money for travel. “There isn’t much they can do while they wait on their asylum decisions,” says Ttoouli. “They are not allowed to work and have no access to benefits. So volunteering offers an opportunity to do something useful and they embrace it when it’s offered.” Today’s group includes a mother from the Middle East and her son who has special needs, as well as a young man and an older woman from east Asia. After an hour of work among the weeds the volunteers gather

for a chat around a cup of tea and a biscuit. It is a cold day and the refreshments are welcome by all. Thomas Kendall, the project lead for Cultivate Colindale talks about the impact of the sessions. He says: “Working with GoodGym and people seeking asylum at Cultivate Colindale has been a really meaningful experience for us. The group have been incredibly keen, thoughtful and engaged in the garden, and their presence has added so much to the space. Creating room for people to participate, especially those so often excluded, feels central to what we believe in, and we’re excited to keep developing the garden together.” GoodGym Barnet has also organised volunteering sessions with asylum seekers at the Mutton Brook Tiny Forest, where volunteers engaged in some citizen science, measuring trees and counting wildlife. On a separate occasion they took part in a litter pick along the Dollis Brook. “I really enjoyed the tree measuring,” said Danjire from east Africa. “I did not know anything about the Tiny Forest until today”. Jude Howlett, an organiser with the Dollis Brookers volunteer group, led the litter picking session. “It was great to meet this group of volunteers. They were very keen to help and were quite distressed to see some of the dirtier spots along our walk. They want to come back and tackle those”. George Ttoouli from GoodGym points out that because so many of the people making these dangerous trips are young, single men, so much of the negative press coverage focuses on alarmist rhetoric around “predatory men”. “Our experience could not be more different. The people we have met are invariably courteous and respectful. They are eager to make a contribution and embrace the opportunity of getting to know their neighbours and their neighbourhoods better. They also have an incredible wealth of untapped skills. One man I met worked in finance for 14 years, and with the help of Volunteering Barnet I have managed to help him volunteer with a local charity in need of bookkeeping support.” GoodGym Barnet is hoping to organise more of these volunteer opportunities in the coming months.

For more information on Cultivate Colindale Visit: wayward.co.uk/news-article/join-our-cultivate-colindale-community-build To find out about Goodgym: Visit: goodgym.org

Hospice to mark 30th anniversary of flagship fundraising event

BY JAMES CRACKNELL

North London Hospice will this year celebrate the 30th anniversary of its flagship fundraising event. On Sunday, 10th May hundreds of walkers of all ages will gather for North London Hospice’s latest Big Fun Walk, an iconic ten-mile route through Barnet, Camden and Westminster boroughs “filled with laughter, remembrance and purpose”. Big Fun Walk is North London Hospice’s flagship fundraising event, and one of their most loved by supporters. This year marks 30 years since the very first walk took place, when a group of enthusiastic participants made the journey from Finchley to Westminster on foot. To celebrate, the charity is offering special discounted ticket prices until 15th February. The very first Big Fun Walk took place on Sunday, 10th March 1996 with over 300 participants raising nearly £13,000 for the hospice. The event has grown to encompass more than 1000 walkers and raises over £175,000 for North London Hospice each year. To mark the 30th anniversary, the event has a meaningful theme this year: ‘Every Step Holds a Story’. Big Fun Walk offers a way to keep alive the memories and stories of those people we have loved and, this year, the hospice is inviting walkers to step into a world of imagination with participants encouraged to dress up as a fairytale character for the occasion. If ten miles is too far, participants can instead join the much-loved ‘Little Fun Walk’, a five-mile route that finishes at the top of Primrose Hill. Louise Cohen, senior events and community officer at North London Hospice, said: “Join us for the 30th anniversary of our Big Fun Walk on 10th May. Along the way you can expect stunning views, inspiring company, and a finish line filled with music, celebration and moments that will stay with you.”

Big Fun Walk Credit North London Hospice





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## BY REBECCA PATTNI

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SPORT

Dropping in on Barnet's local derby



Veteran London Lions fan Neville Zeller (right) with Darren Zeller Credit Nick Jones



Hadley FC director Oliver Deed (right) with club chairman Steve Gray and first team coach Mick Hore Credit Nick Jones

Nick Jones attends the clash between two football teams based in Arkley

Arkley has a new claim to fame – its top two football clubs are now in the same division and when they play each other their matches are thought to be the closest local derby among leading English football leagues. Until this season Liverpool and Everton held that honour because of what previously was the close proximity of their stadiums. Local football fans believe that Arkley village may now have become the setting

for perhaps the hottest local derby in the top eight tiers. The two clubs are based less than a mile apart. Hadley FC's stadium and clubhouse is in Brickfield Lane, next to Arkley Village Hall, and London Lions FC are a ten-minute walk away in Rowley Lane. London Lions won promotion this season to the Southern League Division One Central and their first away fixture to Hadley ended in a 2–1 victory after they snatched the winning goal a minute from the end. Hadley, hit recently by a bad run of injuries, had been hoping for a win and were in high spirits during the warmup. London Lions under their skipper for the

day Adam Lipman were disappointed when Hadley were deservedly 1-0 up at the end of the first half after striker Lenny Asamoah had made no mistake from close range. Zan Appleson-Fidler equalised for the Lions in the 60th minute and a minute from time Daniel Creese clinched the match for the visitors from six yards. Veteran London Lions fan Neville Zeller (pictured), 87, is no stranger to the local football scene. He has been a supporter of the club since he was 15. The last time the two teams met was in 2014 when Hadley ran out 4-0 winners in a Spartan South Midlands League Premier Division match. A decade ago, the two clubs were both ground sharing – Hadley at Potters Bar Town and London Lions at Hemel Hempstead Town but after ground improvements both returned to Barnet. Hadley FC president Tristan Smith – above – is hoping for a better result when the two teams meet again at the London Lions' stadium in Rowley Lane on 28th March. Arkley became the permanent home of Hadley FC – which was established in 1882 and is the oldest football club playing in Barnet – after the club secured a long-term lease on the sports ground at Brickfield Lane in 2016 – where the regular chant is now: "Come on You Bricks." Since 2016 the club has spent £1.3million in improvements to its ground and facilities, including the installation of an



Hadley FC players (left to right) Hermes Gbio, Hedley Ogbemor, Jordan Edwards and Hadley goalkeeper coach Tim Teixeira warming up Credit Nick Jones

all-weather training pitch. The latest addition is new changing rooms which have been in use since the start of the season, and which were funded with the help of grants from the Football Foundation and Barnet Council. Despite being hampered since November by having up to 13 players unavailable through injuries, club director (and *Barnet Post* columnist) Oliver Deed is hopeful Hadley might make it to the playoffs for promotion. "We reached the first round of the FA Trophy, as we did last season, and although we are mid table, we have still got a chance of reaching the playoffs in 2026. It'll be tough, but we are hopeful." For club members perhaps the next phase in the club's development programme might be improvements to the bar and seating area at Hadley Pavilion.

This story was originally published by 'The Barnet Society'. To read regular news stories by Nick Jones: Visit [barnetsociety.org.uk/news](http://barnetsociety.org.uk/news)

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SPORT19

# Spotlight on Senior as postponements see Bees drop into bottom half

After Barnet were beaten 3–1 by play off chasers Salford City just before Christmas, the Bees found themselves in the bottom half. After that, a draw and two wins over the Christmas and new year period saw them back amongst the top end.

One man who has been at the key to this improvement is 22-year-old centre half and right back Adam Senior, who has taken his second chance in the league well with a string of fine performances in the backline for the black and amber.

Having joined the ranks of his boyhood team Bolton Wanderers, he made his first team debut in 2019 aged 17 for the then League Two Trotters in an away game at Gillingham where they were beaten 5–0.

He netted his first ever professional goal against Shrewsbury in the EFL Trophy in 2021, then embarked on a series of loan deals for the next two years taking in Ashton United, Chorley, York City, AFC Telford and FC Halifax, who he joined permanently in 2023 after being released by Bolton, for whom he made only four first team appearances.

He was a mainstay for the Shaymen in his two seasons with the West Yorkshire outfit.

In his first season (whilst on loan) they made the play offs but fell short and, last season, he was ever present in a campaign where they finished just below the dotted line.

Dean Brennan jumped at the chance to sign the out of contract Bolton lad last summer and he has been the perfect replacement for Ade Oluwo in the back



Nick Sandmas with his monthly update on the fortunes of Barnet FC

<p>▲ The Hive Credit Katie Chan via Wikimedia Commons</p>	<p>four, alongside Danny Collinge and Nik Taveres.</p> <p>Senior’s goalscoring qualities have been shown too, with six goals mainly from set pieces, including the opener in a 2–0 win against Bristol Rovers to end the year on a high.</p>	<p>The first game of 2026 saw Senior’s fellow defender Joe Kizzi on the scoresheet twice in beating Crawley 2–1 to leave them in the top half of a topsy turvy division.</p> <p>With the weather putting paid to the next two fixtures, the Bees were back on the pitch for the visit</p>	
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to Grimsby which ended up in a single goal defeat. Kizzi was shown a red card (since rescinded) early on and the Bees did well to concede only one goal in defeat, the result dropping them back into the lower half as we went to press.

With the transfer window also open last month, boss Brennan was actively in business strengthening his squad with Leyton Orient duo Phillip Chinedu and Dialling Jaiyesimi joining on loan until the end of the season, and experienced striker Kabongo Tshimanga coming in from Crawley Town.

Tshimanga went straight into the starting eleven for the visit of Oldham, which resulted in the Bees winning by the odd goal in five thanks to a debut double from the former Crawley man.

Departing were Joe Hugill (who returned to parent club Man Utd), Ryan Galvin, Ollie Kensdale and Lee Ndlovu to Carlisle, Boreham Wood and Notts County respectively with youngsters Bright Siaw and Patrick Matejko going out on loan to gain much-needed game time and further experience.

This month, the Bees have seven games in their hectic schedule, including the two recently postponed fixtures. This means home games against Crewe, Cheltenham, Swindon and Chesterfield, alongside trips to Walsall, Colchester and Accrington Stanley.

Another crucial month awaits the boys in black and amber, and how they cope with the games coming up thick and fast will be a big factor in determining their position at the end of their first season back in the EFL.

## ARTS

# Dance festival brings Barnet together through movement

BY MAGA JUDD, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, DARE2DANCE

North Finchley will once again come alive with dance, colour, and community spirit this month as the Be Well Family Dance Festival returns for its third edition.

The festival on 22nd February, organised by Dare2Dance Company CIC and funded by The National Lottery Awards for All, brings together children, parents, grandparents, and local artists for a full

day of free workshops and uplifting performances celebrating creativity and wellbeing.

This year’s programme features Bollywood, African dance, Mediterranean fusion, street dance, groove together (for under-5s) and art and movement sessions, alongside a vibrant community

showcase featuring performers from across Barnet.

Our aim is to create spaces where people of all ages feel welcomed, seen, and connected through movement.

Feedback from last year’s festival reflects that impact: “Friendly, family environment... wonderful team!” said



Golda; “Perfect! The mixture of workshops and performances was amazing” said Sophia and “A genuine commitment to community dance, drawing in so many performers” said Jo.

The festival continues to grow as a beacon of inclusion, intergenerational creativity and local pride; a joyful reminder that wellbeing can be nurtured through community and dance.

All workshops and performances are free, but booking is essential via artsdepot at: [artsdepot.co.uk/festival/bewell-family-dance-festival-2026/](https://artsdepot.co.uk/festival/bewell-family-dance-festival-2026/)





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