

News | P.6



Council in Hendon parklet stand off

News | P.8

Student entrepreneur's prize win

Features | P.11



The pub that cares for its community

Arts | P.17

Edgware entertainer tackles *Animal Farm*



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Colindale creativity – an arts group is giving residents aged seven to 70 a chance to express themselves – see page 7 ► Credit Joan Roselie / Colindale North Creatives

Council accepts recommendations to help close huge budget gap

BY JOE IVES,
LOCAL DEMOCRACY REPORTER

“Our priority is reaching financial sustainability,” claims the leader of Barnet Council – following a damning report into the local authority’s fiscal operations.

The comments were issued by Barry Rawlings, leader of the council’s Labour minority administration, at a cabinet meeting last month.

They come in the wake of an ‘external assurance review’ carried out by accountancy body Cipfa on behalf of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

The report, a condition of the ‘exceptional financial support’ (EFS)

granted to the council by the government, was drawn up through “desktop research” and interviews with councillors in April.

Its aim was to “assess the council’s financial position” and provide a “roadmap” for improvement. The latter has been reflected by 18 recommendations – almost half of which received a ‘risk rating’ of nine out of ten.

The causes of the ratings include “the absence of a credible and deliverable savings plan” and “ongoing reliance on EFS and weakening financial resilience”.

These issues, the report found, have been deepened by inadequate reform of key – and costly – services, such as adult social care, children’s services and temporary accommodation.

Here, the report concluded that

demand and market pressures “continue to outpace transformation delivery”.

The local authority’s budget for the 2026/27 financial year, which started in April, saw the council borrowing £79.3m through the EFS to manage its budget shortfalls.

It was the second year in a row it had to balance its books this way, following £55.7m of EFS in 2025/26. However, the council does say that “only” £45.9m of the allowance was required during that period.

EFS allows councils to treat some day-to-day spending as longer-term capital spending, which is usually funded through borrowing. Recent analysis carried out by KPMG for neighbouring Haringey Council found that, at current rates, each £1m of EFS borrowing could cost town halls “approximately” £62,000

a year in borrowing costs.

At the same time, data published by the BBC in August showed that Barnet is on track to have the largest budget deficit of any local authority in London by 2028.

Its shortfall is on course to reach nearly £113.5m by the end of the 2027/28 financial year – the second largest of any council in England.

Across England, only Hampshire County Council, with an expected deficit of nearly £180m, is expected to be in a worse position than Barnet by April 2028.

Simon Radford, the council’s cabinet member for financial sustainability, was, alongside senior officers, due to submit “progress reports” to the MHCLG by the end of September. He talks about the tough choices in an interview on page four.



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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Council set to take IT systems in-house as Capita contract expires

BY JOE IVES, LOCAL DEMOCRACY REPORTER

Barnet Council has been forced to rush to take key IT systems in-house after a multi-million pound deal for the services was cancelled.

The “urgent action decision” taken by the Labour administration last month came after a deal with Ultima Business Solutions Limited to replace the council’s existing provider, Capita Business Services, fell through.

It comes as the council has been winding down its contracts with Capita, one of the UK’s biggest local government outsourcing firms, due to “poor service delivery” over many years. While most contracts had ended by 2023, contracts for IT and customer services were extended until the end of this summer to avoid any disruption to the local election earlier this year.

In February the local authority’s cabinet agreed to begin a “mini competition process” for the IT management contract. Following a procurement exercise, the council agreed in May to replace Capita with Ultima Business Solutions.

The value of the contract, scheduled to begin on 1st October, was just under £6.2million for an initial three-year term. An option included in the deal for an additional two-year extension would have taken its “estimated” total cost to £10.1m.

However, in October last year, Ultima Business Solutions announced that it had agreed to a merger with Trustmarque

Group, “a leading technology services partner”.

The local authority said that, despite an agreement being reached, the merger contributed to the company seeking to “substantially increase its submitted bid costs post submission and evaluation”.

In response, the council conducted a “service requirement review”, looking into the financial and operational benefits for insourcing its IT services. The review, it said, “confirmed the viability” of doing so.

Part of the reason the council did not go for an in-house operation initially was due to additional pension costs and “concerns about loss of economies of scale in respect of cyber security in particular”.

Speaking at the urgent decision meeting regarding the IT contract on Thursday, 3rd September, Cllr Rawlings explained how some of this reasoning no longer applied. Negotiating a new deal with Capita, the council leader argued, “would have cost more than the in-house option, even taking into account the pensions”.

It was also explained that, in its renegotiation, Ultima wished to make all existing Capita staff redundant “on day one” and to pass the costs of doing so – thought to be around £1m – to the council.

Conservative opposition leader Peter Zinkin said: “Clearly for the merged company to have decided to ask for substantially more money suggests that, on reflection, they didn’t like the

risks of the contract at the contracted price”.

Nevertheless, the local authority said that insourcing its wider IT service will “allow the council to retain ownership of its technology operations, priorities and decision making”.

It also hopes that this will “provide clearer accountability, greater control over security decisions and improved alignment” on cyber security.

By reducing “dependency” on an additional company “to co-ordinate or interpret the council’s requirements”, the council said it can, instead, create “a more responsive and flexible approach to managing cyber risks”.

In a report, the local authority explained that, following the decision, it “now has limited time to de-risk the planned transition on 1 October 2026”.

Retaining existing IT staff, currently employed by Capita, is part of the desired outcome. This, the council said, gives it “the greatest level of service continuity, reduces operational disruption” and gives the local authority “flexibility to respond to any transition challenge”.

Deborah Hinde, the council’s executive director for strategy and innovation, was given authority “to take all necessary steps to deal with the implementation” of the decision.

Hinde was also asked to “deal with the implementation” of Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) regulations “for the whole workforce” from its existing supplier, Capita Business Services Ltd.

No comeback for former Chipping Barnet MP as Villiers rules out Tomlinson rematch

BY DAVID FLOYD

The former Conservative MP for Chipping Barnet will not be attempting a comeback at the next general election.

Dame Theresa Villiers, a former cabinet minister, who lost her seat to Labour’s Dan Tomlinson in 2024, confirmed in late-August that following “careful reflection” she would not be putting her name forward.

Under Conservative Party rules, the former MP – who had been included on the party’s national candidates list – would have been automatically shortlisted for selection without going through a local interview process and would then have faced other shortlisted candidates in a vote of local members.

Talking to *Barnet Post* while campaigning for the party in this year’s local elections, Villiers had not ruled out a potential rematch with Tomlinson, who is a junior minister in Andy Burnham’s Labour government.

However, the *Post* understands there were mixed views among local activists about whether she would be the right candidate for the party at the next poll, which is due to take place in 2029 (if not earlier).

Local Tories feel they have a good chance of retaking Chipping Barnet, which they had previously held since it was created in 1974.

Tomlinson took the seat with a majority of 2,914 (5.7%) in 2024 but results in wards in the constituency at this year’s local elections showed the Conservatives leading Labour by 7%.

In her statement, Villiers said: “In just a few weeks’ time, the Chipping Barnet Conservatives will begin the process of choosing their candidate for the next general election.

“After careful reflection, I have decided not to put my name forward to be that candidate. Nor will I be applying to stand in other constituencies.”

She added: “I believe the Conservatives have a great chance of regaining Chipping Barnet, but it is time to hand over to someone new to tackle that challenge.

“I am grateful to Kemi Badenoch for having appointed me to the Conservative candidates list. I strongly back her leadership. I will continue to campaign energetically for the Conservative cause, in Barnet and beyond.”

The former MP said she would be focusing on writing and her academic career, including a doctorate at UCL, which she would be starting in October.



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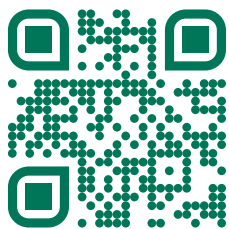
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INTERVIEW

In its own words, Barnet Council is “facing a £200m budget gap”. Later this month, council leader Barry Rawlings and his cabinet will hold a question time event to discuss the situation with residents.

Last month, I sat down with cabinet member for finance, Simon Radford, to discuss some of the factors that have led the council to this point and hear what he plans to do about it.

In August, accountancy body, Cipfa, published a report commissioned by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government into the council’s finances. Its recommendations included calling on the council to review council tax rates and consider reducing bin collections.

Cllr Radford describes the report as “a nice way of telling us what we already knew in terms of the scale of the situation and some of the moves we’d taken to try and address it”.

Describing the legacy of the previous Conservative regime in the borough, which Labour defeated in 2022, he says that “we inherited a life raft on pretty choppy seas.” However, he adds: “We’ve now got a seafaring vessel, but the storm has got worse. We’re kind of in a perfect storm.”

The recurring themes of the interview are that the Conservatives left Barnet in a mess, particularly due to the outsourcing of many council services to private provider Capita and that Barnet Labour has now got the basics right but that it is also grappling with challenges beyond its control.

Aside from the party politics, this is “the fundamental inescapable maths is that the demand is going up by 10% and our ability to raise revenue to fund it goes up by 5%”.

The ‘demand’ is the cost of adult social care, children’s services and temporary accommodation for homeless people, all of which the council has a legal duty to provide.

I point out, though, that this is not a surprise. In 2011, council officers put together a document labelled the ‘Barnet Graph of Doom’ that predicted in 20 years the council would be forced to spend its entire budget on social care and children’s services.

I wonder why the situation hasn’t been tackled earlier. In response, Cllr Radford says: “There are two elements to that. One is the will to do something about it, and the second is the ability to do something about it.”

He partly blames the previous Conservative leadership for keeping council tax low. A band D household in Barnet currently pays around £1,500 a year, while the national average is around £2,000. “If we raised it to average, we’d get about £75million more a year, which would obviously make a massive difference.”

However, when the Tories pointed out the need for council tax increases before this year’s elections, Labour slammed them for wanting to put tax up. Now when

A perfect storm

David Floyd talks to cabinet member Simon Radford about his plans to fix the council’s finances



Cllr Simon Radford

asked if the borough’s council tax will be raised to average levels, Cllr Radford’s response is: “I think the answer is partly right.”

The situation on the role of Capita is similarly complicated. Cllr Radford is clear that having services run by the outsourcing giant limited the council’s ability to keep costs under control. He explains: “They’re thinking about ‘how do we do this more profitably?’ which is a different conversation.”

However, several attempts to

ask whether Labour’s decision to take services away from Capita has resulted in lower costs do not produce a clear answer either way. What Cllr Radford does say is that “sometimes it’s about managing contracts more effectively or getting better value for the contracts we have. For some, it’s about bringing it in-house.”

In terms of additional steps that could have been taken to avoid the current situation, Cllr Radford points out that Barnet has the sixth

lowest number of council houses in London and says: “What we could have done was build a whole load of council houses to bear down on our temporary accommodation costs.

“We didn’t do anything like that. We could have built a whole bunch of in-borough children’s homes so that we didn’t have to rely on private equity.”

In terms of the overall picture, Cllr Radford is clear that: “We can bend the curve but we can’t change the fundamental path of the curve.”

He remains hopeful that part of the solution will come from central government changing its approach to how the costs of essential services are met.

One element of that is Baroness Casey’s review into the funding of social care which Cllr Radford says “can make a massive difference”.

While not suggesting this is likely to happen, he adds: “If all of a sudden they say the NHS is going to pick up the tab then the conversation on council tax becomes quite different.”

However, he is also optimistic about the potential role of technology in tackling the budget gap: “There are people who go out there and just say AI, AI, AI, like it’s some sort of magic wand or something.”

But, he says: “To use it effectively as a process, you need to get the right data and you need to structure the right data. You need to understand workflows and processes. And we also need to think about how we use AI to do predictive analytics.”

He explains that “one of the things about bending the cost curve is that it costs a certain amount of money once people come to us in crisis” and talks about work the council is doing with Citizens Advice and foodbanks to work out how it can help people in council tax arrears before taking enforcement action which would ultimately lead to higher costs.

While a big rise in council tax seems likely, the position on the bin collection recommendation is apparently still to be decided. “If we decide not to investigate or look into things that CIPFA recommended, then I dare say we have a weaker hand when it comes to saying what we’d like as a wider package.”

An additional challenge, Cllr Radford points out, is that, while the council’s target for recycling is 50%, the current level is around 28%.

As he works on his plan to solve an apparently unsolvable problem, Cllr Radford is keen to emphasise: “We’re trying to make very difficult trade-offs. And the more that we can understand how people value the trade-offs, as long as they acknowledge the trade-offs need to happen, the better decisions that we can make. And so that’s the conversation which we’d like to have.

“We’re not going to offer easy solutions, but we want people to know the difficult problems.”

“We can bend the curve but we can’t change the fundamental path”

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NEWS

Council refuses to back down in row over Hendon parklet



BY JOE IVES, LOCAL DEMOCRACY REPORTER

Barnet Council will not remove a controversial parklet in Hendon – despite opposition claims the move is “a no-brainer”.

The decision to allow the renewal of a licence for the space at 134 Brent Street came during a cabinet meeting last month.

It means that, despite the best efforts of Tory councillor Alex Prager, the owners of the Pita Street restaurant in Hendon will be allowed to renew their licence for the parklet when it expires at the end of January next year.

The decision followed a petition submitted by Cllr Prager, who is a ward member for Hendon. Speaking at the meeting on Tuesday, 15th September, Cllr Prager argued that “residents don’t want” the parklet and that it should be removed when the licence expires.

Explaining his view, Cllr Prager pointed to a “huge increase in demand” for parking bays, partly fuelled by residential developments nearby.

“It’s always empty,” added Cllr Prager, who told cabinet he had

received “hundreds of emails” from residents complaining about the parklet, which is around three car parking spaces in length.

The Conservative councillor argued that its removal was supported by more than 500 residents who signed the petition – around 95% of whom, he said, live in the “immediate area”.

He said the petition was created around a year ago, and had 30 to 40 signatures before he posted it to social media, leading to a large increase in support.

Cllr Prager admitted that he had not met with the owner of Pita Street, but had spoken with nearby shop owners, who were concerned about losing business as a result of fewer car spaces available.

As well as lost parking provision, the petition claimed that the spot has become “a magnet for antisocial behaviour”.

This, said Cllr Prager, came as a result of a complaint he’d received about “women feeling intimidated” walking down the road at night with people “hanging around” the space outside the restaurant.

Sara Conway, the council’s cabinet member for community safety, community cohesion and

ending violence against women and girls, said there had been no recorded incidents of antisocial behaviour at the parklet. She also noted that “structures like this” had been taken out where such behaviour had been reported elsewhere in Barnet.

“I would urge residents to report issues that they’re concerned about to the police, to the council, as appropriate,” Cllr Conway added.

Alan Schneiderman, cabinet member for environment and climate change, argued that the council had taken “a very pragmatic approach” to parklets across the borough. “I don’t think that it’s in the interests of the business to pay for something if it is not being used,” he added.

Cllr Prager, disagreeing with this logic, responded: “We have over 550 local residents saying they don’t want it here – you have one business saying they do want it here, and is willing to

pay for that.”

Given this, he claimed that removing the parklet was “a no-brainer”. Allowing it to remain in place would, on the other hand, be “essentially ignoring” residents and nearby shop owners.

Barry Rawlings, leader of the local authority, disagreed, saying the council and the restaurant had signed a contract “and we have to abide by that”.

The Labour leader continued: “I don’t think that we should punish a business that has obeyed the rules and behaved properly.”

In a report, the council estimated that removal of the parklet would cost between £2,000 and £5,000.

Cllr Schneiderman explained that the council is set to have a review of its parklet policy and, when that happens, the Hendon restaurant “may or may not choose to renew based on the terms that are offered”.

Alex Prager, Tory councillor for Hendon



Consultation on Edgware pub plans

BY DAVID FLOYD

Plans for the development of a historic Edgware pub are open for consultation until the end of next month.

The scheme put forward by Edgware Limited would see The Railway Hotel in Station Road transformed as part of a 523-home residential development.

The pub, which was built in 1931, has Grade 2-listed status. It closed as a pub in 2006 and has since suffered vandalism and fire damage.

The plan is an amended version of one put forward by the developers for consultation with local residents last year, which received a cautious welcome at the time.

The Conservative councillors for the ward said: “We are pleased to see that after many years of neglect, The Railway Hotel site is finally being looked at seriously for redevelopment.”

However, they added: “We are mindful that residents will be extremely concerned that issues such as height and density will need to be carefully considered, particularly in the context of the unfortunate decision on the Broadwalk development that the council has taken”.

Describing the current situation on its website, Edgware Limited said: “A planning application has now been submitted to restore Edgware’s much-loved Grade-II-listed Railway Hotel, open up the neglected Forumside site, and create new public spaces, homes, places to eat, and work at the heart of the town centre.

“This is a real chance to repair a neglected local landmark and help Edgware feel greener, safer and more connected.”

However, at time of writing, comments on the application on Barnet Council’s planning portal have been overwhelmingly negative, with 36 out of 40 comments being objections.

The consultation closes on Friday, 30th October and the application: ‘26/0536/FUL’ can be viewed and commented on at publicaccess.barnet.gov.uk/online-applications/

FEATURES

Creative in Colindale

Sophie Winch on art in the park and space for expression

Colindale arts group is opening up opportunities for local people while challenging perceptions about the area.

The Colindale North Creatives community, established last year, is working to showcase and nurture creativity in Colindale.

For years, Colindale has suffered a “stereotype and a stigma”, Joan Rosalie, a founding member of the group, told *Barnet Post*.

“People see what they perceive as ‘just council housing’” and think there’s “not a lot going on”, but Joan feels this is a grave misrepresentation. In the summer of last year, she decided to do something about it.

“I sent an email to the residents associations,” said Joan, “‘Why don’t we just start by painting in the park?’”.

She put up posters in her community, and set up materials in the Grahame Park open space of Heybourn Park. The result was “amazing”.

People who had previously felt that they couldn’t draw soon discovered there were “no rules” to the art being created; ‘Art in the Park’ became a haven for free creative expression.

As the weather changed, however, art in a

colder park felt less enticing and the newly founded group had to adapt. Funded by the Community Infrastructure Levy, indoor spaces were booked and the project grew.

The group started off small, but with the acquisition of more materials, more spaces and support from other organisations, it has developed into a cultural hub, fostering creativity and art across Colindale.

Their *Art in the Park* exhibition, curated by Joan’s daughter Giorgia Spina in July, hosted 90 attendees and their regular creative sessions see participants from the ages of seven to 70 coming to create art. “Some mums come with their children,” said Joan.

Jonas, eight, is a regular at these sessions; his mother has told Joan it’s “his space to just be comfortable, to work and express”.

“It’s a nonsense that [children] are naughty and uncontrollable,” Joan added, “give them something and they’ll sit and put marks on paper; they’re so comfortable when you give them materials”.

Colindale North Creatives also provides an “escape” and respite from exams to older schoolchildren, and gives older people whose children might have left home a sense of community and



Family art sessions
Credit: Joan Rosalie

a creative outlet. “The things they’ve produced have been phenomenal,” said Joan.

Art, Joan is keen to express, is not just painting; the group creates poetry, collage, and photographs too – “anything that’s cultural”.

As the initiative grew, it partnered with other groups and charities, such as green space hub Cultivate Colindale, in August of this year for a community art session. Colindale North Creatives has also received support from charities, local councillors, and Middlesex University,

whose lecturers attended their summer *Art in the Park* exhibition.

“It’s reached so many strands of organisations,” Joan told the *Post*. She said that, as it’s developed, it’s become clear how beneficial the connection this art initiative provides for people is, “socially and mentally”.

Morena Sasso, a regular participant, said that she’s wanted to be an artist for a long time, and the group has given her the confidence to “actively pursue that path”.

Another, Paola Oliani, said it’s given her a space away from the growing influence of AI, allowing her to feel that she still has “a purpose”.

This autumn, Colindale North Creatives is taking submissions for *Rooted & Arriving*, a new zine which brings together stories of “belonging” in Colindale. “We’re inviting people to tell their story”.

Funded by Artsdepot through an Esmée Fairbairn foundation grant, and facilitated by the artist Nyree Meason (a Middlesex University alumna), it aims to reflect the experiences of people both rooted and arriving in Colindale. “What are the places [you] look upon fondly? Why Colindale? What have [you] got from it?”.

The project, Joan said, aims to help people who are unsure how to begin, and welcomes submissions of any sort – “your form of creativity that represents your story”.

Rooted & Arriving’ is hosting sessions on 27th September, and 4th and 11th October, from 12.30pm to 3pm each day.

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NEWS

Middlesex University student wins entrepreneurship competition with pupil safeguarding idea

BY LEILA DAVAUD

“Filmmaking has always mattered to me but the question of its wider purpose is a persistent one,” said Alina Shiraz, first-year film student at Middlesex University in Hendon. She added: “SafeStory is my answer.”

Alina recently won the ‘What’s Your Big Idea: Pathway To Success’ final, taking a £2,000 prize.

The competition aims to promote and develop enterprise and entrepreneurship within Barnet by offering students, residents and employees within the local community the opportunity to showcase their ideas, attend business development workshops and win funding to help grow their business.

Held in July at Middlesex University and delivered in collaboration with Global Talent Solution Hub, the event was sponsored by Barnet Council and Brent Cross Shopping Centre.

It was made up of eight panel judges, including tech CEO and entrepreneur Stephen Crampton, and Middlesex University alumnus and competition sponsor Josef Sucharevitz, among other business leaders and innovators who chose the winner and four runners-up.

Alina said: “Winning first place was genuinely unexpected. Twenty-nine of us reached the semi-final and five of us progressed to the final. What I valued most was not the prize itself but the confidence that my concept was viable.”

Her motivation behind SafeStory has always been the children themselves. She explained: “Safeguarding is one of the most important things a school teaches, and I could see it wasn’t reaching them. So what I wanted, more than anything, was to build something that genuinely helps children learn to keep themselves safe.”

Entering the competition was how Alina tested whether that was possible. “What’s Your Big Idea runs over ten weeks, so it isn’t a single pitch. You are challenged repeatedly, and that was precisely what I needed,” she said.

“I also wanted to establish whether I was capable of building a business around the idea, rather than simply having one. Which came from examining how safeguarding is currently delivered in schools.”

Alina added: “The dominant methods remain assemblies, PowerPoints and printed leaflets delivered once and largely forgotten within hours. The issue is not that children are uninformed; they are told. The difficulty is that being told something once, in a format that does not engage them, offers little protection when a real situation arises. Safety needs to be practised.”

▶ Alina (second from right) celebrates her win
Credit Middlesex University



In her opinion, film is the medium that makes that possible. “A narrative holds a child’s attention in a way written materials cannot, and when a child makes the decision themselves, they move from observing a safety lesson to rehearsing one.”

SafeStory brings together and improves on three elements that schools currently do separately: engaging, interactive lessons that children will actually remember; a confidential route for a child to reach for help if they need it; and the Ofsted-ready evidence schools need to show that safeguarding is working.

“If a story I have made means a child recognises a situation earlier, or finds the confidence to speak to someone, that is more valuable than anything else I could produce.”

When asked why SafeStory won the competition, Alina answered: “I believe it won because it is specific and the problem is real. Everyone in that room recognised it. The judges understood immediately why it matters, and they could see that SafeStory would make a genuine difference to children.”

Following the competition, Alina immediately took the next steps to make her project a reality: “SafeStory is now incorporated as SafeStory Ltd. I am currently developing the prototype through the Venture School sprint I won – a start-up incubator based in London – and allocating the What’s Your Big Idea prize funding to script validation by a certified child psychologist. Writing safeguarding content for young children requires professional oversight of every scenario.”

While the jury was inspired by

Alina’s idea, she was impressed by runner-up Sai Ali’s ‘Mind Haven’ project. The Middlesex data science masters graduate won the second prize of £1,500 with his platform that helps neurodivergent people understand whether a venue will feel too crowded, noisy, or overwhelming before they visit.

“It really stood out to me. It’s a very different project to mine, but I thought it was a genuinely brilliant idea.”

Together with psychology student Boudica Atheldene, who works as a peer supporter at Autistic Parents UK, Sai developed a ComfortScore system built on publicly available environmental data covering more than 197,000 locations across Greater London, validated across over 1,200 venues. MindHaven also includes NeuroPassport, a private profile that helps users find activities and places that best match their individual sensory preferences.

Commenting on the initiative’s success and benefit to students’ future career prospects, head of careers and futures at Middlesex University Jack Tims said: “Every year the What’s Your Big Idea programme produces a range of diverse, innovative and inspiring ideas, and this year was no different, clearly highlighting the entrepreneurial talent across our student, alumni and local resident community.”

The event received £2,000 in funding from Barnet Council and £2,500 from Brent Cross Shopping Centre, which also donated space for the finalists to promote their businesses on a free stand. Middlesex alumnus Josef Sucharevitz also donated £1,000 towards the participants’ prizes.

Barnet Council’s small business champion, councillor Philip Cohen, who spoke at the event, said: “Barnet Council is very pleased to be supporting this competition, as part of our commitment to promoting enterprise and education across the borough.

“Competitions like this are so important, giving students and local residents the opportunity to present their business ideas, take the initiative and build confidence in themselves.”

“I believe it won because it is specific and the problem is real”

COMMENT

The new London Plan punishes Barnet

When *Barnet Post* published the headline online in July “New London Plan includes housing target lower than government’s own aim for the capital” residents breathed a collective sigh of relief.

One can only guess what the headline would have read had the *Post*’s correspondent known then what we know now, the draft London Plan has burdened Barnet with the highest housing target in the capital, a target even higher than that of the outgoing plan and includes building 7,000 homes on Green Belt land?

Lord Sadiq Khan has released his draft of the new London Plan (effective 2028) which largely determines what gets built and where in London over the next ten years. If adopted in its current form, his new plan promises to change Barnet beyond recognition.

The highest housing target in London. Our Green Belt given over to developers. A drive towards “site optimisation” which might mean Barnet never builds a house again, only flats. All to bail out London boroughs which have failed to build. Residents and councillors must use the consultation to stand up and make their voices heard.

Barnet’s Conservative councillors have read and reflected on the draft London Plan. It is deeply troubling. The plan as it is currently authored by the mayor ends Barnet’s long history as a suburban borough. To understand why, here are some of the key reforms in the plan:

- Barnet’s housing target will become the highest in London with a huge rise of 38% against our 2021–2031 target.
- Barnet is expected to build 32,730 “units” in the ten years between 2028 and 2038.
- Barnet has been told that it should build 7,000 of those units on its Green Belt.
- The plan designates Mill Hill and “Barnet” (meaning Chipping Barnet) as a “Green Belt Broad Location for Growth”, meaning their green spaces could be up for grabs.
- A requirement to “optimise” (i.e. build as many units as possible) small sites with typical heights of 3–4 storeys everywhere. It is unlikely that London will ever again build a “house”.
- A new sustainable access measure or “SAM” which replaces public transport accessibility levels or “PTAL”. PTAL previously helped constrain dense development away from stations.
- The minimum definition of a “tall building” rises from six to ten storeys, with a new concept of “midrise” allowing for higher density.

Together, the above measures would rapidly densify and urbanise Barnet. Consider the huge Edgware development: 28 storey tower blocks and 3,500 flats which will change the town centre forever. Under the new London Plan, Barnet



Barnet must not be ‘Boxer’ in Sadiq Khan’s ‘Animal Farm’ argue Conservative councillors Josh Mastin-Lee and Shimon Ryde

▲
Mayor of London
Sir Sadiq Khan
Credit
Wikicommons

would need to build an “Edgware” every single year.

It means potentially increasing Barnet’s population by almost a quarter (based on average household sizes) in ten years without any commensurate increase in social or transport infrastructure. In short, Zone 1 density with Zone 6 services.

We can expect developers to pack new schemes with one- and two-bedroom flats rather than the family sized homes needed in Barnet. This is a trend we are increasingly seeing at planning committees with current supply being disproportionately geared towards small

flats (“Manhattan apartments” as developers are starting to term them).

Finally, it means releasing hundreds of hectares of our Green Belt for housing (especially social housing) with yet more to follow in the second ten-year period from 2038 to 2048. This is despite the preservation of our Green Belt being a core tenet of Barnet’s Local Plan.

Looking at the wider London context, we see a great injustice behind Barnet’s targets. Under the current London Plan, Barnet has the fourth highest housing target in London but has also been one of the highest performers in meeting it.

“
We must make our voice heard constructively and persuasively
”

This is partly due to extensive regeneration projects in Brent Cross, Colindale and West Hendon, which have used up most of the borough’s major brownfield sites.

Meanwhile, many other London boroughs have delivered only a fraction of their housing targets. In the 2021–2024 window, Lewisham delivered only 23% of their target. Greenwich, 39%. Barking and Dagenham, 59%. And yet, the new London Plan has rewarded these boroughs with lower or static housing targets. Lewisham’s target falls by 16%, Greenwich by 1% and Barking and Dagenham by 50%.

What is Barnet’s reward for its own Herculean efforts? It is a significantly higher housing target which consumes our Green Belt to save the Khan’s blushes. Instead of martialling underperforming London boroughs to do their bit, the mayor has instead dumped the unmet targets on Barnet. No good deed goes unpunished.

There is still time for Barnet’s councillors and residents to have their say. The draft London Plan is in consultation, ending in on 15th October, and we must make our voice heard constructively and persuasively.

As a starting point, we are asking Khan to extend the consultation (which spans summer and Jewish High Holy days) to give Barnet a proper chance to review and respond.

At the council level, the Conservatives and Labour are forming a working group alongside planning officers to find common ground for a response. Throughout this process the Conservatives will communicate our concerns repeatedly and robustly.

In parallel, we are working closely with the Conservatives on the London Assembly to deliver a clear message directly to Khan: that London’s suburbs must be treated as partners in his plan, rather than its workhorse. Barnet must not be ‘Boxer’ in Sadiq Khan’s ‘Animal Farm’.

We would also urge Barnet’s residents and residents’ associations to speak out and respond to the consultation. Responses can be sent to londonplan@london.gov.uk.

In May’s elections, the Conservative and Labour manifestos both promised to protect Barnet’s Green Belt. Voters entrusted their councillors with a duty of stewardship over Barnet’s precious heritage as a leafy, neighbourly suburb of streets, parks and green fields.

That suburban character is why people come to live in Barnet. They do not come for yet another domineering landscape of standardised, greyish-brown London “block slop”.

By ignoring and even trying to demolish that character, the new London Plan might be the greatest test of our stewardship in Barnet’s post-war history. Together, we can and must rise to the challenge as a united front.

NEWS



Hendon business prosecuted for selling knife to teenager

BY LEILA DAVAUD

Barnet Council has prosecuted a shop owner for selling a knife set to a teenager during an undercover test purchase operation in December 2025.

Akif Durmaz, owner of grocery and convenience shop Hendon International Food in Vivian Avenue, pleaded guilty of selling the knife set at Willesden Magistrates Court on Thursday, 3rd September. He was fined £3,080 by the court and ordered to pay £1,500 in costs to the council.

The retailer had been included in the 'Responsible Retailer Scheme', a local trading standards and police initiative, designed to help businesses comply with age-restriction laws and prevent the sale of illicit goods.

This included best practice for the storage and display of knives, and education on the legal sale of bladed articles. The legal age to purchase a knife in the UK is 18.

Sara Conway, Barnet Council's cabinet member for community safety and chair of the safer communities partnership, said: "Knife crime devastates families and communities, which is why it is so important we do everything we can to stop young people getting hold

of knives in the first place."

Cllr Conway added: "This prosecution sends a clear message, that we will not hesitate to act swiftly and firmly against any business found to be breaking the law and compromising the safety of our residents."

"Barnet's trading standards team and community safety partnership is committed to protecting residents and standing up for our communities, including when it comes to keeping young people safe."

Last year, the council introduced a permanent knife surrender bin on Bunns Lane, NW7 and a one-day mobile bin in the borough, as part of a London-wide initiative funded by the Home Office to tackle knife crime. The bins provide a safe and anonymous way for individuals to dispose of knives and other bladed weapons.

To safely dispose of knives, they should first be wrapped in several layers of cardboard or paper and secured with tape so that the blade is completely protected and the knife cannot easily be removed. Although it is an offence to have a knife in a public place, it is considered reasonable to carry it directly to a knife surrender bin if it is wrapped in this way.

If you have concerns about how a business is operating within the borough, contact:
trading_standards@barnet.gov.uk

◀ The knives that were illegally sold
Credit: Barnet Council

Podcast investigation leads to conviction of former teacher

Chloe Hadjimatheou on the conviction of a Christ's College teacher for abusing two pupils at a Finchley boys' school

A former science teacher has been found guilty of sexually abusing two pupils at Christ's College in 1988 – a case that only reached criminal court after a podcast investigation unearthed new witnesses.

On 27th August, a jury at Harrow Crown Court convicted Sally Anne Bowen of seven counts of indecent assault in a case involving two former pupils, including the main subject of the *Observer*/Tortoise podcast *Lucky Boy*.

The man, now 53, who went by the pseudonym Gareth in the podcast, says the abuse began when he was 14, and Bowen was 27. He says what began as a friendship with the chemistry teacher as they rode the bus together to and from school turned into a sexual relationship that lasted several months and took place at Bowen's house most afternoons after school. He says staff and pupils both knew about it at the time, but no one intervened.

Gareth told the podcast that his life fell apart after Bowen left the school and ended the relationship. Unable to cope with the emotional turmoil it caused, his behaviour deteriorated and he was eventually asked to leave school.

Gareth first went to the police in 2014 after his own son turned 14 and, for the first time, he began to see the relationship with Bowen as abusive. The criminal investigation ran for years, with Bowen telling police that Gareth was lying and obsessed with her. But the police struggled to find witnesses from the school who were prepared to give evidence.

In 2018, frustrated with the lack of progress in the case, Gareth turned to the Teaching Regulation Agency, which investigates serious allegations against teachers on behalf of

the Department for Education. A tribunal heard evidence from a number of witnesses, including the accused and alleged victim, and concluded that Bowen had more likely than not had sex with Gareth. In January 2024, it announced that it was banning Bowen from teaching for life.

The *Lucky Boy* podcast, released after the tribunal's findings were made public, pieced together the full history of the case — including how Bowen had allowed another pupil to touch her breasts and kiss her at a cafe near the school during lunch break. That former pupil approached the police and became a second complainant in Bowen's trial.

Weeks after the podcast was published, police charged Bowen with eight counts of indecent assault — the offence under the law as it stood in 1988. In her defence, Bowen said she had a physical condition that makes sex difficult and painful. She also told the court that she was born with a low libido and that when sex does occur with her long-term partner, she prayed he

would be quick and that it took him "literally seconds."

The prosecution argued that she struggled to have sexual relationships with adults and suggested that she may have targeted a 14-year-old because sex with a boy may have been less painful than with a fully grown man. After six and a half hours of deliberation, the jury found Bowen guilty of all seven charges, after the judge directed them to acquit her of an eighth charge that did not meet the threshold of indecent assault.

Christ's College, which operates as a mixed sex school today, has never apologised to Gareth or Bowen's other victim. The school has not comment-

ed on Bowen's teaching ban or conviction, and did not respond to questions from the *Observer* during its investigation. Bowen has previously said she believes Gareth, and all the other former pupils who have made allegations against her, need psychiatric help.

Chloe Hadjimatheou is the Observer's narrative editor

"The police struggled to find witnesses from the school"



Harrow Crown Court
Credit: Des Blenkinsopp via Wikimedia Commons

FEATURES

The Black Horse: a pub that cares for its community

Saved by a petition and run by neighbours, Leila Davaud visits the High Barnet pub betting on community over profit to keep its doors open

Through the panelled window, Simon Anderson is staring at scaffolding being torn down. As The Black Horse reveals its freshly fixed facade, he sits down at one of his tables and sighs, satisfied.

Along with two other locals, Danny Daly and Martin Taylor, Anderson took on the challenge of saving the Wood Street pub after its closure in September 2025. The scaffolding coming down is a symbol of their success.

“We’re losing so many pubs,” Anderson says. “It’s in part because we don’t fully understand their importance to the community. It’s the third space people enjoy other than home and work. It’s a space where they can come and just hang out and feel safe and comfortable.”

So the three of them got together and gave the community its safe space back.

“We know each other through our kids’ school and another local pub. When The Black Horse closed, we got together and worked to get



it recognised as an asset of community value and got about 4,000 signatures on a petition to keep the building as a pub.”

Anderson used to own The Albion in Highbury

and Islington “many moons ago”, and now works in “a sort of hospitality-led regeneration in town centres, high streets, markets, food halls etc”. Taylor has a background in finance and Daly works in marketing. “We’ve all got some little skill sets we thought could make this work.”

They quickly got in touch with Heineken Star Pubs and Bars. “We told them we wanted to take over, and by backing us they would be supporting a pub saved by the community, run by the community, for the community. They said yes.”

But how does the new set intend to serve that community? Anderson explains: “We’ve offered the space up to different groups and communities. We’ve had successful charity days during which we’ve raised over £10,000 for local charities. We host art classes, we’re bringing back live music, themed nights and quizzes.

“On top of that, our staff is mainly local. We’ve just hired lots of runners and waitresses who are all Barnet kids. Their mums and dads come sometimes, it’s quite fun to see.”

In his opinion, a pub has to understand what the locals want. “We’re not a corporation. The landlord is a massive multinational, Heineken-owned, but we’re three local people, so we really understand how to create something that works for this area and the people who live around it.

“All of our kids go to the local schools and we know this pub matters to parents. There’s an

older community too who always need somewhere to come together.

“We want to cater for everyone. That means keeping every part of the community in mind when we make decisions about pricing and what we stock. The Black Horse is now a space that puts the community first rather than the business.”

Their biggest challenge so far has been the kitchen. Although it has been serving customers for the past three weeks, it had to be completely rebuilt first. “We’ve got quite a small kitchen for the size of the venue, so we’ve got a very focused menu. Everything’s made fresh. We don’t buy anything frozen, we haven’t even got a microwave.”

Anderson and his colleagues are currently in discussion with the landlord in the hope of expanding the kitchen next year. “It would allow us to do a bigger menu, with more variety but still fresh.”

As the first customers of the day start to come in, Anderson stays hopeful, even in the face of the cost of living and hospitality crises.

“Barnet, I think, is one of those last little pockets of true community in London. Having a pub back in the centre of that appeals to a lot of people, and we are convinced that everything we give them they will give back. I believe we can live together and create something great.”

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Publicly-owned buses could soon be arriving in London

BY KUMAIL JAFFER, LOCAL DEMOCRACY REPORTER

Transport for London (TfL) is moving a step closer to setting up its own publicly-owned bus company for the capital, the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) has learned.

Officials began engaging bus operators last month to discuss the feasibility of bringing franchised services in house, according to sources familiar with the talks.

The proposals were first laid out earlier this year in TfL's business plan, where officials said that as part of a move to "reimagine London's bus network, we will develop detailed proposals for a new publicly owned bus company for London".

The study will "assess how this could further support innovation, efficiencies and accountability, and support the needs of customers and the workforce".

Under the current model, private firms submit bids to TfL to run franchised services, with contracts generally running for seven years and setting performance targets for bus operators with a set income. TfL is still able to set routes and control fare levels.

There are 16 privately-owned operators on the capital's 675 bus routes, including Arriva, Go-Ahead London, First Bus London, and Stage Coach London.

Should a publicly-owned company be launched, when franchise contracts come to an end, TfL could bring them under the new public bus operator.

Such a move would fulfil a promise made by Mayor of London Sir Sadiq Khan in his 2024 election manifesto. In August that year, Khan told the London Assembly that there were "lots of upsides in us having a publicly owned bus company", including being able to reinvest any profit back into public transport infrastructure.

TfL is now able to do so thanks to the Bus Services Act passed by the Labour government last year, which lifted the ban on local authorities setting up their own bus companies.

Trade Union Unite welcomed the progress, with regional officer Nadine Edwards saying: "Unite has been calling for London buses to be brought back into public ownership for a long time."

"This will stop money flowing from Londoners and Transport for London to private companies who preside over a race to the bottom culture that impacts drivers and services."

Elly Baker, Labour's transport spokesperson on the London Assembly, has questioned the mayor on the issue several times in City Hall. She told the LDRS: "Bringing some bus operations directly into public ownership could give TfL greater control over how services are



► Mayor of London Sir Sadiq Khan on a bus
Credit GLA

This will stop money flowing to private companies

run, improve reliability and safety, and mean money made from operating services can be reinvested in London's transport network.

"If TfL is now taking practical steps towards establishing a publicly owned bus operator, I very much welcome that progress. I've been making the case for TfL to explore this option for some time and I want to see it developed into a serious part of the plan for improving London's buses."

Festus Akinbusoye, who is running to be Conservative candidate for mayor, suggested such a move was unnecessary, however.

"Londoners want reliable, affordable buses; they don't care who owns the company operating them. Sadiq

Khan is trying to fix a problem that simply isn't there. London's bus franchising model works.

"Other cities in the UK and internationally aim to replicate the success of London."

"Rather than spending taxpayers' money and years of effort setting up a publicly owned operator, we should be asking how that successful model can be replicated elsewhere in the country."

"All that bringing bus operations in-house achieves is higher costs and more bureaucracy, not better services."

"As mayor, I would protect what works. TfL should focus its time and taxpayers' money on improving services, tackling fare evasion and making journeys better for Londoners

– not dismantling a successful model to win a round of applause from Labour activists."

Last month, Reform's assembly member Keith Prince told a fringe event at the party's annual conference in Birmingham that the rest of the UK would do well to learn from London's franchising system.

A TfL spokesperson said: "As part of our work to reimagine London's bus network, we are currently developing detailed proposals for a new publicly owned bus company for London."

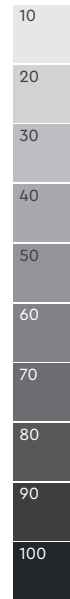
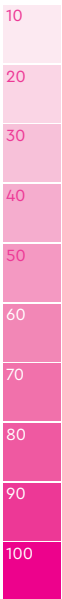
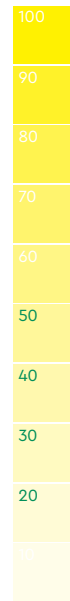
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FEATURES

14

“Humour is often a coping mechanism in extreme situations, because it’s all that’s left,” explained Larisa Faber, award-winning director of *The Land We Shared*. Later this month, she will take to the stage at Artsdepot with this intimate piece.

Talking to *Barnet Post* last month, she explained: "One character in the show says that 'to joke is to disarm'. The humour is very much part of my family folklore: we've always joked around or made fun of dire situations."

Larisa Faber started writing the play after the death of her grandmother. She buried her before finding a bag of clothes with a note inside saying: "These are the clothes I wish to be buried in."

Faber thought she'd made a terrible mistake – a mistake which ended up inspiring her to create a documentary theatre piece with songs and lots of cabbages.

She shared: “I didn’t want to write an autobiographical play, because I found that too restrictive and intrusive. It’s refreshing to be able to take a step back and craft something bespoke for the stage, regardless of this or that real anecdote.”

"I needed to differentiate between story beats that were important for the narrative arc or character development and personal memories that matter only to me. I also



The Land We Shared

Romanian director Larisa Faber talks about grief, surrealism and unfinished business with Leïla Davaud ahead of her London premiere at Artsdepot on 15th October

▲
**The Land
We Shared**
Credit Jeannine
Unsen

love goofiness and surrealism. The image of the protagonist turning into a massive cabbage was there from the start. What happened under communism was surreal, to put it mildly, so that style made a lot of sense to me for this story.”

When asked if piecing together the story was therapeutic, she said: “The play is auto-fiction and I’ve taken a lot of artistic freedom. Still, I couldn’t have written it if I hadn’t made peace with the more personal aspects of it beforehand. The business

needed to be finished for me so that I could write and take those liberties.”

What happened to the bag of funeral clothes? Larisa still has it in her wardrobe. "The real Larisa's journey differs quite a bit from the fictional one in the show. They are both ways of dealing with grief."

Her hope, while taking *The Land We Shared* on the road is “that audiences will connect with the relationships regardless of origin: if you’ve loved your grandmother as much as I have, this show is for you. If you’ve had a heartbreaking, difficult relationship with another family member, this show is for you. It’s about grief, letting go and deep love as much as it is about Romania”

While the show navigates through family tragedies and fall outs, Faber also offers a glimpse of how the Romanian communist dictatorship shaped its people's lives. To this day, she still has an emotional attachment to her country's history.

She explained: "I also have a deep desire to see the country do well, without romanticising it. My Romania lives in my family's stories more than in current Romania. It's rooted in the past somewhat, an era I believe is crucial to understanding the present-day."

'The Land We Shared' will premiere at Artsdepot on Thursday, 15th October at 7:30pm. Tickets available from £19. For more information: www.artsdepot.co.uk

LOCAL NOTICES

Published: 25th September 2026

Licensing Act 2003

Notice Of Application For A Premises Licence

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

- Sale of alcohol for consumption off the premises, Monday to Sunday, from 07:00–00:00.
- For the premises: The Chocolate Box 2 situated at 225 Deansbrook Road HA8 9BX

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: **20/10/2026**

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.

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FEATURES

15

Back to basics: managing mental health

“These will be the best years of your life.” That’s what everyone tells you before you go to university. What no one tells you is how disorienting and confusing it can feel when they aren’t.

By the summer of my first year, I was quietly struggling to admit that university wasn’t living up to the version I’d imagined. I had pictured independence feeling empowering and friendships forming effortlessly. Instead, I felt slightly out of step, smiling in photos, showing up to lectures, but counting down the days until I could go home. A new city and new friendships had felt exciting at first, but I always found myself on the first train back at every break, emotionally and physically drained, as though I’d been holding my breath for weeks.

With everything unfamiliar and suddenly being responsible for every corner of my own world, from finances to friendships to my future, the pressure felt constant. Small decisions felt enormous. My anxiety grew louder in the quiet moments. I questioned whether I was doing university ‘right’, or whether everyone else had received some unspoken guidebook that I’d somehow missed.

I’ve come to realise that I rarely get things right on the first attempt. More often than not, it takes a few false starts before something fits, before plans begin to work, before I feel steady. University has been no exception. Learning through trial and error and sometimes through failure, has been unavoidable and uncomfortable.

Now, at 20 and fighting my way through my final months at university, I want to offer some honest reflections for current or prospective students who might need advice beyond “make the most of it... best years of your life.”

Sometimes the most important thing to know is that if these aren’t the best years of your life, you’re not doing anything wrong.

Once the initial excitement of university settles, it becomes surprisingly easy to forget how to look after yourself. The structure that once held your days together quietly disappears, and with it, the habits you didn’t even realise were supporting you. These are things most of us did automatically at school age (and feel so obvious when written down), eating regularly, leaving the house, sleeping properly, yet at university they suddenly become optional. No one reminds you. No one checks in. And that freedom can feel heavier than expected.

It sounds simple, almost too simple to matter, but when these basics slip, everything else feels much harder.



Kate Rogers shares practical strategies for looking after yourself at university

▲ Credit Keira Burton at Pexels

One habit that came up again and again in my conversations, and in a survey I conducted for this article with ten students from around the country, was going outside regularly.

For me, going outside meant running in my first year, pole dancing in my second, and hitting the gym in my third. Each of these gave me a reason to leave my room, release stress, and feel a sense of purpose.

For others, it could be walking to campus, or a trip to the local park, making sure they attended seminars and lectures, or just stepping out of their room for a while, which helped break the day up and feel less isolating.

For some people, going outside every day, eating well, and getting enough rest is not enough to get

rid of their mental health struggles. Sometimes additional support, like speaking to a counsellor, joining a wellbeing group, or accessing other mental health resources, can also be very necessary. However, trying your hardest to set up a good foundation of wellness is so helpful in managing the rest of your struggles.

For me, managing my anxiety symptoms is significantly easier when I am well hydrated and not exhausted, and while I love chatting with my friends until 2am sometimes, I have to check in on whether that is really the best idea for me long term.

It is easy to let go of the basics as an adult who is just learning to look after themselves, so make sure that you use those basics as a stepping

stone to hit your other goals. Once you have the right fuel, you’ll be much better equipped to tackle everything else.

Talking to someone can look different for everyone, but in my view it’s one of the most powerful ways to feel supported. Some people use professionals, most universities offer counselling services and some turn to friends, family, or partners. Whoever it may be, staying connected and communicative when moving out alone makes a real difference.

When I got into my second year, I set a goal for myself to make two non-housemate social arrangements each week. I found setting small, non-academic goals for myself a good way to make improvements in my life. Sometimes a social call was going for coffee with a new friend and sometimes it was just doing a dance class. Having a hobby helped me and gave me confidence that, by the end of every week, I had been social and spoken to people.

For more pressing concerns, I did seek mental health support in the first semester of my third year. I have a very comfortable relationship with therapy, but I know it can be tough for some people to open up to a stranger. This is where my fourth tip comes in.

I think going to university is already unbelievably brave, but getting there isn’t the hardest part, it’s what comes after you arrive. In my experience, continuing to be proactive throughout your years of study takes everything you’ve got!

Thinking too far ahead is the easiest way for me to curl up in a ball, get decision paralysis, and give up. Right now, I am testing myself in small, daily bouts of bravery: speaking to that person in the gym, going to that office hour, or opening up about my feelings to someone I trust. When everything builds up, I feel like I’m wilting like an unwatered plant, and being brave feels like the last thing I can manage.

Maybe university won’t be the best years of your life, and maybe they don’t need to be. Behind the highlight reels, many of us are quietly learning how to live independently for the first time, figuring out what we need and how to look after ourselves. For me, it has been messy, challenging and sometimes overwhelming, but also full of learning in ways I never expected.

If you ever need support, you don’t have to face it alone. Here are some UK services for students:

- **Student Minds:** [studentminds.org.uk](https://www.studentminds.org.uk)
- **Shout:** giveusashout.org
- **The Mix:** themix.org.uk

A longer version of the article was originally published by youth communications charity Exposure: exposure.org.uk

“My anxiety grew louder in the quiet moments. I questioned whether I was doing university ‘right’”

ARTS & CULTURE

16

Everyone should see this movie

BY DAVE MCCORMICK

At the end of a hot and dry summer during which we experienced wildfires, drought, water rationing, extreme temperatures and low yields of produce from farms, gardens and allotments, around 40 people gathered at Claremont Primary School in Cricklewood to watch a public screening of *The People's Emergency Briefing* and take part in a community discussion.

The film sets out the evidence for why we need to act now to address the biodiversity and climate emer-

gencies, the benefits of doing so, including reducing the cost of living; creating new jobs; improving food, energy, national security, public health, and the quality of our air, soil and water.

It also explains how acting now makes economic sense and how delay will cost us more in terms of money and quality of life.

The screening, organised by Our Yard at Clitterhouse, is one of thousands that have happened, or are being planned, across the country with the aim of ensuring that both the public and decision-makers are clearly and honestly informed about the climate and nature crisis.

The film stimulated lively group

discussions about how it made people feel. For some it made them more determined to act while others questioned whether, and how, we could get more people involved. And that led to agreement that it was important for everyone to see the film.

One participant, a local councillor, supported this and said it would be good for councillors and council officers to get to see it, and in a discussion after the screening one of our Barnet MPs said that all of parliament should get to see the movie.

A free public screening of the film will be held at the Phoenix Cinema East Finchley on Wednesday 14th October starting at 6pm.

The screening is being arranged by the Phoenix in partnership with Barnet Climate Action Group, Barnet Friends of the Earth, Chipping Barnet Foodbank, East Finchley Town Team, Goodgym and Incredible Edible Barnet.

It would be great to fill the cinema but if you can't make it to this event check out the list of screenings on the National Emergency Briefing website (nebriefing.org/screening-map) and make sure you get to see this must see movie.

To book free tickets for the screening go to: phoenixcinema.co.uk/PhoenixCinemaLondon.dtl/WhatsOn?f=675928

“We need to act now to address climate emergencies”



The Phoenix Cinema
Credit
Amanda Stockley



Circus of life

Sophie Winch on this year's season of acrobatic performances at Jacksons Lane

Silence in the theatre: the stage is bare, save for two pulleys and a square of light illuminating a spool of rope. A contemplative piano instrumental fills the auditorium, and we are left watching the rope, as people appear around it – silent, expressionless, clad in white and grey. A whoop; the eerie monochrome is broken by warm light, and the spectacle begins.

One Fell Swoop, an Australian aerial circus company, are performing their show *By A Thread* at Jacksons Lane in Highgate, to mark the beginning of the theatre's circus season.

For Angus MacKechnie, creative director of Jacksons Lane, *By A Thread* is about “support and trust”. “That’s what I see,” he tells us, in his season launch speech, “but you’ll all see some-

thing different”. The performers are almost entirely wordless; the piece is not pinned down by an explicit intention. Support and trust do feel prevalent, though.

The show is almost entirely done on a single rope, pulled taut by people on the ground as others are suspended in the air. The stunts are nearly all unachievable alone; though your eye is often drawn to the people on the rope, you are constantly reminded of those below them.

Connection is central to the show. It seems to showcase the full spectrum of it: from friendship to love to animosity to networks of support. The double-

edged nature of human contact becomes apparent: performers are enabled to swing alone by others, or pull back against their prisons of ever-tightening ropes.

Physically, we see a range of connection too; from full-body embraces to holding hands, from feet on shoulders to fleeting eye contact. What makes *One Fell Swoop* so brilliant is not only their deftly breath-snatching acrobatics, but also the reasons for them.

There’s a thrum of emotion under each scene, which seems to govern each movement; lingering glances and moments of stillness work seamlessly in tandem with the stunts. Each drop and climb seemed to illustrate some universal emotional truth: a loss of stability, the buoyant euphoria of new romance, a leap of faith.

By A Thread is the first in a series of events being put on as part of Jacksons Lane’s annual circus season. It’s been in the works for nine months; “this is my child,” MacKechnie jokes.

One of the key differences between these performances and traditional circus is in how the performers are presented, he tells us. In traditional circus, performers are uniformed and indistinguishable; there is a push now towards “seeing individuals” onstage. This is clearly apparent with *One Fell Swoop*; each performer is given the lime-light in equal measure.

Jacksons Lane continues its circus season with a range of performances this autumn and winter; among them are *Unboxed* (an angry acro-dance duet using sign language), *How A Spiral Works* (contemplative hair-hanging), and *Space Hippo* (the end of the world as seen by a hippo, communicated through Japanese shadow puppetry).

The season also includes older-people-friendly sessions (Circus Skills for Mind and Body) and children’s workshops (Jacksons Juniors) – as MacKechnie says, Jacksons Lane treats circus “as a cradle to grave endeavour”.

“There’s a thrum of emotion under each scene”

Tickets and courses at Jacksons Lane are available to book at jacksonslane.org.uk

ARTS & CULTURE

17

A man of many parts



allegory of the Russian Revolution. Though ostensibly set on a farm, its farm-animal characters closely parallel communist leaders including Stalin, Trotsky and Lenin, as well as workers and propagandists.

“I don’t want it to be comedic,” Citron tells me, “and I don’t want to break a pin-drop moment with humour”. This is a departure from the norms of not just Citron himself, but also previous adaptations of *Animal Farm*. The 2025 Andy Serkis-directed animated film, for example, tried to infuse broad comedy into Orwell’s novel (to mixed success).

“Other productions,” Citron says, “can be like commedia dell’arte, or clowns”. Orwell’s original story, though, was far from pantomime; it was a warning, and a stark commentary on the corrupting influence of power. This is the tone of Citron’s production, which preview audiences have described as “thought-provoking”, “compelling” and “dark”.

Citron does depart from Orwell’s novel though, in his focus on Moses the Raven. He’s “always there”, but he never “had any meat in the game” – Citron describes him as a “watcher”.

Despite playing a relatively small part in Orwell’s original story, Citron keeps bringing his play back to Moses. “He’s a tame raven in the book,” Citron says, “but here he comes and

goes at will”. Citron’s Moses is an anchor; a symbol of hope for the animals – and an ambiguous figure. “We don’t know if this is the first farm he’s seen, or the first story he’s told”.

Staging a one-man play, of course, has its challenges. Citron recounts the daunting task of walking into an empty rehearsal space alone, and creating the physicality of characters and their voices from scratch, pushing against his instincts as a comedic actor to “go all out there”.

“Pulling back,” he says, is important; he focuses on finding subtleties, toeing the line between being instantly defineable without being caricatured. Barons Court is a stripped back theatre, and Citron embodies not just characters but also staging, set and environment.

Despite the difficulties, he strongly recommends making a one-man play. “Don’t rely on anyone else; don’t wait for the phone to ring. Don’t wait to create opportunities.”

Citron hopes that audiences will feel something about his play. “I don’t want a bland response,” he says, “I want them to have an opinion one way or the other”. He also aims to show people who might not otherwise be familiar with *Animal Farm* how unnervingly relevant it is, and how convincingly these characters could be paralleled to the leaders of today.

Barons Court Theatre is just the start for Citron, who aims to bring his play to schools, so that it can be watched in tandem with studying the book.

‘Animal Farm’ is playing at the Barons Court Theatre, from the 29th September to 3rd October. Tickets are available here: baronscourtheatre.com/animalfarm

Dov Citron, better known as beloved Edgware-based children’s party entertainer Captain Calamity, is moving in a new direction this month.

He is stepping out of his cloud of balloons and into the shoes (and hooves) of every character from *Animal Farm*, in his one-man theatrical adaptation of the George Orwell novel at Barons Court Theatre which starts its run on 29th September.

Animal Farm, Orwell’s 1945 novel, is an

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ARTS & CULTURE

18

Season of festive magic, big names and community spirit

Chickenshed’s autumn and winter season promises something for everyone, writes Susan Jamson

As autumn approaches, we at Chickenshed are preparing to welcome audiences to a packed programme of theatre, music, comedy and community events, bringing together people of all ages in a season that celebrates creativity, connection and inclusion.

At the heart of the programme is *12 Days*, Chickenshed’s major festive production, running from Wednesday, 18th November to Saturday, 9th January.

Inspired by the *Twelve Days of Christmas*, this original family adventure follows

five children chosen by the Turtle Doves to discover the true meaning of love. Their quest to find five hidden golden rings leads them through a magical world of curious characters, original music and festive surprises.

Brought to life by a cast of more than 200 performers, the production explores themes of empathy, courage and belonging that have become hallmarks of Chickenshed’s unique approach to theatre-making.

For younger audiences, the return of *Christmas Tales* offers a lively and interactive festive adventure. Families

with children aged up to seven can join the Tales team as they race to unlock Christmas after Clumsy the Elf loses the code to a mysterious safe. Packed with songs, challenges and audience participation, the production promises festive fun for the smallest theatregoers.

The season also features a range of special events and live entertainment.

Entertainer and long-time Chickenshed ambassador Rory Bremner will also take to the stage in November, for a special evening of comedy, conversation and unforgettable impressions.

Music lovers are equally well catered for; Chickenshed co-founder Jo Collins returns with two instalments of her popular *Jo Collins & Friends* evenings, while rock fans can relive the soundtrack of the



1980s and 1990s when *Shot in the Dark Reloaded* comes to the theatre in October.

The season also includes the inspiring community production *Change The Record*, bringing together different generations through music, theatre and shared memories.

Alongside our performance programme, Chickenshed continues to provide opportunities for people of all ages to get involved creatively. Young children can explore storytelling and sensory play through

Planet Play, *Tales from the Shed* and *Halloween Tales*, while aspiring performers can develop their skills through the theatre’s popular Sunday workshops for children and young people.

Adults are invited to discover their own creative talents through a range of inclusive activities, including acting workshops, musical theatre sessions and the ever-popular Community Choir, which welcomes singers of all abilities.

Community remains central

to everything Chickenshed does. Every ticket sold helps support our mission to ensure theatre remains accessible to everyone, regardless of background, experience or ability.

Through workshops, performances and outreach programmes, thousands of people each year find a place where creativity, confidence and belonging can flourish.

As we look ahead to shorter days and longer nights, Chickenshed’s autumn and winter season offers plenty of reasons to venture out, whether its for a magical Christmas adventure, an evening with household names, or simply the chance to be part of one of North London’s most inclusive creative communities.

For information and bookings:
Call 020 8292 9222
Visit chickenshed.org.uk

Autumn in Barnet Libraries

BY JAMES CATCHPOLE

This autumn, your local libraries are alive with activity. Get ready for a cosy season of special events, spine-tingling crafts, and festive cheer to warm up the colder months and keep the chills at bay.



Libraries continue to celebrate the National Year of Reading, a UK-wide campaign inspiring everyone to rediscover the joy of a good book throughout 2026. From lively reading groups to welcoming book clubs and page-turning activities, there are plenty of ways to

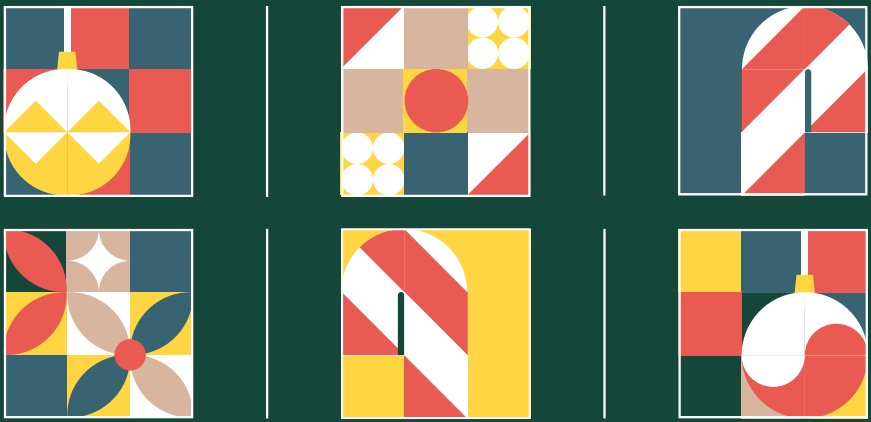
get involved and keep your love of reading alive.

The much-loved Loving Life programme offers a fantastic range of events for those aged 60+ and their carers. It brings fun, friendship and new experiences to libraries across the borough.

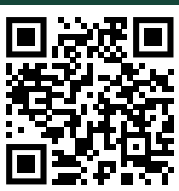
There’s even more to look forward to during October half term and throughout the winter months. Exciting activities for all ages, including a spooky Story Explorers, digital inclusion sessions during Get Online Week, events for Blind Awareness Month and Black History Month, and lots of festive fun await.

So why not pop in, explore, and try something new? Whether you’re looking to learn, relax, or connect, there’s something for everyone at your local library.

Find out more visit barnet.gov.uk/libraries



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SPORT



St James’ Park by Lewis Clarke Credit Wikicommons

Unbeaten Bees in the top two

Nick Sandamas on a strong start to the season for Barnet FC

As we move towards the quarter point of the season Dean Brennan’s Barnet are on course to start October in the top two. At time of publication, the losses column for this season was still reading zero and the Bees’ unbeaten run in the league, stretching back to last season, stood at 16 matches.

Two away games kicked off September with the trip to St James Park, not Newcastle but the home of Exeter City.

Taking the lead on the hour mark through Idris Kanu’s first goal of the season, Barnet were ahead for a mere seven minutes. Regan Cole levelled matters for the Grecians and they had to settle for a point in Devon.

A visit to Chesterfield the following weekend produced a six goal thriller ensued as the Bees threw away the lead three times. Goals from Tom Knowles, Zac Williams and Kabongo Tshimanga had each put Brennan’s side

ahead but Joel Randall’s strike deep into stoppage time broke Bees hearts and they headed back up the M1 with a point rather than three following their third consecutive draw.

There then followed two back to back home games both against the might of Lancashire.

First up was Accrington Stanley and it was a hard fought encounter which saw the Bees prevail with a 2-1 victory.

Charlie Lakin scored twice in the second half after Charlie Caton had given Stanley a first half lead.

Fleetwood Town (also unbeaten) arrived at The Hive the following Saturday but, despite Will Davies equalising Tshimanga early penalty, second half strikes by Lakin and Kanu gave the

Bees victory and top spot.

With their games against both Crawley Town and York City postponed due to international call ups for Kanu, Osisin Gallagher and Brandon Comley, the Bees first action this month will be against AFC Wimbledon in the EFL Trophy with back-to-back away league games against Bristol Rovers and Tranmere to follow – then home games against Swindon and Oldham with a trip to Crewe to finish the month.

Overall, it’s been a really strong start for Barnet and, following the disappointment of just missing out on the play-offs at the end of last season, they are currently on course to be back in the promotion mix, with strong hopes of a better outcome.

LISTINGS

PLAY

Love’s Labour’s Lost
Thursday, 8th to Sunday, 11th October
Upstairs at the Gatehouse 1 North Road London N6 4BD

Four of the King’s entourage wake up in the garden after a heavy night to find they have made a terrible drunken decision: no food, no fun and, most disastrously, absolutely no women, for three whole years. What could possibly go wrong? Director Daryl Hurst says: “This production is exactly what Shakespeare should be; fun, silly, and relevant.No Shakespeare degree required. Just bring yourself, your sense of humour, and possibly someone you fancy.

Visit upstairsatthegatehouse.com

HALLOWEEN

Halloween at Lewis of London
Saturday, 10th to Sunday, 11th October, and Friday, 16th to Saturday, 31st October, 10am to 5pm
Lewis of London Fold Farm, Galley Lane, Barnet EN5 4RA

Mountains of pumpkins, frightful fun and games, fabulous photo opportunities and chilling ice cream make up this year’s Halloween season at Lewis of London. Visitors can pick their perfect pumpkin, take on spooky games and activities. Other attractions include the Grisly Grab and the Dare to Dig graveyard, before finishing with a visit to the ice cream parlour for limited-edition Halloween flavours, waffles, sundaes and hot and cold drinks. The experience lasts approximately 60 minutes.

No entry after 4pm
Visit lewisoflondon.co.uk/halloween

MUSICAL

A Nightingale Sang in Barnet: The Blitz and Beyond
Thursday, 15th to Saturday, 17th October
The Bull Theatre 68 High St, Chipping Barnet, Barnet EN5 5SJ

Blue Door Theatre Company weaves verbatim stories and imagined events from 1940s Barnet, from the newly opened Odeon picture house to a makeshift wartime shelter, asking whether the nightingale still sings over Barnet. Written by the company, the production is directed by Siobhan Dunne, with music arranged by Nick Godwin, and features classic songs alongside moving drama.

Tickets £19 plus booking fee
Visit ticketsource.com/thebulltheatre

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Black History Month Badge Girlguiding Event
Saturday, 24th October, 10.30am to 1pm
RAF Museum London, Grahame Park Way NW9 5LL

Guides will get the chance to explore the stories of Black role models in the Royal Air Force through an interactive talk covering inspiring men and women from the RAF, past and present.

Cost £5 per child, including badge
Email learning-london@rafmuseum.org
Visit tickets.rafmuseum.org.uk

BUSINESS

Brent Cross Town: Barnet’s New Business Hub
Thursday, 15th October, 8– 9.20am
4 Arbour Street, Copper Square, Brent Cross Town NW2

Related Argent is inviting businesses considering relocation to an exclusive breakfast marking the opening of 4 Arbour Street, the first office building at Brent Cross Town, with flexible short- and long-term commercial leases now available. Barry Rawlings, leader of Barnet Council, will speak on the site’s importance to Barnet’s economy and future growth. The morning runs from arrival and a building tour through to breakfast, networking and speeches.

Places are limited; RSVP via Eventbrite by Friday, 9th October.
Visit eventbrite.co.uk

RECORDS

Vinyl Club
Tuesdays, 5pm
Ann Owens Centre, Oak Lane, East Finchley N2 8LT

Age UK Barnet is starting a new Vinyl Club for the over-55s, giving members a chance to share records, discover new sounds and connect with others who share their interest. Those interested are asked to get in touch for a short survey on their music tastes, so the club can pick the right tunes.

£3 a session, including refreshments
Email activities@ageukbarnet.org.uk
Call 07379 331 807

TALK

British Influence on Hong Kong Music: 1970s–1980s
Saturday, 3rd October, 2.30pm to 3.30pm
Colindale Library 7 Bristol Avenue, Colindale NW9 4BR

From the Beatles to Cantopop, this talk explores how British music shaped Hong Kong’s scene in the 1970s and 1980s, with the chance to handle and listen to Cantopop vinyl records.

Free entry

DRAMA

Youth Theatre Productions
Wednesdays, 7th, 14th and 21st October, 6pm to 7.30pm
Finchley Youth Theatre 142 High Road, East Finchley N2 9ED

Designed for secondary school students passionate about theatre, on stage or behind the scenes, this class offers a safe and inspiring space to explore creativity and develop practical theatre-making skills under the guidance of industry professionals. Students take on roles as actors, writers, directors, designers and technicians with performance opportunities to share their work.

Suitable for ages 12–18 years-old
Visit barnetyouth.uk

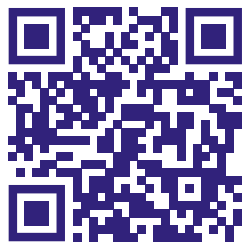
Send your listings
Email the details of your event to barnetpost@socialspider.com by **Monday 19th October.**



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