



HAVE YOURSELF A VERY CANNY CHRISTMAS



Christmas high jinks at Highbury View: tenants, friends and relatives from flats here and further afield braved the cold for mulled wine and festive fare at the Highbury View Residents' Association Christmas party. Spot the one fake Polaroid!

... and a few ideas for families

Fun family craft sessions

Lewis Carroll Children's Library
166 Copenhagen Street, N1 0ST
Craft a Christmas decoration with a dancing Santa
or Christmas stocking Wednesday 21 Dec, 2.30-4pm

We're going on a bear hunt!

Performances until 29 January
Puppetry for ages 3 to 8 years
Little Angel Theatre, 14 Dagmar Passage N1 2DN
'Michael Rosen's thrilling and funny adventure...
Ideal for brave hunters and bear lovers alike.'
To book visit <https://www.littleangeltheatre.com>
Cut price tickets: £8 on Fridays at 4.45pm



INSIDE THIS ISSUE YOU WILL FIND ...

- 2** New year office move will free up cash for bigger priorities
- 3** What you said: majority verdict in on new 'village hall'
* Christmas closing hours and services over the break
- 4** Call for change from BHA TRA and coming elections for top seats
* And a word from our chief executive
- 5** Top tips for healthy eating on a very squeezed budget
* Adding zing and healthy vitamins by 'growing your own'
- 6** Advice and support we can offer when you're going through tough times
* NEW January help and advice session
- 7** Meet housing and communities manager Asif Mahmood
* The plus points of downsizing home





Robin's 'rainforest on a balcony' wins *Islington in Bloom* gold again!

For the second year running, Pugin Court's green-fingered Robin Don has won gold for his gloriously lush balcony garden.

Robin was presented with his prize at the *Islington in Bloom* awards ceremony in October, by Islington mayor Marian Spall.

Urban paradise

Many of you will be familiar with the exuberant display of exotic greenery cascading from Robin's balcony.

Asked the secret of his success, he said: 'Patience and encouragement. It may look very lush but I grew most plants from little cuttings picked up from neighbours, on walks in the park or by the hedgerows.'



Robin says his choice of mainly evergreen species means he also dodges the more tedious task of having to sweep up autumn leaves.

He's especially proud that this year his little fig tree, grown from a tiny snippet cut from a local garden, bore fruit for the first time.

'Before the season ended, I counted at least 24 luscious figs on a tree only 18 inches high. It'll possibly double in height next year and hopefully double the quantity of these delightful fruits!'

FUTURE CHAMPS

Youngsters aged eight to 12 had a ball at Arsenal's half-term coaching sessions in October. Arsenal's coach, interviewed by journalist Hyein Jung for *Islington Now*, said: 'I could see kids who didn't know each other on the first day playing and helping each other the next day.' There'll be more sessions with Arsenal this summer.



Cost-cutting office move to free up cash for warmer homes and help with cost of living crisis

After close to five years at Cloudesley Street a 'break clause' in our lease has got us thinking again about how much we spend on the cost of our office, writes chief executive **Susan French**

A lot has changed in the past five years. The pandemic changed forever the way many organisations work, ourselves included. Many of us now work from home for much of the week, going to the office usually only for meetings.

If we need to meet any of you face to face, we now arrange a meeting with you in your own home. See also our new home care visits, page six.

We also have a new telephone system which all our staff are linked into, wherever they are. The system is designed to make it easy for you to get hold of us by phone.

The upshot is Cloudesley Street is now bigger than we need. So in the New Year, we will be moving to a new office, just off Islington Green.

There is a second, very good reason for the office move. Money. We will have more to spend on improvements like insulating your homes. And we can do more to help those of you hardest hit by the cost of living crisis.

Islington Green should be an easy walk for most of you, and will be easier to reach for those of you in some of our properties.

At Islington Green we will share space with Partners for Improvement in Islington. Our new office will have room for four or five of the team. There is also a large room we can use for meetings, so the residents panel and our board will meet there.

Making sure all goes to plan

Overleaf you will read some criticism of our systems and staffing arrangements from BHA Tenant & Resident Association. We have given our response and appreciate the TRA drawing our attention to these issues. It shows the importance of tenants being involved in shaping our work and plans. We hope to cover this important subject more fully in the spring issue of *BHA News*.

Consultation finds a majority favour a new "village hall" for the community at Morland Mews

The results of the Morland Mews estate improvements consultation are now in, writes **Patrick Penny-Annang**. So what's the verdict?

The option backed by a clear majority is a new 'village hall' built either on the kids' playground or what is now green space. It would replace the community room at 60 Morland Mews and could turn into a great new 'social hub' with space for a range of activities including coffee mornings.

Wider community benefit

Most of you agree a new space would bring residents together, not just from Morland Mews but local groups and the wider Barnsbury community.

The jury is still out on where exactly a new hall should go. There is some support for using part of the football pitch but most disagree, saying the pitch is a great space both for children and for community events.

Some also disagree that a new community space is needed, saying better planting and seating would make the top site more useful. More bins on the top site, add some, would also be welcome.

Those unpersuaded by the village hall idea also argue it would block residents' light and leave children with less play space.

But from the majority in favour we have had lots of useful suggestions for how it should be used. Residents could, for example, hire the hall for parties at a discounted rate.

So where from here? Planning is very much in the early stages. We're also having to rethink how we would fund it, not helped by an uncertain economy.

What we will do is make sure any plans reflect the views of all residents. If we do build a new village hall, we want it welcomed and enjoyed by all.

My thanks to all of you who took the time and effort to share your helpful thoughts and suggestions.

How we counted your views



CLOSING DOWN FOR CHRISTMAS

We close for the Christmas and New Year break at 5.30pm on Friday 23 December.

We open again in the new year at 9.30am on Tuesday 3 January.

Please see right for who to contact if you need help in an emergency while we are closed.



Marius and Spencer from our estates team will be out and about shortly before your bin collection days to make sure the bins are filled only with the right waste or recycling materials.

SERVICES OVER THE CHRISTMAS BREAK

Emergency repairs

If you need a serious, emergency repair call ISHA (Islington & Shoreditch HA) on ☎ 0300 131 7300. If your repair is not an emergency, please report it when we reopen or online at <https://barnsbury.org/resident-information/repairs/>.

Rubbish and recycling

All bins will be emptied two days later than normal from Monday 26 December to Friday 6 January (three days for 30 Dec) and one day later from Monday 9 January to Friday 20 January. Normal service restarts on Monday 23 January.

Cost of living support

Here to Help will be open between Christmas and New Year on Wednesday 28 December, 10am to 4pm and from 9am to 4pm on Thursday 29 and Friday 30 December.

Xmas tree recycling

If you live in a street property the council will collect (real) trees with the recycling between 3 January and 14 January. If you live on an estate please take it to a drop-off point (Barnard Park or Highbury Crescent, by the playground entrance).

Warmth and a free cuppa

The council is offering warm places where you can sit, with free hot drinks laid on, at:

- * St Mary's Church Upper St, London N1 2TX
- * Islington West Library Thornhill Square, N1 1BD
- * South Library 115 Essex Rd, N1 2SL
- * The Arc 98b St Paul St, N1 7DF



BHA TENANT & RESIDENT ASSOCIATION

We need a return to the older tried and trusted methods, says the TRA

Secretary **Robin Don** and outgoing chair **Liam O'Dowd** say some new ways of working at Barnsbury HA aren't going as well as they should. Chief executive **Susan French** replies

Could there be a better system for reporting emergencies that doesn't leave callers in limbo?

Residents have told us the system for emergencies expects them to wait patiently for a reply after they've called to report it. Surely an update service would be better, with designated staff regularly calling back to explain when action will be taken and who by.

Susan replies:

We will look into this. Our response should be faster as reports are logged quickly at our end. It seems likely staff training will resolve this matter.

Can we speak to people when we call please, not technology

Many residents are unhappy with the over-reliance on technology generally. One of us recently used the repairs service and found it confusing. Who should contact who, and when?

The go-to response seems to

be 'leave a message', with a recorded voice that promises 'someone will get back to you'. They often don't.

It seems senior staff have agreed to a business model that uses as few full-time staff as possible and, in many areas, have retreated behind answerphone technology.

This is a major gripe for vulnerable residents especially. Some cannot use a phone because of impaired hearing. We also hear from many unable or unwilling to use email, for many different reasons.

Susan replies:

The phone system we brought in last year at first had teething problems. Most people tell us they now get through without a problem and we can see most calls are answered. But there's always room to do better. We will look again at voicemails to make sure all get dealt with in good time. We're also planning to test how well this works with some mystery shopping on the phones next year.

On the last point, we do try to keep an up to date record of how each of you prefer to contact us, particularly if you have an impairment. If face to face is what you prefer we do our best to go to you rather than expect you to come to us, either by visiting you at home or holding a surgery close by.

For emergencies that happen in working hours Marius and Spencer are out on our estates a lot and will always help with a repair request or pass on a message.

We know we've had a lot of staff changes this last year. The pandemic also changed how most organisations work, with part-time home-working now the norm. There is also a real shortage of people with the skills and talent we need. We have had to widen our recruiting net and offer flexible working and we have been lucky to take on some fantastic staff.

Our housing, customer services and repairs teams all work full-time. Some other staff work part time. This makes sure we have skilled people in place to cover all the services needed.

We've also adopted some new ideas. Our estate walkabouts see staff, tenants and board members meet in each neighbourhood on a rota and it has led to lots of improvements.

If we are out on visits we also knock on doors to ask how things are and we are giving a test run to drop-in surgeries, much like those held by MPs and councillors.

Chelsey, who answers our phones, has been helping some of you learn to use technology for shopping online and more. If you're interested, or know someone struggling with email or technology, give Chelsey a call or email info@barnsbury.org

The old social hub worked. Can it be revived?

Before lockdown we had a weekly 'social surgery' run by Clare from St Mungo's. Residents unable to use email or fill in forms made an appointment and found her extremely helpful. Drop-in sessions and coffee mornings aren't the answer. No one wants other people overhearing personal business.

So bring this sort of service back and give us confidence that staff have expertise and can be trusted to give sound advice. This was not, until recently, always the case. And give us privacy and an appointments system.

We've heard new rent officer Paul told one tenant: 'If you are in trouble, I can help.' It's little moments like this that spread community spirit.

Susan replies:

Sadly for us St Mungo's stopped the service in 2019. We've tried different options since including, last month, drop-in sessions at 60 Morland Mews and Highbury View. We hope in the New Year to give these a regular day, maybe the first Wednesday of a month, so take up gets better as people get used to it. We know privacy is vital and both venues have a private room.

Our housing team makes regular homevisits. If you'd like an appointment or think someone else is struggling let us know and we will arrange a visit. For more on the many other ways we offer one-to-one help, see page 7.

We learnt that if you want a turnout you need to go door-to-door. Do you agree?

Just one person turned up for a recent coffee morning. A flyer had gone up on noticeboards and an email sent to those with an email address. Past staff and the TRA learnt the hard way that even some of us with email barely know how to use it or actively dislike it. The only way to guarantee a turn-out is knocking on doors and flyers through letterboxes.

Susan says:

Engagement manager Patrick works fulltime, which is rare for such a small organisation, and a key part of his job is finding ways to connect with people. This year he did lots of leafletting so you all knew what was coming up, like the Big Jubilee Lunch and Fun Day. We had a great response to all events this year so would like to work with the TRA on this to get more residents out for this sort of occasion also.

Late notice from Robin: Sadly, with tools and documents strewn around 60 Morland Mews the TRA Christmas Party has had to be cancelled.

NIFTY 9 healthy eating on a budget

- 1 Make a shopping list before you go shopping and stick to it.
- 2 Plan meals and recipes ahead.
- 3 Cook in larger batches and freeze pots of it for later meals.
- 4 Buy frozen vegetables and fruits for soups and smoothies. They are highly nutritious and tend to cost less than fresh versions.
- 5 Buy packets of dried beans, lentils and peas, to make stews, dips and soups.
- 6 Canned sardines, vegetables and fruits (in sugar-free syrup) are nutritious, relatively inexpensive and store well.
- 7 Frozen fish costs less than fresh and one well-known frozen food supermarket sells it by the bag. Billingsgate market offers fresh, wholesale fish if you rise early!
- 8 Stretch a recipe by adding beans or lentils to cheap cuts of meat you have stewed or braised.
- 9 Bulk-buying grains or nuts often works out cheaper.

DIY FOOD! Why not try growing nutritious herbs and vegetables?

Robin Don's lush balcony garden (see story, page 2) isn't just a sight for sore eyes, it's also a mini-green grocery and herb garden, all grown from scratch

Herbs add zing to any dish plus vitamins and minerals. They're also, as Robin points out, fragrant and many are very easy to grow.

Taste good, do good

'It's always useful to have herbs to hand,' Robin says. 'Rosemary, oregano and thyme are a cinch to grow from cuttings if a friend or neighbour has a mature plant.

'Just leave some sprigs in water or damp soil for a few weeks and some should sprout roots. With a bit of attentive watering, they'll last the year and survive winter if you're lucky.'

Robin also grows tomatoes and salad veg. 'A balcony west-facing like this is ideal for tomatoes. They like the height, the balcony gets the full summer sun from around 10.30am and concrete and bricks both store heat.' He says he often gets more tomatoes than he can eat.



He carefully plucks just a few leaves each day from a growing lettuce so the rest of the plant keeps growing. Other tasty and easy to grow salad veg are rocket, mustard and lemon sorrel.

'Growing our own plants is one of the most effective and important ways to protect our environment,' Robin says. 'Whether it's flowers to decorate your house or your own food it's amazing what you can do even in the smallest spaces.'

NEW CANDIDATES WANTED FOR BHA TRA TOP SEATS

In our autumn issue Barnsbury HA TRA chair **Liam O'Dowd** announced plans to hold an AGM so new candidates can stand for election to the association's committee, including the chair.

Call for large turnout

'I have been trying to arrange an AGM so a new chair and committee can be elected,' writes Liam O'Dowd, 'but there's always some obstacle to a large attendance. Hopefully we will hold it early in the New Year.'

Please let BHA TRA know by email at ta4bha@gmail.com if you are interested in joining the committee, as chair or another position. Barnsbury HA says it will arrange training, introductions and anything else you might find helpful to prepare you for the role.

The current TRA committee is:

Chair: Liam O'Dowd, *Morland Mews* * Vice chair: Daniel Gooding, *Gissing Walk* * Treasurer: Dean Holdsworth, *Barnsbury Street* * Secretary: Robin Don, *Pugin Court*

AROUND THE HOUSES

A helping hand through hard times with our growing range of in-house and agency services

Since St Mungo's pulled their widely valued fortnightly welfare surgery in 2019 we have tried hard to put in place alternative services. Chief executive **Susan French** explains what is now on offer to help those of you going through tough times

The cost of living crisis has given the need for good quality, reliable advice and expertise a new urgency. Here's what we can now offer:

Advice on welfare benefits

We will shortly have in post a new financial inclusion officer to carry on the benefits advice service Paul had been providing, giving detailed help and advice on a range of benefits, including universal credit. Paul has left for another job nearer his home. His replacement will also have special expertise in benefits and the service will be available four days a week.

New home care visits

We have already done close to 40 home visits to tenants for in-depth talks about how they are getting on. Next year we will visit as a priority people with disabilities, people we rarely hear from and older tenants.

The visits are helping us pick up a lot of things that need to be done, like unreported repairs, unclaimed benefits and home aids and adaptation that would help to make life easier and safer in an emergency situation.

If you would like a home visit please call Asif on ☎020 7704 2324 option 2 or email info@barnsbury.org

Specialist local services

We are making better use of excellent specialist support in Islington, such as **Help on Your Doorstep**, **Shine**, **Mind** and **We are Islington**. All offer a wider range of advice than we are able to.

Support and wellbeing service

Any of you can use the 24/7 support and wellbeing service we subscribe to for tenants. Life & Progress offers, by phone or online, confidential help, support, guidance and professional advice and counselling. So far about 15 of you have used it. If take up remains low we will look for a better way to offer help like this.

Cash help for BHA tenants

And finally, the money we used to pay to St Mungo's for its specialist advice we put into a new **tenant support fund**. This has for the past two years been giving direct aid to those of you struggling with the cost of living.

REPAIRS FEEDBACK SURVEY 2022

If we organised a repair to your home recently why not tell us how it went? Just complete our survey before **30 December 2022** and your name will go into the prize draw for a **£50 cash** prize.

TO COMPLETE THE SHORT SURVEY VISIT
[HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/5FJVZDYC](https://tinyurl.com/5fjvzdyt)

If you'd rather answer the survey over the phone call Patrick on ☎020 7704 2324.

Or scan the QR code on the right to complete the survey online.

Warning: watch out for new energy rebate scam sent with phone messaging apps

Have you been sent a text message with a dodgy link? The answer is probably yes! When times get hard, scammers get busy using messaging systems like SMS, Facebook's Messenger and WhatsApp.

One recent scam text that looks official reads: "GOVUK: You are eligible for a discounted energy bill under the Energy Bill Support Scheme. You can apply here."

Do not click on the link. Delete it. Nobody has to apply for the £400 discount. Your energy supplier does that for you.

To report any scam text just forward it to 7726. This is a free service and your phone operator will share it with the police. If you've already fallen victim to a text scam, you should report it to Action Fraud.

You can read more on scammers, on the Which? website <https://tinyurl.com/mv3s24rv>

Homeswappers wanted: downsize to a home that's easier to heat and clean

Are you thinking of moving to a smaller home or just fancy a change? We have some young families who need a bigger home and tenants who need a ground floor home for health reasons.

Smaller homes on offer

Homes on offer from tenants wanting a swap to get a bigger home include:

- * a one-bedroom flat with a **small garden** at Morland Mews
- * a two-bed flat ground floor flat with a **small courtyard** and
- * a first floor flat with a **balcony**.

We also have residents who for health reasons now need a ground floor flat. They are now in a first floor flat.

And remember, if you do 'downsize' we can help with your moving costs.

Please get in touch with us if you are interested in a homeswap so we can discuss the sort of home you are looking for, and can offer in return, and hopefully arrange a viewing.

Just call us on ☎020 7704 2324 or email info@barnsbury.org giving your name, address and the best way for us to contact you.

Did you call? Voicemail calls from A Nonymous

Please if you leave a message on our voicemail or email us, don't forget to leave your name, address and details like a phone number so we can call you back. We're getting a lot of messages from callers who don't identify themselves.

Clearing away snow and ice from your doorstep

The mid-December snow left some doorsteps covered in snow and ice. And some of you forgot that clearing paths and doorsteps only you use is your responsibility. Our staff will clear snow from any parts of a building you share with other Barnsbury HA tenants.



ASIF MAHMOOD HOUSING & COMMUNITIES MANAGER



How does working here compare?

It's much more personal after managing bigger teams for a much bigger organisation. I much prefer dealing with people one-to-one and I love the close-knit community feel.

It's more satisfying when you can see for yourself a happy outcome but you also quickly realise if you need to try a different tack. I maybe wasn't expecting it to be as busy as working for an organisation running thousands of homes. The 'to do' list never ends!

What values drive you?

Listening to you, understanding and appreciating your circumstances, being open and transparent and making decisions that will, I hope, benefit all residents. I believe strongly in treating people fairly and with respect, as I would like to be treated, and working with you to get better outcomes.

If you could up-sticks and move to another part of the planet...

The Maldives, surrounded by the sea, blue skies, wonderful food and culture!

How we spend your rent: how we'll be making homes better next year

Asset manager Michael Bunker is getting contractors lined up to carry out the following **building improvement works** in 2023

- * New roofs: 2, 3 Highbury Terrace
- * Windows restored and draught-proofed at Highbury Terrace and fire doors upgraded
- * Windows also to be restored at 303 Upper Street
- * Upgraded roofs for Upper Street, Barnsbury Park, Ronalds Road and Pugin Court
- * Exterior lighting upgraded along Gissing Walk
- * Roof repairs for Lofting Road, Pugin Court
- * Fire alarms upgraded: Belitha Villas
- * Insulated attics: 1-8 Morland Mews

- * New decking at Beech Tree Close

In other works, BT Openreach full fibre will be getting upgraded and fire safety will be enhanced in buildings where our surveys have identified a potential risk of fire and/or smoke spreading.



Draught-proofing, insulation and sturdier roofs will help make homes warmer

* DROP IN OR BOOK AN APPOINTMENT * PRIVATE ROOM AVAILABLE *

ADVICE AND SUPPORT SESSION

new date!

THURSDAY 19 JANUARY
10.30AM - 12PM

60 MORLAND MEWS

Grab a hot drink and talk to us about anything linked to your tenancy, rent, energy bills or welfare benefits.

WE'RE HERE TO HELP

We have a private room so tell us if you want to speak in privacy.

Call ahead if you would rather book an appointment.

☎020 7704 2324

Home safety inspections: for your own safety, let our contractor in

Some of our contractors have had tenants refuse to let them in to carry out vital health and safety checks.

These appointments can be and often are life-savers. Every gas-fired appliance we've fitted in your home must be checked yearly.

We also carry out safety checks on electric wiring and other potential risks in your home to protect you and your neighbours.

We do our best to find a convenient time for you when booking routine repairs. If you cannot be home for a safety inspection we have booked for you please let us know.

Testing alarms fitted to detect smoke, heat and carbon monoxide

For your own safety and that of others please check all alarms and detectors in your home every four weeks.

To do this press and hold down the test button. The alarm should sound loudly. A green light should show continually on the device and a red light should flash every 40 seconds.

If there is a fault with any device ring us on ☎020 7704 2324 and we will send someone out to repair it. You will not be charged for this service. It is free. If your smoke detector starts bleeping do not take the head off! Call us and we will replace it.

SUSPECT A GAS LEAK?

This is an emergency. Do not call us. **Call the National Gas Emergency Service NOW on ☎0800 111 999.**

You will be given safety advice and, if the call handler says it's needed, they will send out a Cadent engineer.

Highbury View coffee morning



EVERY TUESDAY IN THE BUNGALOW, STARTS 11AM

Life & Progress:

free tenant support & wellbeing service



Life & Progress gives **free confidential help** with many types of problem, from isolation to grieving or depression, being a parent, caring for a relative, coping with disability, legal or money matters and more.

Freephone ☎0330 094 8845 or www.tsws-assist.co.uk
Username: **barnsburytenant** Password: **support**.

Free, expert confidential help * 24 hours/7 days

BARNSBURY HA SUPPORT FUND

IF YOU'RE STRUGGLING, WE CAN HELP



Any of you can apply for a one-off grant to pay for food, an energy bill, children's clothes, for essential household items like a table or white goods or a digital device so you can use online services.



YOU DO NOT HAVE TO PAY BACK THIS GRANT.

☎020 7704 2324 * ✉info@barnsbury.org

DID WE MISS SOMETHING?

- ☒ Is there something you'd really like to read about in the next newsletter/s?
- ☒ Would you like to write something for *Barnsbury News* yourself?
- ☒ Do you know any local community projects or events of interest to other Barnsbury HA tenants?

If you've answered yes to any of these please get in touch with engagement & comms manager Patrick on patrick@barnsbury.org or call ☎020 7704 2324.

R U FIT

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

FREE

For further info
ring/text Jane
07443 903 237

DOMESTIC ABUSE

SOLACE IN ISLINGTON

CALL THE LONDON FREEPHONE

☎0808 802 5565

**IF YOU ARE IN DANGER ☎999
NOW CALL THE POLICE**

If you need help because of domestic abuse, call Solace in Islington for free, confidential support.

Solace helps men and women.

Call ☎020 3795 5070 or email advocacy@solacewomensaid.org
Mon to Fri, 9am to 5pm.