

Nº 37

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BARNET Post.

News | P.2



Edgware campaigners slam Mayor

News | P.8

Colindale residents fight 'mismanagement'

Election | P.9-12



The fight for control at the town hall

Features | P.18
French students visit Finchley



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The local community showing solidarity with Finchley Reform Synagogue following last month's attempted arson Credit Citizens UK



MP hails 'Finchley at its finest' in response to synagogue attack

BY LUC GAUCI GREEN & DAVID FLOYD

Sarah Sackman celebrated the solidarity shown by the Finchley community as local organisations came together at Finchley Reform Synagogue following an attempted arson attack last month.

The Finchley and Golders Green MP hailed the gathering on Friday, 17th April as "Finchley at its finest" as over 20 community groups came to show support for the synagogue following the incident two days earlier.

Representatives of neighbouring religious organisations spoke out in support of Finchley Reform Synagogue (FRS), highlighting its contribution to the wider community.

Tamara Joseph of Finchley Progressive Synagogue said: "FRS do so much in the local community and show up for them so you can see that they all want to show up for FRS." Rev Jared Jaggers of the American International Church added: "We see you, we hear you, we support you and we want to return all the love that you give out."

Frequently referenced was the deep connection between FRS and the Somali Bravanese Welfare Association (SBWA). The Somali group saw its own centre destroyed in an arson attack 13 years ago and FRS opened their doors to let them use the synagogue as Ramadan approached; an arrangement that lasted for four years.

Roda Imam of SBWA said a silver lining could come from such horrific incidents: "We had our situation in 2013, but it helped us open up to the wider community. It had a positive impact. We can help now, by showing our support and being a voice for those less integrated."

Speaking at the event Labour MP Sackman, said of the connection



between the groups: "That's what solidarity looks like. That is a quiet radical act that shows what North London is all about."

She said the gathering "shows we stay resolute and we carry on as a local community", before adding: "Not only are the Friday prayers continuing in Finchley Reform, people have turned out. Our local Muslim community. Our local police officers. Our councillors. Our MP. All here to show solidarity with the community at Finchley Reform. I think that's Finchley at its finest."

The attempted attack on FRS is one of a spate of recent antisemitic attacks in North West London including March's arson attack on Hatzola ambulances in Golders Green in March and a further arson attack on a synagogue in Harrow last month.

Speaking following the FRS incident, Barnet Council leader Barry Rawlings said: "The attempted arson attack on Finchley Reform Synagogue, carried out

deep into the night by masked thugs, was the work of bullies and cowards."

He added: "We stand with members of Finchley Reform Synagogue and the wider Jewish community. Relevant councillors are in touch with the synagogue. Antisemitism cannot be tolerated in Barnet and we are dedicated to combatting it now and always."

Talking to *Barnet Post* while campaigning with local activists in Barnet last month, Conservative shadow chief secretary to the treasury Richard Fuller expressed his concerns

about growing antisemitism. He said: "It's horrible looking at some of my friends who are Jewish in London who feel that this city has changed dramatically over the last few years and no longer feel safe walking the streets where they live or in central London in particular."

He added that regular marches focused on Gaza had created an atmosphere that was "divisive and hostile".

"This is a quiet radical act that shows what North London is all about"



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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Edgware bus station Credit David Floyd

Local campaigners accuse Khan of 'ignoring' fire safety risks at Edgware redevelopment

BY JOE IVES, LOCAL DEMOCRACY REPORTER

Campaners have accused Mayor of London Sir Sadiq Khan of leaving the public "exposed to an unresolved fire safety risk" by not intervening in plans to demolish and rebuild Edgware Bus Station.

The plans are part of a wider £1.7 billion planned redevelopment of Edgware town centre, which will also see the construction of over 3,800 new homes.

These major works are set to be carried out by Places for London, the development arm of Transport for London (TfL), and private developers Ballymore.

The existing bus station will be replaced with an underground garage for the vehicles. Campaigners are concerned by both the loss of the station and the potential fire risks posed by the batteries on new electric buses.

As it stands, plans for the development, including for fire safety, have yet to be formally completed. Barnet Council granted outline planning permission for the redevelopment of Edgware Bus Station in July last year. The move has raised concerns that the development could go ahead without a proper fire safety plan in place beforehand.

Nevertheless, Khan's deputy mayor for planning Jules Pipe sent a letter to Barnet Council in late March saying there was "no basis" for the Greater London Authority (GLA) to intervene.

Pipe added: "I am content to allow the local planning authority to determine the case itself, subject to any action that the secretary of state may take, and do not therefore wish to direct refusal or to take over the application for my own determination."

Campaign group Save Edgware Bus Station has accused Khan of "ignoring more than 7,000 objections submitted to Barnet Council, 3,000 signatures on the Save Edgware Bus Station petition and over 1,400 objections submitted via the GLA planning portal".

The group added: "The decision leaves the community exposed to an unresolved fire safety risk and the permanent loss of a functioning transport hub."

The Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) approached Barnet Council for comment on these concerns.

In response, a spokesperson for the local authority said: "The council takes the matter of fire safety very seriously and has robustly worked with relevant stakeholders throughout the planning application and post-committee resolution process to secure strong and appropriate fire safety measures."

"The proposed underground bus garage will not be permitted to operate with electric vehicles unless and until they have provided evidence to the council that all relevant fire safety strategies, testing and

approvals have been secured, including agreement with the London Fire Brigade and other statutory regulators.

"This is a requirement of the planning conditions and Section 106 obligations, and public safety remains the council's overriding priority."

The spokesperson added that the bus station and garage cannot be decommissioned or demolished until temporary bus infrastructure has been approved by the council in consultation with TfL.

Asked what conversations the council has had with London Fire Brigade (LFB) regarding the plans, the local authority's spokesperson responded: "The council has liaised with the London Fire Brigade throughout the planning application process and were formally consulted as part of the planning application."

"Their responses were set out and summarised within the committee report and addendum. The committee report makes clear that the London Fire Brigade supports the proposed approach of requiring further detailed design, testing and approval before the garage can be brought into use by electric vehicles, and that no such use can occur unless they are satisfied."

"The committee report secured specific planning obligations and conditions relating to fire and LFB confirmed to the council that they were satisfied with the proposed approach."

Barnet now among worst in London for recycling as rate falls again

BY RICHARD CUBITT

Barnet has dropped into the bottom ten London boroughs for recycling, the latest figures show.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs recently released its annual report into local authority waste collections, which shows that Barnet's rate of household recycling in 2024/25 had fallen to 27.8%, down from 28.7% in 2023/24.

This gives Barnet the eighth-lowest rate of household recycling out of all London boroughs, and also significantly below the London average of 32.6%.

It also means the borough is nowhere near achieving the 50% household recycling rate target agreed by North London Waste Authority (NLWA), the public body responsible for waste disposal on behalf of seven North London councils.

Asked for a response to the latest figures, a Barnet Council spokesperson admitted the local authority has "faced some challenges" with recycling in recent years.

As well as Barnet, NLWA covers the boroughs of Camden, Enfield, Hackney, Haringey, Islington and Waltham Forest, with the overall household recycling rate across these areas stagnating over the past few years.

But Barnet's recycling rate is also lower than NLWA's own average.

Last year, Labour council leader Barry Rawlings told councillors it was "important that officers consider all the options" to boost recycling rates.

But with the rate again now dropping further to 27.8%, it leaves Barnet a long way even from the borough's own record high of 37.4% achieved in 2016/17.

A council spokesperson said: "As with many councils, Barnet Council has faced some challenges in increasing household recycling rates, particularly in locations where there are shared or communal waste and recycling arrangements. The council has been working to tackle this challenge, for example through trials of the best approaches to recycling and food waste collections at flats."

"With the anticipated impact of our new food waste collection service, Barnet's recycling rate will be in line with other boroughs in the North London Waste Authority area."



A household recycling bin in Barnet

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NEWS

Jewish campaign group's protest against Jewish charity criticised

A demonstration by a Jewish campaign group in Hendon was criticised by a Barnet councillor for bringing "intimidation" to the borough's Jewish community.

On Monday, 30th March members of the International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network (IJAN) held a protest outside the building of the Jewish National Fund UK (JNF UK), a pro-Zionist charity.

In a statement released the following day, Labour councillor Sara Conway, Barnet Council's cabinet member for community safety, community cohesion and ending violence against women and girls, criticised the protest as "unacceptable".

Her comments are understood to be in regard to the concerns in the area following after four Hatzola ambulances were set on fire in a suspected arson attack in Golders Green.

Cllr Conway said: "Seeing the scenes in Hendon it is deeply concerning and unacceptable that protestors brought intimidation to the streets of Barnet at a time when the Jewish community is feeling so vulnerable following the counter terrorism arrests and the arson attack on the Hatzola ambulances.

"We have been liaising with the police and are aware that this was a spontaneous protest, with no prior warning or notification and the police arrived within ten minutes of receiving the call.



BY JOE IVES, LOCAL DEMOCRACY REPORTER

▲ International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network (IJAN) protest in Hendon on Monday 30th March
Credit: International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network/Instagram

"We will continue to work closely with the police, CST, Shomrim and community leaders to maximise community safety at this very challenging time."

It is not clear whether Cllr Conway understood that the protests were carried out by a Jewish campaign group. She did point out that, as she understands, there was an Iranian regime flag

at the demonstration.

Separately, Hendon Labour MP David Pinto-Duschinsky described the protest as "utterly appalling, completely unacceptable and clearly antisemitic".

On its website, IJAN describes itself as "an international network of Jews who are uncompromisingly committed to struggles for human survival and

emancipation, of which the liberation of the Palestinian people and land is an indispensable part".

They add: "We are committed to the right of return for Palestinian refugees and to ending Israeli colonization of historic Palestine, which is reinforced by US economic and military power."

The organisation criticises JNF for what it sees as assisting in the seizure of Palestinian land in the Occupied West Bank for Israeli settlements. These settlements have been described by the United Nations as "a flagrant violation under international law and a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-state solution and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace".

JNF UK describes itself as "Britain's oldest Israel charity" which "has supported the Zionist pioneers since the days of the Second Aliyah".

It adds: "We are working to ensure that the people of Israel who live in the underdeveloped south of the country can also share in the Jewish State's success story."

JNF UK says it is "active in every area of Israeli life", adding: "We are supporting schools and hospitals, bringing high-tech industry to remote desert towns and ensuring that gifted children do not have to settle in Israel's overcrowded centre in order to pursue their passions."

Doubts raised over effectiveness of Barnet's PSPOs

It's "impossible to tell" the effectiveness of Barnet Council's public space protection orders (PSPOs), a councillor has argued.

The concerns were raised by Conservative councillor Peter Zinkin at an overview and scrutiny meeting in late March.

Cllr Zinkin said the local authority was failing to provide the data necessary to properly understand how well its policy is working.

A borough-wide public space protection order (PSPO) was first introduced by the local authority in 2022 for a three-year fixed term. This was renewed for a further three years in December last year alongside the introduction of three additional PSPOs.

According to a council report, the first public space protection order, referred to by the council as 'PSPO1', gave the council and police "enhanced powers to respond swiftly and proportionately" to antisocial behaviours.

BY JOE IVES, LOCAL DEMOCRACY REPORTER

► Conservative leader Peter Zinkin

These include "alcohol related nuisance, harassment or aggressive conduct, dog fouling, limits on dog numbers in designated areas, urinating or defecating in public, aggressive begging, and unlicensed music events".

The three new PSPOs (PSPO2, PSPO3, PSPO4) approved last year include a gating order, loitering offences for certain wards, and borough-wide bird feeding prohibition.

Cllr Zinkin, also leader of the opposition at the local authority, cast doubt about the usefulness of a report published by the council examining the effectiveness of its scheme, noting that "almost all the offences are subject to other acts".

With this in mind he argued

that the role of the council's public protection orders in addressing anti-social behaviour is unclear.

"My observation is – having looked at the data – I'm not much wiser what the real impact of the PSPO is," he said, adding: "It's impossible to tell at the moment because we've got no data at all."

Sara Conway, the council's cabinet member for community safety, responded, saying there was already "quite detailed reporting on all of these things" available as part of quarterly publications by the inter-agency Safer Communities Partnership Board.

"I'm sure things can always be improved," she added.

Cllr Zinkin wasn't convinced. He questioned why, if data was

available, it wasn't presented to councillors tasked with scrutinising the local authority's PSPO policies and their impact.

"It would seem helpful to understand what it is we're really talking about," said Zinkin.

Following the discussion, the overview and scrutiny committee agreed to "continue to monitor the overall effectiveness" of the measures, with further data to be provided in future.

The council said the orders, which are aimed at tackling "persistent and detrimental anti-social behaviour (ASB) in the borough", are popular with residents, noting that 87% of those who responded to a public consultation on the policy supported the measures.

"I hope they're not reporting councillors for loitering – because we're doing quite a lot of it at the moment on the streets of Barnet," joked Labour member Kath McGuirk at the meeting – a reference to the upcoming local elections.



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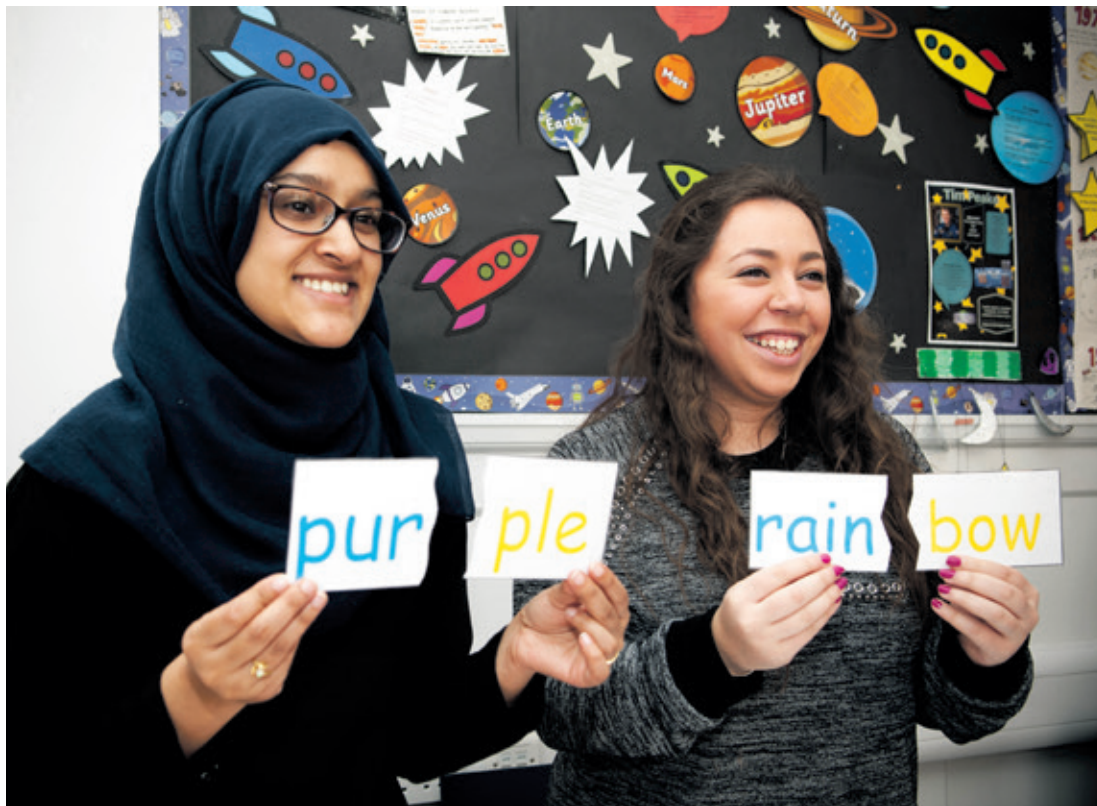
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MIDDLESEX UNIVERSITY — AT THE HEART OF BARNET, POWERING JOBS, AND BUSINESSES



A recent independent report found that Middlesex University contributes nearly £1 billion to the UK economy, with the majority of that impact in the local community.

The study, conducted by consultancy London Economics, looked at everything the University did during a typical academic year – from teaching and research to spending and partnerships – to measure its economic and social value.

Local economic impact

The findings show that most of the economic benefits stay local. Around 84% are felt in Greater London, with nearly two-thirds



concentrated across Barnet and nearby boroughs including Brent, Ealing, and Harrow.

Teaching and learning accounts for the biggest impact at £394.7 million, by helping graduates to earn more, contribute more in taxes and build successful careers. Middlesex's economic contribution provides real value for money. For every £1 it spends, it generates nearly £5 for the wider economy, well above what government standards consider "very high" value. Research also delivers strong results, with every £1 invested generating £2.41.

Powering the public sector

Middlesex is a crucial engine in training public sector workers. Each year, the University trains around 1750 nurses and midwives, 400 social workers and 275 teachers and more than 150 police officers. Apprentices who started on healthcare programmes in 2023/24 will contribute more than 400,000 hours of work to the NHS and other public services during their training.

Beyond the classroom, Middlesex's Unitemps student employment agency has helped fill 22,000 jobs over the past nine years, with

students providing local employers with around 900,000 hours of work.

Creating opportunities for all

The report also examined Middlesex's social, environmental, and cultural contributions. One standout number is that 98% of Middlesex students are from underrepresented groups that typically face barriers to higher education.

This includes people from ethnic minority backgrounds, low-income areas and those who are first in their family to go to university.

This commitment to widening participation has been internationally recognised, with the University ranked in the top 10 in universities worldwide for reducing inequalities according to UN sustainability measures.

Looking ahead to a brighter future

Middlesex Vice-Chancellor Professor Shân Wareing sums up the University's contribution: "Our positive impact on the region is significant, measurable and we are committed to increasing it. We have been an intrinsic part of our civic society for nearly 150 years.

"Our mission is to ensure that education is accessible to all those who can benefit from it. We work together to build a fairer, more sustainable, productive, and prosperous society for all."



NEWS

8

Adastral Village South residents fight back against decades of alleged mismanagement

“We are being held hostage,” declares Fiona Cameron, spokesperson for the Adastral Village South residents action group.

With a number of neighbours by her side, Fiona has been relentlessly pushing for a drastic change in how the estate is managed.

She explains: “Decades ago, landlord Notting Hill Genesis set up a resident management company (RMC) called Adastral Village South Residents Ltd. They said it was for us to have a say in how the estate was taken care of, alongside management company BLR.”

In theory, some residents are supposed to be part of the RMC. “However, some paid for their membership but never got their certificate. And when they did, they still didn’t get a say,” she highlights.

This is exactly what Kamal Shah, a freeholder on the estate, has been going through. “I am supposed to be a member of the RMC. In 21 years that I have lived on the estate, I have never been informed of a single meeting.”

Frustrated, he adds: “NHG removed themselves from the board of the RMC very early on, leaving a sole director in charge who has remained unanswerable to residents. As a member, I am asking for an EGM and a new board.”

To achieve that, residents requested the membership list from John Galliers, RMC director, who until recently was also a director at BLR, in order to establish who could get involved and organise an emergency meeting. Fiona Cameron recounts: “He simply ignored us.”

What followed were long months of pressing NHG to help them acquire the list.

“It took them 15 years, but NHG finally came through and started legal action. On the 16th of March, the court ordered the RMC and John Galliers to hand over the list,” one of the residents announces.

“But it backfired for a moment. It was said that legal fees would have to be paid by the RMC, of which residents are technically still a part.”

A Notting Hill Genesis spokesperson told *Barnet Post*: “We work closely with resident management companies (RMCs) across our portfolio and have engaged with Adastral Village South Residents Limited over two years to obtain the list of members. Reluctantly, we had no choice but to take legal action to order the information be disclosed, which has now happened.”

They continued: “We did incur legal costs in obtaining the list, and the court ordered this to be paid by the RMC and



Residents of the Colindale estate pushed landlord Notting Hill Genesis (NHG) to take legal action after claims the management company director ignored their requests for transparency and collaboration, reports Leïla Davaud

not the residents. However, we do not intend to pursue the RMC for these costs, and the RMC are not legally able to pursue residents for those costs.

“Currently, there is one sole director. That arrangement does not offer residents the opportunity to democratically make decisions about the maintenance of their estate and buildings. Using the list of more than 170 residents provided to us, we will this week write to all members about how they would like to be involved in the RMC and the future running of the Adastral Village South.”

While waiting for the list to be shared with them, residents are not standing down. Robert Williams, a leaseholder on the estate, sums up years of feeling disappointed: “We have been unrepresented by design, underserved to line pockets, and only when threatened with litigation will they so much as raise a finger. I’ve lived here for eight years, we’ve never had an AGM despite asking repeatedly, never had a query responded to, and all issues are pingponged between NHG and BLR and never addressed.”

Kamal Shah echoes the frustration: “After NHG left the RMC, our service charges increased by 30%. Ever since, we have been paying our charges while barely anything was done to the estate. We have been asking for invoices and proof of work, but before that was sent to us, we received our 2026 service charges, another 30% increase. We are also told the sink fund is empty. How was it spent? We need

answers. Now.”

In response to residents’ mismanagement claims, a BLR spokesperson said: “Following the acquisition of BLR Property Management in December 2025, a number of historical management and maintenance issues at Adastral Village came to light that were not fully apparent prior to the purchase.

“In response, the new leadership team moved quickly to take corrective action, including placing a new property manager to oversee the estate, replacing all existing cleaning and grounds maintenance contracts, and introducing a more hands-on approach with regular weekly site visits and direct engagement with residents.”

On the subject of service charges, BLR added: “The service charge budget increase reflects the reality of addressing these legacy issues. It has been carefully prepared following a detailed review of the estate, incorporating resident feedback, and balancing the need to maintain core services, deliver requested improvements, and meet all statutory health and safety requirements. A significant factor in the increase is the need to carry out urgent repairs.”

Residents, however, remain on their guard. One says: “I’m sceptical. I’ve been here 22 years and NHG have never wanted to be involved when it came to sorting out issues with BLR.”

Others say they will “give them the benefit of the doubt.” Most are now turning their attention to the original member of

the tripartite: Notting Hill Genesis.

“Why did it take decades for them to act?” asks Fiona Cameron. “Leaving the RMC and giving such power to a solo director was a mistake they need to own. They need to take responsibility for failing us.”

Another resident agrees: “I would like NHG to support residents in removing John Galliers. This needs to be continued support until he is gone, with no repercussions on residents. They need to support this financially. For years they turned a blind eye.”

Now that NHG holds the membership list, residents are being invited to a meeting to begin the process of electing new RMC directors. For Fiona Cameron, it is a moment of cautious hope: “We are finally getting somewhere. It is not an easy situation and it has been going on for so long.”

Residents are calling on NHG “to go further, like funding the process of removing Galliers from the RMC and covering any associated costs, given years of inaction.”

The Adastral Village South Action Group waits to see whether this time, after almost 20 years, the system will finally work in their favour.

John Galliers was contacted for comment but had not responded at time of going to press.

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ELECTION 2026



Unpredictable battle still likely to produce Labour or Tory win

BY DAVID FLOYD

Barnet voters go to polls this month in one of the most unpredictable local elections the borough has ever seen.

The candidates for May's election to Barnet Council were announced on Friday, 10th April with 311 hopefuls battling to win 63 seats across the borough's 24 wards.

Labour, which currently leads the council, is standing a full slate of 63 candidates, as are the Conservatives, the Greens and Reform UK.

The Liberal Democrats have 45 candidates, while there will be eight representatives of Re-join EU standing, along with five independents and one candidate from the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition.

Perhaps surprisingly, the left-wing Your Party, whose most prominent member nationally is former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, is not running any candidates in the borough.

While most recent electoral battles have been a straight fight between the Conservatives and Labour, this time both Reform UK on the right and the Greens on the left are offering a clear alternative

to their more established rivals.

Both insurgent parties are running a full slate of candidates and have high hopes of having councillors elected for the first time.

However, the most likely post-election scenario remains that either Labour's Barry Rawlings will continue to lead the council or Conservative Peter Zinkin will replace him.

Campaigning in Whetstone last month, the Conservatives expressed their optimism about returning to power at the town hall.

Shadow chief secretary to the treasury, Richard Fuller, who had joined local activists on the campaign trail said that while his party had struggled in local elections while in national government, voters were now losing faith with Labour. He said that Barnet voters "can see that they had a Conservative council here just three/four years



▶ Hendon Town Hall

ago that was doing good stuff".

He said for many voters the position had been "I liked my local councillors but I didn't like the national Conservative back then" but that "now they can say, I still like my Conservative candidate but I also like Kemi Badenoch".

While the Barnet Conservative manifesto leads on "fixing the finances" and a pledge to "reverse this damage" done by Labour since 2022, Labour say: "The Conservatives ran Barnet on the snooze button for 20 years, with no real

vision for the borough, and left a legacy of cuts, depleted reserves and run-down services."

They added: "Labour has been ambitious for Barnet, delivering a far-reaching programme."

The Greens combine a strong commitment to housing with equally strong opposition to most approaches to development currently being pursued in the borough.

Reform UK on the other hand are seemingly steering clear of more controversial national positions and focus on local measures such as tackling potholes and free parking at Barnet Hospital.

The Liberal Democrats are focusing on community campaigning and offering a moderate alternative to both the two main parties and their radical challengers.

Among the independent standing are Frank Orman, chair of Mill Hill Residents Association, who is standing in Mill Hill ward and Gina Theodorou, chair of the Quinta Village Green Residents' Association, who is standing in Underhill.

Information on how and where to vote in the election is available from: barnet.gov.uk/elections-and-voting.

Lib Dems are 'a sensible vote'



◀ Lib Dem candidate Sarah Hoyle

and communities are what drives us as a party."

She describes a vote for the Lib Dems as "a sensible vote" compared to what's on offer from the other parties, describing the centrists as "a strong party that has a record of local government".

She adds: "We have a track record across London of being community-based politicians and I stress community because it's really important. So the way we do things is much more led from the ground upwards".

Hoyle explains that the party carried out a survey last summer to understand what Barnet voters wanted. In terms of the results she says "there's a big focus on feeling safe in communities" adding: "Then there's just the small things that really irritate people, like fly-tipping and litter."

The Lib Dem candidate is dubious about Labour's track record at the town hall since it won power in 2022. She says: "It's difficult to

unpick it, to be honest, because I know that they inherited a long regime from the Conservatives, but I think everybody wanted them to do more. From the residents I speak to, they couldn't tell you what Labour has done in four years.

"Labour is now running on [the slogan] 'ambitious' for their local areas. My question would be why weren't they ambitious four years ago? What have they been doing for four years that they're only ambitious now, four years later.

"Barnet needs more. I'd hate to think that the last four years were a warm-up act. People's lives move quicker now, and people need more, and therefore we need more dynamic politics, but safe."

In a possible dig at Reform UK and the Greens, she adds: "I'm not talking about populist politics."

When it comes to tackling the borough's financial challenges, which have seen the council apply for over £130million of exceptional financial support to balance its

budget over the past two years, Hoyle is unimpressed by Labour's approach, questioning whether the administration knows what it's doing. She adds: "We go back to the fact that it's a Labour government and a Labour administration and a Labour mayor.

"Why can't they talk to each other and sort this out? I think there's a big challenge for the government to provide more money for the local authority and the mayor to help out where he can."

As the vote approaches, Hoyle is realistic that her party is unlikely to win control of the council but is hopeful they can win some seats. She says: "We've done lots and lots of canvassing. I genuinely think people are looking for an alternative.

"We're picking up votes from the Labour Party and the Conservative Party. We're picking up votes for people who may have at one point voted for Reform because they wanted a change. We're picking up some degree of people who are green-leaning but we're picking it up all the way across for lots of different reasons."

David Floyd talks to Childs Hill candidate Sarah Hoyle

Unrepresented at the town hall since 2018, times are tough for Barnet's Liberal Democrats, but they are approaching May's elections with a sense of optimism.

Sarah Hoyle, one of party's candidates in Childs Hill ward, says: "We have lots of amazing local champions who are standing for their communities because they're passionate about their communities

ELECTION 2026



Labour seeking second term amid financial challenges



Council leader Barry Rawlings speaks to Joe Ives, Local Democracy Reporter, on his hopes of Barnet Labour winning a second successive local election

▲ Barry Rawlings has led Barnet Council since May 2022

Barry Rawlings is aiming to lead Labour to a second successive local election win in the borough – but faces threats on multiple fronts.

Labour have been in charge of Barnet Council since the local election in 2022, when they won 41 of 63 seats. The result ended two decades of Conservative administrations, beginning in 2002.

Four years ago, Barnet Labour’s success came at a time of relative popularity for the party nationally – something they can’t count on this time around.

A recent YouGov poll found that only 17% of people across the country would vote Labour if there was a general election tomorrow. Ahead of the 2022 local elections that number was 38% – more than double the current figure.

Cllr Rawlings may hope his Labour administration will be judged according to its own record come Thursday, 7th May. But Barnet Labour’s success could depend on whether voters believe they can trust the party to guide the borough back from the precarious financial situation it finds itself in.

The local authority’s budget for the 2026/27 financial year saw the council using emergency measures

to manage shortfalls for the second year in a row, with £79.3m of exceptional financial support (EFS) from the government needed to balance the books, on top of the £55.7m used last year.

Speaking to the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS), Cllr Rawlings maintains that his administration is committed to looking after the local authority’s long-term financial health.

The council leader claims Barnet Labour have a solid plan to get back into the black – or at least a few shades closer to it. The council, he says, is now “living within” its budget and will continue a “relentless hunt for savings”.

Not all of this will be in his control, the Labour leader admits. “It might be that you get a bit off course and you need to deduct contingency,” he says, adding: “Hopefully interest rates will go down.”

“The cost-of-living crisis affects councils,” says Cllr Rawlings, pointing out that rising energy costs can increase spending on things like street lighting by hundreds of thousands of pounds, almost overnight.

Cllr Rawlings is also keen to counter the fierce criticism levelled at him by opposition Conservatives.

The Labour leader believes his opponents “are right in some ways: finances are really difficult” but says he “won’t fall for the despair” pushed by the Tories.

“Yes, we’ve got to ride out a bit of a storm – but at least we know the direction we’re going in,” argues Cllr Rawlings.

Unlike the Conservatives, Cllr Rawlings believes savings can be found without making extensive cuts or retendering a significant amount of the council’s non-statutory services. These are services that, although generally beneficial to residents, local authorities have no legal obligation to provide, such as children’s centres and public leisure or arts facilities.

The Labour leader argues the council needs to hold its nerve in the face of mounting financial pressure, arguing these services – and “preventative work” in particular – will save the local authority money in the long run.

It’s hard to tell the extent to which the current leader’s views are based on data – and how much comes from his own ideals.

Speaking to the LDRS, Cllr Rawlings was keen to bring specific discussions about balancing the books back to his general belief that investment in preventative services would save the council money in the long run. He also frequently spoke of plans to make greater use of artificial intelligence. But the exact amount of money the latter would save is hard to quantify.

Values play a role in policy, the Labour leader admits. “It’s not all about figures,” he says. “We’re in a people industry and about making things better for people, that also happens to save money.”

Long-term financial stability, Cllr Rawlings says, would not be possible “without doing the groundwork, without using technology in the right way, without trying to prevent people going into care, prevent people being homeless, prevent people needing residential care”.

“That is where you make the real savings,” says Cllr Rawlings, adding: “Even if it didn’t save us money we

should be doing that because it’s the right thing to do.”

The Labour leader claims the Tories don’t have realistic plans for how to balance the books. But Cllr Rawlings’ own council tax policies have come under scrutiny recently. While setting the budget for the current financial year he said he was proud his administration had stuck to its manifesto promise of never raising council tax by the maximum amount. Nevertheless, this year saw the local authority raise tax by 4.98% – just 0.01% shy of the limit.

As a result, the overall Band D resident in Barnet will be paying nearly £77 more in council tax than they did last year. The 0.01% of grace will keep just an extra 15p in their pockets. Cllr Rawlings argues that the marginal figure means his party kept its promise which, he says, “is important”.

While Labour and the Conservatives remain at loggerheads in terms of finances, both parties have expressed a desire to work together to support the safety and wellbeing of Barnet’s Jewish community.

In late March, four Hatzola ambulances were set on fire in Golders Green. The arson attack has contributed to growing concerns about antisemitism in the borough.

Cllr Rawlings says the incident has “greatly affected the feeling of safety amongst large parts of the Jewish community”.

“Community cohesion is one of the most important roles councils have,” he adds.

It’s something Cllr Rawlings hopes will be prioritised regardless of which party is in power following the election.

Summarising the rewards of his role, the council leader says: “Local government is where a lot of the excitement in politics is, because you can make a big difference.”

“I think we can make life a little better for people – and we’re asking for that chance.”

Wrapping up, the LDRS asked Cllr Rawlings to share his views on another key issue – music taste.

“I don’t listen to music that much,” the Labour leader admits. But if he had to choose a favourite artist it would be Bob Marley, who he saw live in Brighton in 1980. Cllr Rawlings is also a fan of Stevie Wonder, who he’s also seen live.

“It shows my age,” Cllr Rawlings joked. “I’ve picked people from 40 years ago!”

“We’ve got to ride out a bit of a storm – but at least we know the direction we’re going in”

ELECTION 2026



Tories pledge to lobby government for London funding

Barnet Conservative leader Peter Zinkin talks to Joe Ives, Local Democracy Reporter

Barnet Conservatives are not particularly used to being out of power – and won't want to grow any more familiar with the feeling after the election on Thursday, 7th May.

Before the last election Barnet Council had only ever had one Labour leader, Alan Williams, who steered a Labour and Liberal Democrat coalition between 1994 and 2002. During this eight-year stint the Conservatives still had the most seats of any party, but not enough to form a majority.

Dan Thomas, who led council between 2019 and 2022, oversaw a disastrous campaign for the local Tories four years ago. His party lost 16 seats, which cleared the way for the first Labour majority administration in the council's history.

Thomas stood down late last year shortly before switching allegiances to lead right-wing rivals Reform UK in Wales. His replacement in Barnet is long-serving councillor Peter Zinkin, who was elected as opposition leader in 2024.

The Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) recently sat down with Cllr Zinkin to discuss the upcoming local election. Asked about the potential threat posed by Reform UK, Cllr Zinkin argued that Tory success in Barnet Council by-elections last year demonstrated that the Conservatives are much more popular locally.

Regarding the Conservatives' own campaign, Cllr Zinkin says there is "an overarching theme". This, he says, is the need to face the spiralling financial difficulties at the local authority. The current Labour administration, he argues, is guilty of avoiding transparent debate about the council's growing deficit because it presents a reality "too painful" for many to accept.

Cllr Zinkin believes this is "utterly, utterly financially irresponsible" and risks the local authority failing to reach its legal obligation to balance its budget. He and Labour leader Barry Rawlings have very different views about how to fix this problem.

Cllr Rawlings argues things are on track now and will be better in the long run. Cllr Zinkin, meanwhile, is highly concerned about the overall long-term impact of borrowing a total of £135million

in 'exceptional financial support' (EFS) from the government over back-to-back financial years.

"What this administration has done is publish a financial suicide note to the residents of Barnet," Cllr Zinkin warns. The £135m in EFS borrowing must be paid back to the government over time and with interest. Labour, he says, are "self-deluded" about the long-term impacts of their decision.

Labour argue that austerity measures, carried out by coalition and Conservative governments, have put immense strain on local authorities across the country and left some councils with their core spending power cut in half. The LDRS asked Cllr Zinkin if Barnet Council's financial issues can, in part, be attributed to this. His answer: "No, absolutely not."

Local government, Cllr Zinkin says, "was massively inefficient", adding: "What austerity did was drag local authorities into the 21st Century."

“*The administration has published a financial suicide note to the residents of Barnet*”

This was through "huge strides in productivity" which came, he believes, "as a result of the pressures that were put on them".

Cllr Zinkin continues: "What we are seeing today is an entirely legislatively driven set of obligations which have been put on

local authorities to spend money by law on behalf of their residents, which central government says we have to do."

For the Conservative leader, the problem lies in the fact the government is placing legal obligations on councils without proper thought on what is needed to fulfill them.

Councils are mainly funded through two major avenues; council tax and funding from Westminster. The government's financial settlement for local councils is, as Cllr Zinkin describes it, "based on an insanely complex formula"

with considerations of factors such as deprivation and population demographics.

He argues that the government has essentially benchmarked the council tax incomes of London boroughs against local authorities outside the capital. Right now, £510.51 of a Band D resident's annual council tax in any London borough effectively bypasses their local authority and goes straight to the Mayor of London. This money is then used for spending on services such as London Fire Brigade, Transport for London (TfL) and policing.

This fact is being overlooked by the government, Cllr Zinkin argues. For him, it means London councils do not get the amount of funding from the local government settlement that they actually need.

The Conservative leader certainly doesn't hide from explaining what he believes the problems facing the council are. But the LDRS asked him about the other side of his campaign: what he plans to do about it, if elected.

"It's not a question of what we plan on doing," Cllr Zinkin responds. "It's a question of what the government are telling councils to do."

If elected, Cllr Zinkin argues that the Conservatives would attempt to tackle what he regards as issues stemming from financial mismanagement by the current Labour administration. In addition he says he would work with other London councils to lobby the government "to seek proper, logical joined-up thinking" and to "point the finger

at the policy makers" who, he believes, are taking funding from the capital without reducing the obligations London's councils have to provide by law.

Of course, elections aren't about one issue and councilors are more than just their jobs. Like many others in Barnet, Cllr Zinkin has had more immediate concerns than budgets lately. In March four Hatzola ambulances, vehicles used by Jewish medical volunteers, were destroyed in an arson attack in Golders Green, which is Cllr Zinkin's ward.

The Conservative leader described visiting a group of friends during Passover not long after the incident: "Most of the discussion," he says, "was around the Holocaust and their parents' experience of Kristallnacht".

He adds: "I think that the burning of the ambulances has triggered memories which have disturbed people – and to be honest with you I came away from a really nice evening event really thoughtful about what on earth is going on."

With this and an election campaign ahead it would be understandable if the Tory leader needed some escapism. Many find this in music – not Cllr Zinkin: "I'm not tone deaf but music doesn't do anything for me and it never has," he says. Books, on the other hand, are a different matter.

"I read science fiction and fantasy because I find that is a way of dealing with some of the pressures of the world," Cllr Zinkin says.



► Barnet Conservative leader Peter Zinkin

ELECTION 2026



Greens want to do things differently

BY DAVID FLOYD

The Green Party is riding high in national polls but, while former Labour councillor Linda Lusingu became its first representative at the town hall in February, it has never had a councillor elected in Barnet.

Charli Thompson is one of the party's candidates in Woodhouse ward, understood locally to be the party's prime target. Discussing the change the party hopes to bring to the borough she says: "We want to make decision making in the council much more open and give a lot more power to residents to have a say in what happens in Barnet."

"We just feel that the other parties are not willing to shake things up and actually really change things. They're quite happy to manage the status quo and tinker around the edges but we really want to do things differently."

Many will find the radical talk appealing but is it really possible when the council is so cash strapped? Thompson thinks so. Particularly in one of her key focus areas. She says: "In adult social care, I can certainly say that a lot can be improved within existing budgets."

An improved approach to care, she explains, "will be about shaping provision around people's needs and having flexibility in that".

"At the moment, it just doesn't work. And actually,

▶ Green Party leader Zack Polanski with Barnet Green candidates
Credit Anna Mahtani



it's leading to further crises and it's costing more money."

Barnet Greens have a strong track record of both highlighting gaps in housing provision and opposing new developments, with Thompson herself a major figure in campaigning against the Great North Leisure Park development.

Is there a route to getting the kind of housing that the Greens feel local residents want? Thompson says: "There's a housing crisis for affordable homes, particularly social and council homes."

The problem with current plans is: "They're saying, this is what we're going to give you. And we know that these types of developments end up, a lot of them not sold, sitting empty, bought by investors from other countries. They're not housing people, local people."

"We know that there's a need to build, but not at the scale and the type being built at the moment."

In recent weeks, the Greens have faced controversy and criticism (including from the Jewish Greens

group) after a motion was put to the party's conference declaring Zionism to be racism.

Thompson condemns antisemitic attacks in the borough: "We stand in solidarity with the Jewish community. There's been some horrendous attacks recently on the Jewish community in Barnet and it's really scary."

However, she is uncomfortable when addressing the issue of the controversial motion: "We have a broad Jewish constituency within our membership. We have Zionist Jews in our membership and we have anti-Zionist Jews in our membership."

"The motion that you're talking about wasn't debated at the last conference. And it will be debated at some point. And our party is a democratic party."

As polling day approaches, does Thompson think the Greens will end up leading the council?

"I mean, I'd love to say yes."

"But I think realistically, we would love to see a good number of Green councillors elected. We would love to be able to hold whoever leads the council to account from within the chamber."

Reform targets potholes and parking



BY DAVID FLOYD

It's a sign of how much politics has changed in the past four years that Reform UK didn't even run in Barnet at the previous local election in 2022.

Now the Nigel Farage-led populist party is running a full slate of 63 candidates and is confident of making a breakthrough in the borough.

While often associated with strongly right-wing stances at a national level, Reform's local approach seems more focused on nuts and bolts issues.

Barnet chair Mark Shooter, a councillor who

▲ Mark Shooter (right) with Reform's London Assembly member Alex Wilson

defected from the Conservatives in early-2025, explains: "We've looked at some of the core issues, such as fly-tipping and lack of hospital parking."

He adds: "Barnet's now in a state with so many problems with roads and pavements and cleaning, and we just want to try and pump money into those services."

They even know which machine they will use to fill in the potholes: "We've got very specific solutions based on some experience in other Reform councils with new technology, the JCB Pothole Pro, which will significantly reduce the cost of fixing the potholes, as well as fixing many, many more in the same amount of time."

On finance, Reform joins most of the other parties in pledging to ask the government to give Barnet Council more money. However, for Cllr Shooter, the idea of "fair funding" is based on the idea that the council's current settlement doesn't reflect the extent of development in

the area. He says: "We built so many units and the old parties haven't anticipated the extra funding for social care and infrastructure around all of these new developments."

Beyond that, though, he believes Reform has what it takes to make the council's approach to spending significantly more efficient: "We need to review all contracts. There have been all these structures set up, which basically hide the transparency that's needed for the public who are actually paying for these services."

"We need to take control of the procurement. And then we need to deliver real solutions based on some of our candidates who are business leaders with experience, who know exactly where and how to cut the costs."

Cllr Shooter goes on to mention AI and new technology. So, while it's described slightly differently, is Reform's approach to the council's woes really so different to the measures the other parties are proposing?

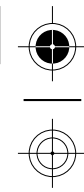
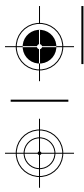
"I don't believe that they really have much intention of cutting the deficit. They're the ones that actually were the cause of this deficit. The Conservatives set up all these corporate structures, which I believe need to be dismantled. So really, I don't think Barnet residents have much faith in them being able to deliver on cutting."

On housing, Reform offers a variation on the yes-to-housing, no-to-that-housing theme.

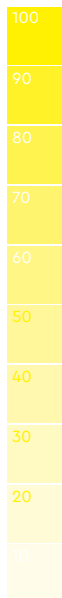
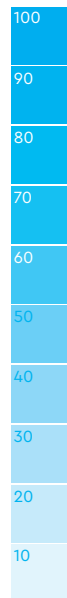
"We want to see regeneration, certainly. There's areas of Barnet that certainly need it. But we want to also keep the character of Barnet. We want to ensure that all our green spaces are protected."

"We don't want to see these sprawling developments taking place, taking away all the parking spaces next to stations and ruining the skyline of places like High Barnet."

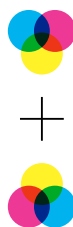
What does Cllr Shooter expect will happen at the election? "I would expect us to form a group; the bare minimum. We've got 63 excellent candidates. I hope they all get elected," but, he admits: "That's not realistic."



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Barnet Post issue #38 June

Print date: 28th May

Publication date: 29th May

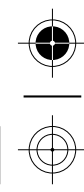
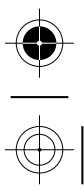
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Councils urged to commit to ‘basic standards’ of temporary housing

BY KUMAIL JAFFER, LOCAL DEMOCRACY REPORTER

London’s boroughs have been asked to commit to basic living standards in temporary accommodation as new analysis reveals the crisis is getting worse in almost every part of the capital.

Data published as part of Trust for London’s ‘poverty profile’ research show that 24 of London’s 32 boroughs – equivalent to three-quarters – have seen an increase in the number of households in temporary accommodation year-on-year.

Overall, 76,000 households are now in temporary accommodation across London, an increase of 10% on the previous year. Two-thirds of these households include children.

A new campaign has now called on every council in the capital to commit to ensuring all households in temporary accommodation have access to the ‘five basics’ – kitchen facilities, laundry facilities, storage space, Wi-Fi internet and clear information about their situation.

Albinia Stanley, co-ordinator of the ‘Fix the Five Basics’ campaign, told the Local Democracy Reporting Service: “Families in temporary accommodation are living without the basics the rest of us take for granted. Cooking facilities, laundry, Wi-Fi, storage, clear information: these are not big asks.

“Some London councils have already started delivering them. We’re calling on every candidate standing in May’s elections to pledge to fix the five basics in their borough. This is a chance to make a real difference.”

Faith is a mother of two who has lived in temporary accommodation since 2022. Her name has been changed to protect her identity. She said: “Many people like me are raising their children without these basics for months or even years.

“Without these basics it’s hard to survive, let alone rebuild your life and get back on your feet. But it doesn’t have to be this way.”

Campaigners say that being deprived of any of the five basics can have a major impact on families, whether it be difficulty preparing meals, children being unable to complete homework without Wi-Fi, households falling into debt to store their belongings, or simply the anguish and confusions caused by a lack of clear information about their rights or when they will be moved on.

In Newham, the equivalent of 6% of all households are now in temporary accommodation – the highest rate in the



▲ Supporters of the ‘Fix the Five Basics’ campaign

country and more than ten times the average for England.

Westminster (3.4%), Lambeth (3.2%), Southwark (3%) and Hackney (2.8%) also have rates far above the national figure. The London average is around two per cent.

Barnet is close to the middle of the list, with the 16th highest rate among London boroughs (plus the City of London).

Samuel Thomas, senior policy adviser at anti-poverty charity Z2K, said: “Tackling London’s temporary accommodation crisis has never been more urgent, with our advisers supporting increasing numbers of families trapped without access to the essentials we all need to get by.

“Z2K’s research suggests that when people are denied the Five Basics, their health worsens, their costs soar, and their chances of moving on from homelessness decline.

“That’s why we’re calling on all London local election candidates to match the commitments made in boroughs like Westminster and commit to fixing the Five Basics, so that stays in temporary accommodation are as safe, stable and short as possible.”

Wandsworth, Westminster,

Greenwich and Lewisham have all committed to work towards implementing the five basics in their boroughs, while discussions are ongoing with candidates from major parties in more than ten boroughs across London, according to the campaign.

Questioned about the state of some temporary accommodation centres in 2023, Mayor of London Sir Sadiq Khan told assembly members: “I recognise that councils are finding it increasingly difficult to secure temporary accommodation, but it must be of decent condition.”

More generally, Khan has said the “creation of more genuinely affordable homes is the long-term solution to the worsening crisis in temporary accommodation”.

However, the existence of an unfair housing rule currently allows local authorities to deem someone ‘intentionally homeless’ if they refuse an offer of housing and they deem that an ‘unreasonable refusal’.

Reports suggest that Londoners are routinely being moved to temporary accommodation in Birmingham, Manchester, Newcastle and Middlesbrough, sometimes

for years at a time. Enfield Council is frequently moving families to Hartlepool and Durham.

There have been multiple cases of residents being told they have to accept a long distance offer – whether temporary or permanent – or the council will discharge its legal duty to house them, meaning they are homeless and on their own.

A spokesperson for Khan told the LDRS: “London, alongside the rest of the country, is working to tackle increasing numbers of households needing temporary accommodation.

“Ensuring better quality and more cost-effective temporary accommodation is a key element of the work City Hall is doing with local councils and partners through the Ending Homelessness Accelerator Programme to build a safer, fairer London for everyone.”

A Westminster City Council spokesperson said: “This is a national challenge, but its impact is particularly severe in areas like Westminster where there is so much demand for homes. We have 4,500 households in temporary accommodation and the reality of the housing crisis in central London means we will need to continue providing housing for those in need.”

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Taking action on mental health

So, spring has finally arrived – giving us brighter, warmer days and renewed debates about when we can start having barbecues. But beyond the sunshine and optimism, this change of season also invites us to pause and reflect on something we often overlook: our mental health.

This month, we celebrate Mental Health Awareness Week (11th–17th May) by having conversations about mental wellbeing to help reduce the stigma that can prevent people from seeking help. This year's theme is about taking action – whether big or small – to ensure that those who need support, including ourselves, can access it at the right time.

At Meridian Wellbeing, we have been supporting the mental health of local people for over 30 years. We have seen firsthand the value of community-based support in helping people with their mental health and we know that local knowledge and trust is vital for effective support. Our experience is also reflected by wider research. For example, the National Institute for Health and Care Research in 2024 found that community-based mental health services helped reduce stigma, focused on a person-centred approach and supported accessibility.

Research has also found that mental health support works best when it's not limited to a single intervention, but rather is part of a holistic, person-

John Truong of local charity Meridian Wellbeing on Mental Health Awareness Week

▲ Credit Thomas Wolf via Wikimedia

centred approach through interventions like talking therapy, peer support and exercise. That's why Meridian Wellbeing offers a range of services designed to support people in different ways, because we recognise that everyone's mental health needs and journey are different.

We believe that supporting mental health isn't just about excellent clinical care alone, it's also about empowering people to take an active role in their own wellbeing. This includes addressing the challenges which have affected them, such as social isolation, trauma, stress, or a long-term health condition. These challenges are part of their journey and must be addressed to improve their wellbeing.

A key part of our work is ensuring that our services are accessible, inclusive and shaped by

those with lived experience. Our Wellbeing cafés in New Barnet and Hendon are a great example of this approach because they are organised and run by peers with lived experience to support others just like them. The Cafés are open and welcoming spaces for everyone to drop in – whether it's for a cup of tea or coffee, to try a new activity, or simply to spend time with others.

Partnership work is another key part of our approach. We work closely with local organisations including Change Grow Live, Barnet Council and Fit and Active Barnet to provide joined-up, wraparound support for local residents. As the provider of the Barnet Wellbeing Hub, Meridian Wellbeing also continues its long-standing commitment to offering reliable, locally rooted support to individuals and

families across the borough.

Listening to people with lived experience has also helped us understand the importance of meeting people where they are, with compassion and without judgement. In response, we are increasingly working with local businesses to provide tailored mental health and wellbeing support in workplaces, helping employers create environments where staff feel supported, valued and able to thrive.

Mental Health Awareness Week reminds us that mental wellbeing is everyone's business. Every action, no matter how small, can make a difference and by working together as a community, we can help ensure that support is available, accessible and meaningful for all.

We will be hosting an event on Thursday 14th May to celebrate Mental Health Awareness Week at the Meritage Centre in Hendon. This is a fantastic opportunity to learn about supporting your mental health and what activities and services are available locally – everyone is welcome! We'll be sharing more details soon, but if you'd like to find out more, please contact us using the email below.

John Truong is head of operations at Meridian Wellbeing.

If you would like to find out more about our services, events or if you are interested in developing a wellbeing package for your organisation, please contact us at info@meridianwellbeing.com

“Mental wellbeing is everyone's business and every action can make a difference”

FEATURES

16

Review: 'Respectable People' by Bridget Gardiner

Both historical novels based on true stories and 'true crime' are genres with significant followings but Bridget Gardiner's debut successfully takes both of these in an unusual direction.

While *Respectable People* does ultimately centre on an incident that may or may not have been a crime, its focus is more on the workings of the criminal justice system in the late-1920s and its interaction with the attitudes and values of wider society.

This may not immediately seem like as a compelling premise for a novel but its testament to Gardiner's mix of narrative skill and plotting abilities that reader's initial scepticism is likely to be overcome.

Respectable People is the story of a 22-year-old New Southgate factory worker, Irene Savidge, who is arrested for sexual misconduct in Hyde Park with a middle-aged former MP, Sir Leo Money.

It covers the trial and the subsequent inquiry into how the Metropolitan Police dealt with the incident. This series of events had profound implications for government ministers, including the then Home Secretary Sir William

BY DAVID FLOYD

Joynton-Hicks and senior figures within the police and prosecuting authorities. Over the course of the novel, Gardiner uses the incident as a prism through to view changing attitudes towards women both within the police force and the nation as a whole.

The novel's key success is in covering the story convincingly and engagingly from a range of different angles. These include the perspectives of Irene and her family at home in North London: her protective parents and bewildered but ultimately supportive fiancé; the police officers involved in both the initial case and the follow-up inquiry; and the politicians and

top administrators trying to navigate their way through the implications of the case.

Most of the key characters are portrayed in enough detail to be at least partly sympathetic. Irene is clearly badly treated but is not solely a victim of the situation. She also, despite her limited power and relative lack of status, initially attempts to find ways to use her experiences to her advantage to pursue a career in showbusiness.

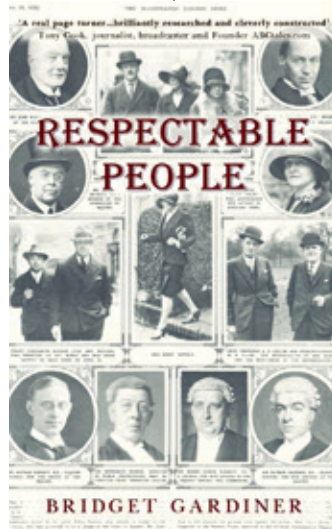
Police officers are guilty of both misguided attitudes and major errors but make at least some of their mistakes based on good intentions. Politicians and senior leaders, while driven (sometimes in the wrong

direction) by ambition and sense of legacy also ultimately want to find ways to make things better within the constraints they operate under. In all cases, Gardiner makes the reader care enough about the characters to read on and find out how their part of the story ends.

The character whose motivations remain the least explained is Money. He appears only when interacting with other characters and never to tell his side of the story. It's not clear whether this is primarily because he's an obvious baddie and readers don't need to know much more about him, or because there isn't enough additional information to draw on.

Ultimately, though, *Respectable People* effectively shines a light on how much has changed for women, politicians and the police since the 1920s, while also reflecting multiple themes and arguments that recur today in slightly different ways.

It's hugely successful in taking an interesting but relatively minor historical incident and turning it into a novel that is fast-paced and enjoyable but also significantly thought provoking.



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HOLLYWOOD**
Thu 14 May

**TALES FROM
ACORN WOOD**
Fri 22 - Tue 26 May

**THERE'S A MONSTER
IN YOUR SHOW**
Wed 27 - Sat 30 May

**STILL POINTLESS:
BALLETBOYZ AT 25**
Thu 4 & Fri 5 Jun

**PAULINE EYRE:
ANYONE FOR TENNIS?**
Sat 13 Jun



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FEATURES

French pupils cross the Channel to meet their North Finchley pen pals

Fifty-one children from a school south of Paris travelled to Northside Primary School and shared their experience with Leïla Davaud

After months of letter-writing, dictionary checks, and bilingual introductions, the coach from Georges Dortet Primary School in Fontenay-aux-Roses finally pulled up outside Northside Primary in North Finchley.

The pupils' trip to the UK last month included an overnight journey via the Channel Tunnel, with stops in Oxford and at the Warner Bros Studio Tour along the way. But the visit to Northside was the highlight: a full school day spent alongside the year five and six pupils they had been corresponding with since autumn.

For nine-year-old Zoe, a Year Five pupil at Northside, the experience was both exciting

and challenging. "Writing the letters was hard but thankfully, the teachers helped," she said. "I was so excited to meet Charline, my pen pal. I've been to France on holiday and I really want to go back, though French is very difficult!"

Her classmate Olivia, ten, agreed: "I would definitely do it again. It was fun. I want to see their school in France someday."

The day began with a whole-school assembly that quickly turned into a celebration of music. Northside's choir performed *Stargazing*, while students from Durham University impressed with a lively samba percussion piece. The assembly concluded with pupils from both countries standing side by side to sing John Lennon's *Imagine*.

"That really was a pull at the heartstrings," said Lara Goldhill, who organised the visit at Northside alongside Mickael Delande, director of Georges Dortet. The two have kept in touch since Delande visited England a decade ago as a teacher. "This reunion has been a long time coming," said Lara. "Hopefully



French children visit Northside Primary School Credit Leïla Davaud

it won't be another ten years before we do it again," Mickael added.

Throughout the day, the French visitors joined lessons, built Eiffel Tower models from spaghetti, made friendship bracelets, and played board games and Lego together. At lunchtime, they were treated to what the school cheerfully described as "a very British lunch": fish and chips.

For many of the French pupils, it was their first experience of an English school. Wyatt, eleven, who has read all seven Harry Potter

books in French, said he was "happy to finally see an English school. It is way better than I imagined but not as good as Hogwarts". One thing annoyed him though: "We experienced weather from all four seasons in half a day, it's weird!"

His classmate Sophie, ten, was intrigued by the rules: "Schools are different here, they wear uniforms and the year groups don't mix during the day. I don't like the uniforms, I prefer my clothes," she added with a laugh, "but I like the school."

For many of the children, it was their first time meeting someone their own age from another country.

By the time the coach departed that afternoon, gifts had been exchanged, photographs taken, and new friendships formed. A bon voyage, indeed!

LOCAL NOTICES

Published 24th April 2026

Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015

NOTICE UNDER ARTICLE 10 OF APPLICATION FOR PLANNING PERMISSION

Proposed development at: Meadow Works Great North Road Barnet EN5 1AU

Take notice that an application is being made by: CSS NB Asset Limited

To the London Borough of Barnet for planning permission for: Non-Material amendment to Planning Permission 25/1262/ FUL "Demolition of all buildings on site and erection of a building comprising predominantly B8 (Self Storage) and additional Class E (co-working) and Class E (cafe/restaurant) uses, with associated parking, landscaping and all other associated and ancillary works.

Any owner* of the land or tenant** who wishes to make representations about this application should write to the London Borough of Barnet at the address within 21 days of this notice:

London Borough of Barnet
Planning and Building Control
2 Bristol Avenue
Colindale
London
NW9 4EW

owner means a person having a freehold interest or a leasehold interest the unexpired term of which is not less than seven years.

tenant means a tenant of an agricultural holding any part of which is comprised in the land.

Signatory: DP9 Ltd on behalf of CSS NB Asset Limited

Date: 22.04.2026

Statement of owners' rights

The grant of planning permission does not affect owners' rights to retain or dispose of their property, unless there is some provision to the contrary in an agreement or lease.

Statement of agricultural tenants' rights
The grant of planning permission for non-agricultural development may affect agricultural tenants' security of tenure.

LONDON BOROUGH OF BARNET Section 26(1)(bb) of the Marriage Act 1949 The Marriages (Approved Premises) Regulations 1995 Section 6 (3a)(a) of the Civil Partnership Act 2004

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT Avenue House Services Ltd has applied to the London Borough of Barnet for approval of Avenue House at Stephens House and Gardens as a venue for the solemnization of civil marriages and registration of civil partnerships.

The application and accompanying plan may be inspected at Barnet Register Office, Hendon Town Hall, The Burroughs, NW4 4BG during normal office hours.

Any person may give notice in writing of an objection to the grant of approval, with the reasons for the objection, within 21 days from the date of publication of this public notice. Such notice should be addressed to the Superintendent Registrar at the Register Office, address above.

Copies of all objection letters will be sent to the applicant.

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Licensing Act 2003

Notice Of Application For Variation Of A Premises Licence

NOTICE IS HEREBY given that **Charles Menegatos** has applied to the Licensing Authority of London Borough of Barnet for a Variation of a Premises Licence to permit:

- The extension of our opening hours for the provision of late-night refreshment (takeaway food - delivery only) until 12:00am every day from Mondays through to Sunday. No alcohol will be sold or supplied beyond 10:00pm
- For the premises: **Going Greek situated at 152 High Road, East Finchley London N2 9ED**

A register of licensing applications can be inspected at 8th Floor, 2 Bristol Avenue, Colindale, London, NW9 4EW. Appointments to inspect the register can be made by telephoning 020 8359 7443 during office hours.

Any person wishing to submit relevant representations concerning this application must give notice in writing to the London Borough of Barnet, Licensing Team at the address above, giving in detail the grounds of the representation no later than: **19/05/2026**

The Council will not entertain representations where the writer requests that his identity remains anonymous. Copies of all representations will be included in the papers presented to the Licensing Authorities Sub Committee and will therefore pass into the public domain.

Representations must relate to one or more of the four Licensing Objectives: the prevention of crime and disorder, public safety, the prevention of public nuisance and the protection of children from harm.

It is an offence liable on conviction to a fine up to £5000 under section 158 of the Licensing Act 2003 knowingly or recklessly to make a false statement in connection with an application.

Dated: 22th day of April 2026

Licensing Act 2003

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NOTICE IS HEREBY given that **Charles Menegatos** has applied to the Licensing Authority of London Borough of Barnet for a Variation of a Premises Licence to permit:

- The extension of our opening hours for the provision of late-night refreshment (takeaway food - delivery only) until 12:00am on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Sundays. No alcohol will be sold or supplied beyond 10:00pm
- For the premises: **Going Greek situated at 1 Colin Parade, The Hyde, Colindale London NW9 6SG**

A register of licensing applications can be inspected at 8th Floor, 2 Bristol Avenue, Colindale, London, NW9 4EW. Appointments to inspect the register can be made by telephoning 020 8359 7443 during office hours.

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Dated: 22th day of April 2026

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Next newsletter publication dates: Weekly, every Monday (except Bank Holidays)

COMMENT

18



Are we looking a gift horse in the mouth?

Bob Bevil of Chipping Barnet Foodbank on the new Crisis and Resilience Fund

Both officially and anecdotally the experience of poverty in Barnet has burgeoned in recent years.

Government Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2025 (IMD25) data show that Barnet has seen the greatest relative negative change in overall deprivation out of all the London boroughs since IMD19, the previous analysis. Worryingly, Barnet ranks second in terms of the greatest negative relative change in deprivation across all English local authorities.

The footfall in the borough's foodbanks is increasing. According to the most recent Citizens Advice Barnet report, compiled for Chipping Barnet Foodbank, half of the residents seen in quarter four of 2025 had problems associated with benefits, housing, or debt, leading to a need for food.

Until now, struggling households have been able to apply for help to the Household Support Fund (HSF). In October 2021, the HSF was introduced by central government to support low-

income families in the aftermath of the pandemic and local authorities were given discretion in its allocation.

While welcome, the effectiveness of the HSF in Barnet, and elsewhere, has been questioned, not least because it was renewed on short, unpredictable cycles, leaving no possibility of strategically planning for community resilience. It is difficult to assess a fund which is temporary and tactically concerned with a revolving door of crisis management.

However, as of 1st April, the new Crisis & Resilience Fund (CRF) is replacing the HSF. This fund has a line of sight spanning three years and is the first multi-year settlement for locally delivered support.

This means that Barnet now has a gilt-edged opportunity to take a strategic approach to building individual and community financial resilience; to quote directly from central government guidance, the CRF allows the building of "co-ordinated systems of support with strong connections between local authority services and community support organisations".

The CRF has three support strands including immediate crisis payments for sudden financial emergencies, housing-related support where there is a sudden shortfall in rent for example, and long-term resilience services including funding for agencies providing frontline assistance.

There is a very real fear in the community that the strategic opportunity proffered by the CRF to support residents will, in reality, become a rehash of the HSF. After all, it is easier to maintain a status quo than to actively seek innovation.

So here is a clear message for those standing for election on 7th May.

A local authority facing an eye-watering decline in its fortunes is now at a fork in the road. One road relives the rocky journey that brought us here. The other road leads to resilience, change, and the outcomes that our residents deserve from their leaders.

Bob Bevil is advocacy and campaign lead at Chipping Barnet Foodbank

Get involved with food growing!

Barnet Community Food Growing Network on opportunities around the borough

Would you like to spend more time outdoors and in your local community? Enjoy the brighter days of spring and come along to a community food growing project in Barnet and get involved!

From orchards to community gardens, there are plenty of places to get involved across the borough—whether you're an experienced gardener or just curious to give it a try.

Thinking of starting a community food garden in Barnet this year?

Explore the interactive map of food-growing opportunities and find a garden near you.

If you already run a community food garden that's not on the map, or are thinking of establishing a new food garden, email growbarnet@gmail.com for advice and support.

The interactive map can be found at: <https://shorturl.at/DrwVK>

Local students meet Cypriot Eurovision star Antigoni

Anthony Solomou, chairman of Finchley Greek School, on the singer's visit



Students from Finchley Greek School enjoyed a special treat last month when they took a break from their regular classes to meet Antigoni, the singer representing Cyprus in this year's Eurovision Song Contest in Austria.

Born and raised locally, Antigoni attended Greek School herself and shared with the students how her time at Greek School nurtured her connection to her Cypriot heritage and helped shape her passion for music, particularly in learning to sing traditional Greek songs.

The children, aged six to 16, had the exciting opportunity to join Antigoni in performing her Eurovision entry, *Jalla*, creating a memorable experience that celebrated both music and cultural roots.

It was an honour to host the locally born and raised British Cypriot singer. Antigoni's visit inspired the children and showed them what can be achieved with passion and dedication.

For further information about Finchley Greek School visit: finchleygreeschool.com.

SPORT

19



Cockfosters players celebrate
FA Vase semi-final win
Credit @els_photo_graphy

Cockfosters heading to Wembley after stunning FA Vase semi-final win

Two-legged victory over Punjab FC puts Chalk Lane side in dreamland, writes Tommy Rose

Cockfosters FC will play at Wembley Stadium for the first time in their history after completing a memorable FA Vase semi-final victory over Punjab United.

Gavin Kelsey's side secured their place in the final with a composed and disciplined performance across two legs, overcoming difficult conditions and a strong opponent to win 3–1 on aggregate. The reward is a trip to Wembley on Sunday, 17th May — a landmark moment for the club and everyone connected to it.

The two-legged tie began at

Chalk Lane on Saturday, 28th March, where blustery conditions made free-flowing football difficult for both sides.

Punjab United took a first-half lead, but Cockfosters responded with determination and patience. Their persistence was rewarded late on when Jandir Da Cruz rose to head home an equaliser, ensuring the first leg ended 1–1 and leaving the tie finely balanced heading into the return.

The second leg on Saturday, 4th April followed a similar pattern, with swirling winds again playing a major role. Cockfosters, however, showed their growing maturity and control in key moments. George Lutaaya gave them the advantage with a superb, volleyed goal, settling any early nerves and shifting the pressure onto the hosts.

As Punjab pushed forward in search of a way back into

the tie, Cockfosters remained organised and resolute. The decisive moment arrived in the 86th minute when Da Cruz struck again, sealing a 2–0 victory on the day and confirming a 3–1 aggregate success.

At the final whistle, players, staff and supporters celebrated an achievement that will go down as the greatest in the club's history.

Reaching Wembley represents an extraordinary milestone for Cockfosters — a club built on the dedication of its players, management, volunteers and supporters. Manager Gavin Kelsey and his coaching team have guided the squad through a remarkable campaign, while contributions from across the group have underpinned a run defined by resilience, discipline and belief.

Off the pitch, the achievement is shared just as strongly.

Chairman Vas Chiotis and the volunteers who sustain the club week in, week out have played an essential role in making days like this possible. For many involved, the journey to this point has been years in the making.

Attention now turns to Wembley on Sunday, 17th May, where Cockfosters will have the opportunity to complete a truly historic season when they face AFC Stoneham in the final. The club is calling on the local community to get behind the team and be part of what promises to be an unforgettable occasion.

From late winners and penalty shootouts to composed performances in high-pressure ties, this FA Vase run has already delivered moments that will be remembered for years to come. Now, one final step remains — on the biggest stage of all.

New Barnet sports manager to run London Marathon for St John's Ambulance

Lara Bone is running the London Marathon on 26th April, hoping to raise £2,000 for first aid charity St John's Ambulance — she shares her motivations with Leila Davaud

For Lara Bone, running 26.2 miles is about far more than crossing a finish line. The 22-year-old community sports manager at Better Barnet leisure centres will take on her first London Marathon (after the *Post* goes to print) in aid of St John's Ambulance.

Her reason for supporting the first aid charity? "I want to become a paramedic," Lara explains. "I can't afford the training right now, but in the meantime I want to support the people at St John's Ambulance who show up for their community every day."

Her connection to the cause began almost immediately after starting her job. "On my second day as a lifeguard, someone collapsed outside the building. I had to resuscitate them. It was surreal." When the paramedics arrived and she watched them work, something shifted. "It just made something click in me."

That sense of vocation runs in the family. "My dad was in adult care and my mum worked with the police. Helping people, it's just in us," she says.

On race day, Lara will have a very special support, just as in training. "My grandmother's home is on my running route, so I pop by for a biscuit and some encouragement. She'll be present at the marathon, one of the best parts of the day."

Friends and other family members will also be cheering her on from the sidelines.

As for crossing the finish line? Lara is upbeat. "I'll either make it or fall down and be rescued by St John's Ambulance paramedics. Either way, I'll be in good hands," she laughs.

Her fundraising target is £2,000. Every donation goes directly to St John's Ambulance, helping fund the volunteers and staff who provide vital first aid support at events and emergencies across London and beyond.

To support Lara's fundraising, visit: [justgiving.com/page/lara-bone-1?utm_medium=FR&utm_source=CL](https://www.justgiving.com/page/lara-bone-1?utm_medium=FR&utm_source=CL)





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