

BE A STAR IN THE BARNSBURY STORY

GUARANTEED
NOT BORING!

Help us steer Barnsbury HA's future direction

Earlier last year we teamed up with community storytellers **take stock exchange** to help us better understand what each of you wants and expects from us and how you would like us to better serve you



PHOTO: TAKE STOCK EXCHANGE

take stock exchange (TSX) has worked with communities across east London to help neighbours better understand and value each other.

Fresh, fun and entertaining

They do this in a way that is fresh, fun and entertaining, drawing out and sharing people's stories with others who live near them.

People discover what they have in common, often to their surprise. They also get a better sense of how and why others behave as they do.

TSX then weaves together, into one fascinating story, strands from

each person's account. The result is a shared sense of history that makes the tricky task of agreeing what you want as a community much easier.

TSX has run workshops with our staff, board members and resident panel. Now the team wants to meet you and an invitation is already on its way to some of you.

Feedback from others in east London who have worked with **take stock exchange** is uniformly positive so we too hope you'll find doing so enjoyable and welcome after a grim and depressing year.

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BHA GARDENING COMPETITION



It is finally warming up after the coldest spring in 50 years so by mid-July your window boxes, balconies and patio gardens should be looking hugely welcoming. And that's when our panel of judges will be out inspecting pots and plots for the **BHA gardening competition**.

We're offering a £25 voucher to be spent at the Camden Garden Centre for the winners of each of these categories. We will be giving the overall winner a second voucher, worth £50:

- ❁ best small garden in a patio or balcony
- ❁ best window box
- ❁ best container garden (win bonus points for using repurposed materials)
- ❁ most bee or bird-friendly display of plants
- ❁ most exotic display of unusual plants.

Our judges will be out and about looking for the most impressive displays in mid-July. Keep an eye out for posters on a noticeboard near you and let us know if you think your plot, or a neighbour's, deserves a visit from the judges.



TELL US IF YOUR HOME NEEDS A REPAIR

If you need a repair and have not yet logged it please get in touch with us.



To report any repair during normal office hours, you can call us on ☎ 020 7704 2324.

Outside office hours please report emergency repairs to the service run for us by ISHA:

Mon-Thurs 5:30pm to 9:30am
☎ 0772 530 2389
Weekends, 5:30pm on Friday to 9:30am on Monday
☎ 0300 131 7300.

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Help us steer Barnsbury HA's future direction

Over June and July some of you will be invited to take part in small group talks with TSX and other neighbours, or you can volunteer to join them. You'll be asked what you think of life as our tenant and what you'd like changed and why.

The workshops may take place in person or online, depending on Covid-19 levels. Ideally you would attend two sessions. Each workshop will last for one to two hours.

Discussions from the workshops will be recreated as an outdoor storytelling event, hopefully this autumn, giving a hearing for the views of you and your neighbours. And you'll get a free meal!

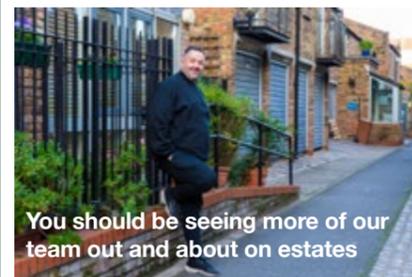
If this sounds like your cup of tea please email info@barnsbury.org and TSX will get in touch with you. If you'd rather talk by phone, call Anna at TSX on ☎ 07854 423 991.

You can find out more about TSX here: takestockexchange.co.uk

Vaccine delays and new variants prompt caution

As London slowly opens up for business again you will see our team **out and about on your estates** a bit more. Our offices, however, are for now staying closed

One of the stand out lessons of this pandemic is that letting down your guard rapidly leads to a jump in infection rates. Some of our staff are yet to be vaccinated and with the



You should be seeing more of our team out and about on estates

Delta variant now detected in Islington and neighbouring boroughs, we think it safer to keep staff working remotely. Coffee mornings, keep fit and the like will also for now stay on ice.

Report your repairs

We are still working through a repairs backlog but please don't hold back from reporting more repairs. We would rather know what we still have to deal with than get a surprise further down the line. As always, emergency and urgent repairs go straight to the front of the queue.

Panel calls for new members with fresh ideas and plenty of energy

The resident panel has shown itself to be an extremely effective way for tenants to improve our services and influence our plans. But members say they would welcome new and younger members with fresh ideas.

'We've been able to resolve issues for tenants who felt their situation had not been properly heard, or the extent of their personal matters addressed,' says panellist Janice Walsh.

'One was so happy with the result after we took up her case she said she felt like "a pig in chiffon"!'

Mutual benefits

The benefits, she adds, are two-way. 'If you're at the start of your career or thinking of going into any profession then on the panel you'll pick up new skills and a wider understanding of how things work.'

'You'll also find you are better informed about Barnsbury HA and what could be done differently and we get to see a broader picture, like



One was so happy with the result after we took up her case she said she felt like "a pig in chiffon"!

learning about Barnsbury HA's full range of properties. I've only just realised we have some in the Cally.'

Most of the panel members now also serve on our two tenants and residents associations, two (Janice included) are on our board and one is on our audit and risk committee.

'Being on the panel is easier,' Janice says. 'There's less reading to do and you bring your experience as a tenant to any matter coming up.'

The panel meets four times a year with senior staff and some board members. If you could spare a few evenings each year, plus a bit of reading time before meetings, or want to know more please email us at info@barnsbury.org

YOUR RIGHT TO BE HEARD

Informed, engaged and fired up: top-down push for a stronger voice for social housing tenants

From Westminster down, there is a big push to **give social housing tenants a stronger voice**. It is set out clearly in a new government white paper, *The Charter for Social Housing Tenants*. It is a priority too in a new code of governance published by the National Housing Federation, adopted earlier this year by our own board

Tenant-led decisions have long been a Barnsbury HA strength. We were an early adopter of having tenants elected to our board, and one of the few non-profit landlords outside the cooperative movement to be managed for many years wholly or partly by tenants.

Best of good intentions

This wasn't without complications. But a strong tenant voice keeps us on our toes and reminds us that every decision we make impacts on

the lives of those of you who live in our homes and use our services.

Over the past couple of years we have tried hard to do a better job of explaining ourselves and sharing our news and information.

We have also set up more ways for you to put across your views and ideas so you can choose to chip in, dive in or just keep an eye on what's happening - whatever suits you best. And of course we actively support forums you have set up like the tenants and residents associations.

Agreeing a shared sense of direction

We very much hope that over the next few months we and you can, together, agree a future direction for Barnsbury HA.

We want a better feel for what you, as a community, want from us. We have obligations locally to house people on limited incomes who live or work locally so we need to find a way to balance this with what you tell us you want. There will be differences but the starting point is talking.

That is where **take stock exchange** comes in (see left). We very much hope you will accept your invitation to their workshops. But we also hope you will find, and enjoy, many other ways to influence our work and decisions for the better.

WHO SETS THE AGENDA?

If you want to **set up your own group** we are happy to provide places where you can meet, or support with online meetings, and help with admin and costs.



Pic/n/mix: choose from the menu or invent a new way to 'have your say'



LEAD: BE A BOARD, COMMITTEE OR PANEL MEMBER

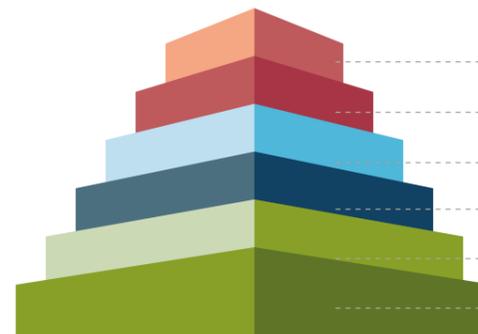
COLLABORATE: TAKE PART IN SCRUTINY, TASK & FINISH GROUPS

CO-CREATE: JOIN FOCUS GROUPS ON REPAIRS OR OUR WEBSITE

CHIP IN: FILL IN SURVEYS, GO TO LOCAL MEETINGS

OPT IN: AGREE TO, IN FUTURE, TAKE PART ON SPECIFIC MATTERS

BE AWARE: READ OUR NEWSLETTERS



Housing ombudsman names and shames landlords for tenant complaint failures

A new legal power given last September to the Housing Ombudsman Service for England has already resulted in slapped wrists for 10 social landlords who failed to properly handle complaints from 11 tenants.

Ombudsman investigating

Formal investigations are now underway into two of the landlords, both London councils, under the ombudsman's complaint handling failure order.

In one case, the council decided not to deal with a complaint from a tenant about delayed repairs he had first reported in August 2019 until the outstanding works were finished.

HOW TO COMPLAIN TO US

You can file a complaint, or a compliment, or just report a problem via our website at barnsbury.org

The ombudsman can help if you want some help preparing your complaint, and can advise on outcomes and actions that might put things right for you.

It is now also willing to step in before your complaint has gone through all the stages of our process if nothing has been done to stop a problem getting worse.

TAKING A COMPLAINT UP WITH THE OMBUDSMAN

Any of you can take a complaint to the ombudsman service if you first raised it with us and are not happy with our final response.

We will refer you to the housing ombudsman if you ask us to. But you can also contact the service directly yourself. See our website for details.

If you contact the service about a decision we've made on a complaint you must first wait eight weeks after getting our 'final response'.

www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk

Clink of mugs as Highbury View celebrates escape from lockdown



Younger residents from flats for key workers at Highbury View recently shared coffee and biscuits with older tenants at the first coffee morning in over a year. A company called Mobilise has been asking residents here their thoughts on what they'd like changed but also how they feel about living and socialising with different age groups. We'll report on this in the next issue of *Barnsbury News*.

New government charter sets out an expanded set of tenant rights

The government has published a new charter setting out steps it says it will take to make sure all social housing residents are safe, listened to, live in good quality homes, and have ways to put things right if they go wrong.

It is a very long document but includes some welcome changes some a response to past mistakes.

Principles of *The Charter for Social Housing Residents*

Social housing tenants, it says, should have the right to:

- * be safe in your home
- * know how your landlord performs and spends its money so you can hold it to account
- * have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in

- * be treated with respect, backed by stronger consumer standards
- * have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly, with a strong ombudsman giving you swift and fair redress when needed
- * have your voice heard by your landlord, at meetings for example, on panels or as a member of its board.



To download a copy of the charter follow this link: <https://tinyurl.com/49tr568r>

LOCAL HISTORY ROUND UP

Pop through The Hole in the Wall for a glimpse of a happier rough-round-the-edges Islington

Do treat yourself if you haven't seen *Through the Hole in the Wall*, Susan Oudot's hugely touching documentary on life in **Milner Square** before and after World War II

The documentary looks back to an Islington better known for its poverty and shockingly bad housing. The upside, however, was a powerful community spirit recalled by former Milner Square residents, many Oudot's own family, who are taken back to barely recognisable homes to be asked about their early years.

Milner Square stalwart

Oudot also meets one who never left. Barnsbury HA tenant Margaret Cryne has stayed put since arriving aged two weeks in January 1941.

Margaret's mum had earlier been evacuated to a maternity hospital in Welwyn Garden City just months after bombs had rained down on Islington during the October Blitz.

'My earliest memory was being pulled out of bed and held wrapped in blankets by my mum on the steps to the basement,' Margaret tells us.

The steps offered safety from flying glass, as did the square's three air raid shelters. But the shelters would later bring a new problem. 'They didn't close the shelters after the war so rats flourished,' Margaret adds.

Oudot also lived in the square though Margaret better remembers her parents, specifically Oudot's mum's chilling death, run down on a pedestrian crossing on Upper Street.

Oudot herself doesn't dwell on the subject but nor does she shy away from the other hardships of life on a



Margaret and James on their wedding day

square built for the well-heeled but long abandoned to poorer families.

If money was in very short supply, friendship was not. 'Everyone was poor but we looked out for each other - and if you misbehaved your mum was told!' Margaret says.

'Our family was close-knit and there was a lot of love. Dad made sure we did spelling tests in the evening and he and mum did jigsaws with us. Dad was very particular about our place being decorated and clean but a lot had distemper peeling off. And each house had four families, only one toilet and no bathroom.'

She tells Oudot of weekly trips to the public baths in Caledonian Road, with washes in a tin tub in between.

When war came along her dad, disabled by childhood tuberculosis, was unable to join the army. With bricklaying jobs thin on the ground, he carried on supporting his family

by working on the docks.

Life became even tougher after her dad died when Margaret was just 11. Her mum persevered, even managing to keep all three girls in secondary school an extra year.

One sister moved to another flat on the square when she married, clearly a Milner Square tradition, but in the late 1960s the council began to buy and renovate Milner Square and other older Islington houses. Most of the residents were moved to newer estates or outside London.

Margaret had qualified as a nurse after training at the Whittington and

her luck was in. 'I got a flat here with my own bathroom and front door.'

She enjoyed her work but loved her flat too so was careful to stay an easy commute from Milner Square, ending her career with a 20-year stint at the Elizabeth Avenue practice off New North Road.

Husband James came along later down the line after a chance encounter

on a train to Scotland. James was visiting family. Margaret was heading north to visit Scotland.

In keeping with the square's older community spirit James now serves as a volunteer on our resident panel.

And if Milner Square is no longer the teeming playground of Oudot's documentary, and the paintwork is now uniformly fresh, in the Barnsbury HA corner that is home to Margaret and James it is still neighbourly.

'There are six flats here and we are really happy with our neighbours. We're not in and out of each other's homes,' Margaret says, 'but we do look out for each other, meet up every so often and we get on well.'

Poverty in Islington has not gone, she adds, despite its many wealthy and well-known residents. 'But I'm very lucky to have this flat and I have happy memories,' she says. 'There are some sad as well, but that's life.'

WATCH FOR YOURSELF



You can watch *Through the Hole in the Wall*, a documentary by Susan Oudot, online at <https://vimeo.com/138173028>

Huge thanks to Margaret and James for speaking to *Barnsbury News* and to Janice Walsh for alerting us to the documentary.

ROUND THE HOUSES: SERVICE NEWS

Changing the way we serve you on estates

Over the past few weeks more of our staff have been able to get out and about and it's been a joy getting to see many of you in person. **Viv Astall** reports

We have heard more than once that standards slipped over lockdown so we drew up a plan which we have now run past the resident panel. These are the main points.

NEW ESTATE OFFICER

Most of your homes are on estates or part of small clusters of flats so we will be taking on an estate officer who will make sure services like cleaning and repairs are done to a high standard. They will also be your go-to person if things go wrong or you think we could and should do something differently.

TWICE-A-YEAR ESTATE WALKABOUTS

We've started going out in teams to check on estates and get your feedback. But we want this to be a regular thing, and we really want as many of you as possible to walk around with us so you can tell us what the problems are and point out anything we might miss or that has slipped under our radar.

We'll mainly be looking to check:

- * how well cleaning is being done
- * if anything in shared areas needs to be repaired or replaced
- * that paths, planting etc are clean and well maintained
- * any risks to health or safety.

Our walkabouts will need local experts, and that means you, so please join us. You can also point out things you're not happy about and tell us what could be improved.

We'd also like your help agreeing the standard you'd like set for your patch and we'd like you judging what meets and what fails the grade.

We will draw up and circulate an action plan after each walkabout to make sure problems get sorted.

The dates and time of walkabouts will shortly be published on our website. Summer walkabouts will be in the afternoon or early evening. In winter they'll be in the morning.

A board member or two may also join us on the walkabouts as may associates with relevant expertise.



GREEN DOCTORS CONTRACT HAS BEEN EXTENDED!

Our contract with the **Green Doctors** service was due to end this month but it was proving such good value we've agreed to sign up for another year.

A lot of you have told us Green Doctors have helped you switch to a cheaper supplier, saving money on fuel bills.

Green Doctors is free for Barnsbury HA tenants and could save you precious pennies. To book a chat with them call 0300 365 00 03 or email greendoctorsLDN@groundwork.org.uk

Selfish minority cause a health risk and eye-sore

A small number of thoughtless people are flytipping bulky items on our estates, Morland Mews especially, and leaving rubbish and recycling bags around despite our installing new recycling bins.

This attracts rats and makes the place look awful for your neighbours. Rubbish and recycling bags should only be put on on collection days.

If you want to get rid of large items call Islington Council, which will collect them, on 020 7527 7272. If you spot anyone flytipping please call us on 020 7704 2324.

Getting hold of us by phone should now be easier

Adding a fourth phone line to our system has, we hope, made it easier to call us by phone and for your calls to be transferred. Our sudden shift to home-working caused hiccups early on and a few of you rightly complained. If you are still having trouble getting through please let us know. Any staff out on estates will be happy to pass on a message.



RAISING THE CLEANING STANDARD

This work has until now been done by a contractor but we think it would be better if we employed the cleaner. They would be part of a team with caretaker Spencer Benoit. The resident panel backs this move but has also told us:

- * the cleaning will have to 'look good'
- * we must be crystal clear what we mean by 'looks good'
- * and you should be the judge of what 'looks good'.

So we'd like at least one volunteer in each block to rate the cleaning one to 10, probably once a week.

There are no plans now to change the window cleaning and grounds maintenance arrangements. Health and safety is covered by estate handyman Steve Woodgates.

The Tenant Support & Wellbeing Service is available 24/7, 365 days a year, over the telephone and online. The service aims to answer your questions quickly and will also refer you to the most appropriate source of support, including counselling, legal, financial, childcare and consumer experts.

Tackling stress & anxiety

Parental Challenges

Health & wellbeing advice

Around-the-clock support



Life & Progress: free help 24/7 with all matters vexing, from family woes to legal worries

Many of the best employers now offer their staff free in-work benefits. So we too have signed up to a service offering free help, but this one is for tenants.

Life & Progress gives free, confidential help with a huge range of problems, among them isolation, grieving, depression, being a parent or caring for an older relative, coping with a disability, legal or financial matters and more.

It is available by phone or online 24-hours a day, seven days a week. It is free and it is entirely confidential.

Life & Progress tenant support and wellbeing service

Call them on freephone

0330 094 8845 or go to

www.barnsbury.org and click

on resident support.

A link to the service includes

a username and password

you can use to log in.

Slow walk to freedom: please don't spoil it now!

We're all keen to shake free from lockdown but please think of your neighbours before letting your hair down. This week the *Islington Gazette* ran a story claiming Islington is second only in London for noise complaints. The source of this (an insurance company) was maybe questionable but, for too many of you, noise is a constant problem.

We have Parkguard out on patrol trying to keep a lid on antisocial behaviour but we'd rather not have to resort to heavy tactics.

So please keep the volume down if you're playing music or watching TV (or similar). Don't leave music playing when you go out and keep the volume down when others are trying to sleep – babies, shiftworkers and sick people included.

Fire safety risks: security grilles and barbecues

Please do not have barbecues on balconies. They are a serious fire risk. **Security grilles are also unsafe if a fire breaks out.**

Some of you have in recent months had grilles fitted to your outside door and you should now also have had a letter from us asking you to remove the grilles.

Security grilles do not make your home secure. They do make it much harder to get out quickly if you need to escape a fire.

TENANCY SUPPORT AND WELFARE

The past year has hit incomes hard. Many of you have fallen behind with your rent and the number applying for universal credit for the first time has risen sharply

Your first time face-to-face with universal credit

One of the many shocks of the last year for many of you has been your first experience of claiming universal credit. Some of you have had to claim welfare for the first time ever. Others have moved on to universal credit from housing benefit because your personal circumstances have changed.

Universal credit was meant to make a difficult system simpler. Very few would say it does that. We're now working on our own guide to this benefit, which we hope will explain it fairly simply.

But please be prepared. More of you may have to claim this benefit. It is not generous, it can take weeks before a payment comes through and any delay in making a claim means more lost income.

We don't want rent arrears to add to your worries so, if you can, start setting aside a modest sum each month to tide you through if the worst happens.

Help through hard times

We have been able to help make life a little easier for more of you by securing crisis payments, a grant towards your rent and, for some new tenants, money from our own hardship fund to cover the cost of electrical goods or furniture.

There are many different sources of help but knowing which way to turn is confusing. That's where we come in. If you are struggling with a tenancy matter, poor health, rent or money problems or maybe you have another query, please call us.

We can help you claim welfare benefits or a one-off grant, tell you where to find a food bank or may be able to find a way to help with your bills or managing a debt.



Contact our housing manager Asif Mahmood at Asif@barnsbury.org or housing assistant Priscilla Adjei-Assante at Priscilla@barnsbury.org or call Asif or Priscilla on 020 7704 2324, option 2.

OUT AND ABOUT IN ISLINGTON

Champion call out for new gardening group at Morland Mews

Local councillor Rowena Champion is keen to get a **gardening group** going at **Morland Mews**.



PCS: CHARLIE ROUND/TURNER

Gardening is a lovely way to enjoy nature first hand. It is great for your physical and mental health and it's marvellous for birds, bees, bugs, bats and the planet. Not to mention making your estate look and smell lovely and feel more welcoming. No experience is needed and everyone is welcome to join.

If you live on or near the estate and want to join the group please email Cllr Champion on rowena.champion@islington.gov.uk

University of the Third Age: feed your brain after retiring

If you are no longer working full-time because of your age or health, you might find activities run by or with your local U3A group an excellent and enjoyable way to keep your brain and body in good shape.

U3A stands for the University of the Third Age. But don't expect exams or tutorials. Instead U3A offers something for all tastes, from pub lunches, bird watching, coffee mornings, nature walks or cycling to talks on culture, current affairs, architecture and much more.

Some activities are still being done online, using Zoom, but they have also started proper events with real people again at venues dotted across Islington.

You can find Islington U3A's website at islingtonu3a.org. If you're undecided about joining many activities are open to non-members. To find out more, call U3A Islington on ☎ 07784 336 219.

Guided walks to historic Islington are back on track

Guided walks around Islington (and beyond) have also started up again and we are reliably informed that they are well worth the £5 or £6 charge. For Covid safety, masks and social distancing are still observed.



One walk, illustrated with a photo of our own office, looks back over 500 years at the legacy of Richard Cloudesley. If you fancy something bloodier, there is *Burnings, Butchery and the Black Death*. This last one can also be followed online for those unable or unwilling to face the great outdoors.

For details of walks coming up see <https://islingtonguidedwalks.com/our-walks/>

HAVE YOUR SAY WITH OUR NEW BARNSBURY FORUM

- BARNSBURY NEWS ✓
- REGULAR SURVEYS ✓
- 'READABILITY' CHECKS ✓

Would you like to help plan and write for **Barnsbury News**? How about taking part in **regular surveys**? If you have the time, could you read through **our policies** to check they are clear and helpful? If you have other suggestions, do tell us.

Email us at info@barnsbury.org or call ☎ 020 7704 2324.

DOMESTIC ABUSE: NEED HELP NOW?

SOLACE IN ISLINGTON
CALL THE LONDON FREEPHONE
☎ **0808 802 5565**

IF YOU ARE IN DANGER NOW CALL THE POLICE

☎ **999**

If you need help call **Solace in Islington** for free, confidential support. Solace helps men and women. ☎ 020 3795 5070 or ✉ advocacy@solacewomensaid.org, Mon to Fri, 9am to 5pm.

R U FIT

Get back into shape
1hr TUESDAY SESSIONS
10am 60 Morland Mews
MIND & BODY

FREE For further info: ring/text Jane
07443903237