



OPINION

Why we support the strikers

Newham Voices editor Jean Gray comments on the low-pay crisis

When *Newham Voices* launched in 2020, we told readers that we would avoid taking a stand on political issues. Now we have changed our minds.

Some issues are a matter of life or death for our readers and just too important to remain silent.

That is why today we are calling on you to join us and support public sector workers, particularly nurses, ambulance staff and others in the health-care team, who are fighting for a decent pay rise.

The government is not listening. They are putting all of our lives at risk by creating a climate in which the people we and our families most rely on are expected to suffer the brunt of the cost of living crisis without the respect and dignity which their sacrifice and outstanding devotion to duty deserves.

University-educated nurses are turning to food banks to feed their families, or are leaving jobs because they can earn more at the supermarket checkout.

The government is refusing to discuss pay or a compromise settlement of the current dispute and ministers are even attempting to discredit these honest, decent and often courageous public servants in the media.

It defies belief that the very workers who kept us going through Covid, even at risk to themselves, are being given the cold shoulder.



They stood by our community. There was a good reason why in Newham we clapped for NHS doctors and nurses. The lesson we learned from the pandemic was how valuable to us are workers in health care and the public sector.

The public is overwhelming sympathetic to nurses but politicians have conveniently forgotten how much we are in their debt.

Recent figures from the Office for National Statistics show that private sector workers' pay has gone up by almost twice as much as the public sector, a record high pay gap. With inflation at 10.5 percent public sector staff have effectively taken a much higher pay cut compared with others.

No wonder nurses are on picket lines for the first time in their history. In Newham and other Barts Trust hospitals nurses voting in the strike ballot were more than 95 per cent in favour.

But the ballot just failed to meet the government's threshold for the percentage of staff voting. There is massive support for the action in the Newham health care system.

In May 2021, we were privileged to interview staff at Newham hospital about their experiences of day to day life during the worst days of the pandemic. It is humbling, and hard to believe how those staff are being treated today by the government.

Nurses worked long hours and risked their lives to provide the best care they could, even at risk to themselves and their families. The nurses never lost sight of their humanity. Every patient's death left its mark.

Now the people who have the power to reward them, and who were never called upon to risk their lives, are failing in their duty to recognise and repay the debt we owe health workers.

Turn to Page 2 for just three examples of heroism from within our community.

Then join us and demand that our leaders – in council, in parliament, and in positions of power stand up for public servants and call on the government to act urgently to meet union leaders, to negotiate and to settle these disputes.



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Time to honour our heroes

In May 2021, Newham Voices interviewed staff at Newham hospital about their experiences of working through the pandemic that hit us in March 2020. Unusually we are publishing some of their words again now, to remind ourselves and others of the enormous debt we owe these people. They deserve better from a government that is now refusing to give them a decent pay rise.

You can read all the interviews in our online archive. But just three quotes give a flavour of the reality and how much is owed to nurses everywhere:

Shiblu Khan, Nursing Assistant, Stratford Ward: "As a father of three, I was aware of the risks. I went home and had to be socially distanced from my family. But there was no choice, you are doing something for yourself and also for your country."

"I am a Muslim and from my religious perspective, it's a question of once you are in something you are fully committed, you stay there. I think staff should be given a souvenir or a special medal that their children can be proud of, something to say, 'we were in it!'"

Saleema Iqbal, nurse, Stratford Ward: "I qualified early last year and had decided to take some time off then start work in June. But I was sitting on the sofa watching what was happening with Covid-19 on TV and decided that I had to



Petra Francis © Sylvie Belbouab



Shiblu Khan © Sylvie Belbouab

start straight away, I wanted to help in any way I could. It has been a tough start to my career. There have been times when I have cried because a patient died, you get attached, it is the hardest part."

Petra Francis, Matron for Specialist Medicine, manages a team of 150 staff.

"It was completely surreal. I just can't describe it. I would go home exhausted and get straight into what I called my 'Covid pyjamas'. My husband would say 'It's only 4pm and you're in your pyjamas, what's going on?' But that was all I was fit for outside of work."

"We worked flat out, seven days a week. I usually work five days, but I couldn't leave staff, I had to be there."

"People were deteriorating and dying very quickly, and when the patient was receiving end of life care we worked really hard to make sure we could get loved ones up to the hospital to say their goodbyes."

"We suddenly went from four patients on the CPAP non-invasive ventilators to 20 so of course there was a shortage of staff. The team were incredibly hard working, I just couldn't have asked for more."

"As a leader, I knew I had to be positive. And I had to make sure I was there, doing the things that I expected them to do. I made sure my team could always get hold of me." ●

How trust and unions work to protect patient safety during strike days

SHEILA NURSINHULU

Newham Hospital which forms part of Barts' Health NHS Trust is not affected by the nursing strike but ambulance strikes are going ahead.

According to Bart's Health, all their hospitals will be running at the highest alert level for three days on either side of the London Ambulance Service action. The Trust states that all their hospitals remain open to care for patients requiring treatment.

On the day of the strikes (check London Ambulance Service website for details) ambulances will still be expected to respond to 999 calls where

there is an immediate risk to life.

The Trust emphasises they have put contingency plans in place to ensure the industrial action does not impact patients' care and safety. They report the staffing level in the Emergency Departments has been increased to ensure patients arriving by ambulance are dealt with promptly. The Trust has also taken steps to accommodate additional inpatients if necessary and ensure patients can leave the hospital after their treatment in a timely manner.

While the maternity services are expected to run as usual, expectant mothers expecting to give birth on strike days are urged to make plans in advance

for getting themselves to the hospital.

In a pre-Christmas message to staff, focusing on winter arrangements, group Chief Medical Officer Alistair Chesser said in spite of the ballot not reaching the legal threshold, the trust recognised the strength of feeling staff wanted to express about pay and conditions. The trust would like to see an end to the dispute but it was a matter for government and the trade unions. The role of the trust was to work with unions to ensure patient safety.

If you need immediate medical help or advice, call NHS 111 online unless it is a life-threatening emergency, when you should still call 999. ●

Victory for trans rights: Council demands equality for all

AIDAN WHITE

Newham Council adopted a comprehensive motion supporting transgender rights on January 16, just days after figures from the census in 2021 confirmed that the Borough has the highest proportion of trans people in England and Wales.

The motion proposed by Green Councillor Nate Higgins received overwhelming support, but an amendment which would have given council backing to the Scottish Parliament's con-



Danny Keeling

troversial Gender Recognition Reform bill failed to get Labour support.

The final motion included a raft of commitments, including action to consider the needs of the trans community when accessing healthcare and in the Council's homelessness and rough sleeping strategy.

Councillor Nate Higgins said: "I'm proud of this motion and the action it has set in motion, and I look forward to working with trans residents and the administration to ensure Newham



Nate Higgins

is as safe and welcoming to trans people as it possibly can be"

During the debate at the council meeting Cllr Higgins described as "shameful" the Labour group's treat-



"I'm proud of this motion and the action it has set in motion, and I look forward to working with trans residents and the administration to ensure Newham is as safe and welcoming to trans people as it possibly can be"

ment of the motion which had been held over from the November council meeting and Labour's failure to explain why it opposed the Green amendment supporting the Scottish gender reform law and honouring victims (two of them trans people) of the recent Club Q Shooting in Colorado.

"Labour's decision to block the amendment is truly appalling," Nate Higgins said after the meeting. "For them to do so without any explanation is cowardly. Trans residents deserve an explanation."

But Labour hit back. At the council meeting Labour Deputy Mayor James Asser sharply condemned Green councillors over their criticism of Labour's handling of the motion.

He noted that it was almost 30 years since he had come out as gay and joined the movement to combat discrimination and promote gay rights.

He rejected the accusations of Green councillors that Labour was playing procedural "childish games".

"After 30 years of campaigning I take offence that we play politics on this issue," he said. "All councillors here want to achieve equality for all and equality for the trans community."

In a pointed reference to the amendment he spoke strongly of the benefits in working together and avoiding actions that could divide the LGBTQ+



Neil Wilson

Borough, said "Our motion has come at an opportune time, with LGBT+ History Month in February and data from the Office for National Statistics highlighting that Newham has the highest proportion of trans people in England and Wales.

"The actions to be implemented by Newham Council will affirm that trans men are men, trans women are women and non-binary people are valid and exist."

In a statement to *Newham Voices* the Labour group further responded to the criticism of the Greens. They said Labour have a proud record of standing up for trans rights, "and have done since before the Greens had a presence in Newham."

They said Labour-run Newham Council was the first London borough in 2019 to fly the trans-inclusive Progress Rainbow Flag. "We also fund Forest Gayte Pride and support Queer Newham, a local grassroots LGBTQ+ charity."

On the row over the amendment Labour Group said: "It is regretful that the Green Party Councillors wish to play politics where there is common ground."

They said the amendment was brought to the council "without following correct constitutional procedures".

"Newham Labour Group are getting on with supporting trans people. We are not wasting our time on the procedural nature of a Council amendment." ●



James Asser

community.

Other councillors – notably Cllr Rohit Dasgupta and Cllr Neil Wilson, also long-time campaigners for gay rights – weighed in with their support for the motion which highlighted a concerning rise in transphobia and commits the council to substantial action to support the trans community.

"Trans people are some of the most vulnerable and discriminated against members of society," said Cllr Higgins, "and they deserve specific attention and support, especially in this transphobic climate we're experiencing."

Newham's other Green councillor, Danny Keeling, the first openly non-binary councillor elected in the



Rohit K Dasgupta

Crossrail: a sign of greatness on our doorstep

A trip on the new Elizabeth Line gives Irfan Badshah hope for the future of modern travel

There is something different about my commute from Forest Gate these days. My regular journey to London Bridge where I work as a trainee solicitor has taken a turn for the better.

The Elizabeth Line train from Forest Gate station heads underground through a magnificent new tunnel to Paddington station, an impressive feat of engineering.

The eerily silent air-conditioned cabin glides along the track. The only thing visible through the wide-pane window is a yellow-cable stretching all the way through. The only sound, a small burr from the drivetrain – electric powered and fed by overhead cable.

Staring at the window, images flash in my mind from the BBC documentary of the gargantuan tunnel-boring machines with orange hi-vis jackets and hard hats bobbing up and down on them. This Bombardier machine, Derby-built from fibreglass, steel and plastic makes light work of carrying the thousand or so people with me.



And then, Whitechapel station. The train stops. The same monotone voice heard on London's buses booms out of the tannoy and the glass doors on the platform open to a beautiful, wide vista. A curved arch roof and grey concrete slabs adorned the walls. And among that plastered on the walls some kind of modernist art.

This could be the grand Moscow underground built by slave labour at the command of Stalin. But no, the design seamless, easy, practical was quintessentially British. The planning-process, slow, expensive and

time-consuming was characteristically British and the care for each skeleton or skull slowly unearthed by giddy archaeologists wielding paint-brushes was also quintessentially British.

And it is no surprise that this new line is already attracting millions of passengers and after only a few months is close to being the busiest line in London. I have no doubt this truly great train will show to London's millions of tourists why this is the greatest city on earth.

It will dramatically transform connections across the capital. From Shenfield in the East – Essex proper – you can now follow the metaphorical road all the way to Heathrow Airport, Reading and Slough in the West.

The population caught in the net of this new network is massive and will grow. There will be new jobs, museums or concerts or games to see. More new homes will be built along the route. More businesses will take up premises. The cumulative impact of such infrastructure investment is truly impressive.

That is why despite the seemingly ever-increasing cost, despite the repeated delays and despite the passionate objections, I am in favour of

HS2 – it should be full-steam ahead for this project.

These challenges are all part of the painful birthing of any major infrastructure scheme (how many times was Crossrail delayed?) and I am convinced, as you should be too, that once new trains start rolling out of Euston the benefits of HS2 to so many folks will soon be abundantly clear.

No person is enthused to travel to work or anywhere else for that matter when conveyed on wobbly corrugated steel-boxes: slow, creaky, and stifling. That was the old TFL Rail and that is still an accurate portrait of travel in many parts of Britain.

The clear impact of infrastructure investment in London makes a positive case for the government to integrate Northern and Southern towns – like Bradford – into the cities and hubs of their regions. Those regions should have an HS2 – style connection to London and eventually to Edinburgh itself.

Finally, and by no means least, the Elizabeth Line bearing the name of the late Queen is a truly lasting and befitting tribute. It is a line of which we can all be proud and a lasting sign of a great country and its capacity for change and innovation. ●

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Newham's homes crisis needs urgent government action

AIDAN WHITE

Newham is at the epicentre of a national homeless crisis with around one in every 21 people with no permanent place to live – almost ten times the national average.

Council leaders battling to avoid evictions and to keep people in their homes have told *Newham Voices* that a wholesale review of government pol-

places to live means Newham is facing near-impossible challenges, made worse by cuts in government funding both for housing investment and welfare services.

And the crisis has intensified in recent months following the lifting of a ban on forced evictions which offered families in need some temporary security during the Covid 19 pandemic.

Council efforts to prevent a new

will open shortly at Ferrier Point in Canning Town.

Like other London councils Newham believes a significant increase in the Local Housing Allowance would be a start, by improving support for low-income households in the private rented sector.

London Councils believes this allowance should be increased to cover at least 30 percent of local market rates and they point out that the government's decision to boost the allowance at the height of the Covid-19 emergency was a key factor in preventing greater homelessness.

"But it's not just housing allowance," says Thompson. "The whole welfare benefits cap needs to be looked at. The cap has a direct impact on people's ability to pay."

Newham also suffers from the impact of right to buy laws which contribute to the shortage of housing stock and government needs to ensure more long-term investment in affordable housing, particularly in homes for social rent.

Above all, more funding for homelessness services is needed to keep pace with inflation and to meet the rising level of homelessness in Newham. In particular more local welfare assistance schemes are needed to help residents, including in preventing homelessness.

The government needs to reinstate ring-fenced, long-term direct funding for local authorities' welfare assistance programmes, say London Councils. These were abolished seven years ago forcing councils to decide whether to maintain a welfare assistance service paid via their general funds.

When launching its strategy to combat homelessness for 2021-2026 Newham Council estimated that one in 22 people in Newham were homeless. Since then an extra 700 people have found themselves with nowhere to live.

The Council strategy also involves working with Newham's 25,000 landlords to support people at risk of homelessness and to combat harassment and illegal evictions. ●



A "perfect storm" of low income families, child poverty, rising rents and chronic shortage of affordable places to live means Newham is facing near-impossible challenges, made worse by cuts in government funding both for housing investment and welfare services.

icy and targeted assistance to ease the crisis is urgently needed.

Councillor Shaban Mohammed, Newham Council cabinet lead on housing, insists that the government needs to change course on a raft of housing and welfare policies including right to buy laws that have led to a chronic shortage of housing stock.

"We urgently need more resources to help low-income households with housing costs and to provide more investment in new affordable homes," he said

A report from the homeless charity Shelter, released last month, says the crisis in Newham compares to an average of one in 58 people who are homeless across the whole of London.

A "perfect storm" of low income families, child poverty, rising rents and chronic shortage of affordable

wave of homelessness have been initially successful, but now the Borough is recording the highest number of evictions from private rented accommodation in London.

Additionally, around 5,800 people in Newham are in temporary accommodation, but even that is a "misnomer" according to Candida Thompson, Newham's Assistant Head of Housing Services, who says providing a roof over the heads of people otherwise on the streets is far from short-term.

Many people have been living in so-called "temporary" homes for years, often for more than five years and now numbers are rising.

The council is opening housing hubs to give residents an opportunity to get face-to-face advice to solve their housing problems. The first opened in Stratford last year and a second

Final brick laid in transformation of former West Ham stadium site

Newham's housing lead Councillor Shaban Mohammed joined Barratt London and its development partners, Knight Frank and John Rowan and Partners to celebrate the Topping Out of Sealy Tower, at the housebuilder's Upton Gardens development on Thunderer Street.

Cllr Mohammed laid the last remaining brick on the apartment block, which will provide 68 new one and two-bedroom homes, marking it structurally complete.

To complete the ceremony, Stephen Thompson, Managing Director for Barratt East London, presented Councillor Mohammed with an engraved trowel.

The event marks the completion of the final phase at Upton Gardens, a development built on the site of West Ham United's former Boleyn Ground and now hosts over 800 homes, a residents' gym, concierge service, library, and on-site café.

Councillor Shaban Mohammed said: "As a long-standing resident of Newham, it's great to see the work the team at Upton Gardens have done to transform this historic site and honour its heritage throughout."

Stephen Thompson, Managing Director for Barratt East London, said: "This development brings a wealth of much-needed sustainable, high-quality, private, and affordable housing to Newham."



Barratt London - Upton Gardens Topping Out

£1.6m boost for Newham's flagship community assembly programme

Newham Council is revamping its flagship community assembly programme and is planning to put another £1.6 million in the activities over the next two years.

A review of the programme reveals that since 2019 more than 16,500 Newham residents have taken part in community assemblies which are at the heart of one of the country's largest and most comprehensive participatory budgeting programmes.

Now the Council cabinet has agreed to allocate £200,000 to each of eight neighbourhood assemblies in Stratford and West Ham, Plaistow, Forest Gate, East Ham, Custom House and Canning Town, Manor Park, Beckton and Royal Docks, and Green Street, giving local people in these areas a say in how local funding is spent.

The assemblies allow people to put forward their own projects and ideas to meet local needs and they then vote to choose projects for funding.

The evaluation of the work over the past two years found that almost 90 per-

cent of residents who attended a community assembly in 2022 felt more connected to their local area after attending.

Councillor Charlene McLean, Cabinet Member for Resident Engagement and Resident Experience said that the funding has already reached 209 resident groups, charities, social enterprises, faith organisations, voluntary and community organisations.

The assemblies, she says, "represent the diversity of experience and ways that communities and the Council can work together toward 'Building a Fairer Newham'."

The council has also agreed to change the process to establish a two-year cycle. The first year will focus on deliberation, project applications and participatory budgeting and the second year will concentrate on project delivery and evaluation.

A key recommendation is to encourage residents from all ethnic backgrounds to join community assembly events and more effort will be put into improving communications to trans-

form awareness of the programme so that residents better understand what it is and how to take part.

Project case studies will also be used to encourage residents from cur-

rently underrepresented communities to take part.

Newham Voices featured all of the winning projects last year. These can be found at www.newhamvoices.co.uk



Alma Street Playground – a chosen project

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The Newham Apprenticeship Fair is taking place during National Apprenticeship Week, whose theme is Skills for Life. During this event you will be able to:

- learn about different sectors, pay and benefits
- meet some apprentices and hear about their journey
- find out about the recruitment processes
- get tips on completing an application form.

**Thursday 9 February
10am-4pm**

(booking required for hourly slots)
Open to all Newham residents and those studying in Newham.



To book your free attendance slot please visit scan the QR code or visit <https://bit.ly/3We21cF>

The following employers will be attending:



Council news

Peter Landman reports from the 16 January meeting of Newham Council

Once again there were protests at the beginning, from a group of members of the public with a grievance. The meeting was adjourned for ten minutes.

But overall, the meetings are interesting, with a wide ranging agenda starting at the top with announcements from the Chief Executive or Mayor, going on to submissions in different ways from members of the public, and individual councillors. The agenda also allows for outside speakers.

The speaker was Lady Phyll, Executive Director of UK Black Pride. Her intervention on countering discrimination and LGBTQ+ rights was a curtain-raiser for the debate on trans rights later in the meeting (see Page 3).

After this, there were questions from individual councillors and six from members of the public. Questions on three subjects came up:

- How to avoid people slipping on pavements during cold weather
- What's happening about a new Council Constitution?
- When will food waste recycling be introduced?

Written responses: The Council could not expect to have enough grit for

every street, but they are engaging with community groups to single out more streets that could do with gritting, and examining ways to ensure greater safety for cyclists.

The Mayor said she takes a revised constitution seriously, and that work is ongoing.

On food waste recycling, the Council does not have sole responsibility. This is with the East London Waste Authority that includes other Councils. However the Council is working on a food waste collection pilot. But meanwhile composting bins can be bought for £12.50 each, more details from **0845 130 6090**.

Paul Grigoras, a member of the public, asked about a plan to replace "deadly and toxic cars" on our roads. Cabinet Member James Asser responded with a list of measures: low traffic neighbourhoods; healthy school streets; expanding the number of electric charging points; and promotion of cycling

Motion from Councillor Rita Chada Defending the Right to Seek Safety from War and Persecution. Her motion calls upon the Government to withdraw the Rwanda Agreement, and to repeal the Nationality and Borders Act; in favour of a system that treats all asylum seekers with dignity and compassion. She urges Newham to become a recognised Borough of Sanctuary. This was agreed.

3,000 will get aid to stay warm

The Renewal Programme and Groundwork, in partnership with the Cadent Foundation have jointly launched the 'Stay Warm in Newham' project.

The project was introduced as the latest figures estimate that from April 2023, 8.6 million people will be living in fuel poverty across the UK.

The Cadent Foundation's aim is to help households find sustainable solutions to fuel poverty by awarding grants to charities and organisations working to support those impacted by this growing issue. They have awarded

more than £8.7 million to support charities across its network.

The Cadent Foundation approached Newham Council, the Renewal Programme and Groundwork in early 2022 to look at how community partners could come together in a multi-agency approach to tackle fuel poverty. These discussions led to the development of the 'Stay Warm in Newham' project.

This two-year project looks to address the rising levels of fuel poverty among Newham residents, by providing energy support and advice through a dedicated link worker service.

Groundwork-Green Doctors service will be offering impartial advice and support to help people save energy, reduce bills, and live in a warmer, more comfortable home.

The Renewal Programme and its partners will support 3,000 Newham residents a year to access warm bank sessions, support, and activities. We will provide energy related hardship grants to some of its vulnerable residents. We



STAY WARM IN NEWHAM

Struggling with rising energy costs? Join our warm bank sessions and access the below services.

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will also provide hot meals once a week and host volunteer led cooking classes to encourage residents to try different energy saving methods. ●



Parks still feel heat from summer

ROGER JONES, FRIENDS OF WEST HAM PARK

The Met Office has recently confirmed what we all really know, that 2022 was the hottest year in the UK since records began. It may have been too warm for us, but what about the trees and plants in West Ham Park and other open spaces. They have found the heat and lack of rain difficult to tolerate as well. You may have noticed trees losing many of their leaves well before autumn. Trees are able to survive extreme conditions by shutting themselves down and waiting for the groundwater to return over the winter.

An occasional cool damp summer will not put things right. The long term forecast is for a more extreme climate in the UK. This does have consequences for all parks and open spaces which have little or no rain water storage facilities. When there is no rain replenishing the water in the ground, trees and plants start to suffer. Many of our trees and plants thrive best in the 'traditional' British summer with warmish temperatures and plenty of rain. They are much less suited to a drier and warmer environment. The problem will get worse over time. The lovely green spaces we enjoy will become increasingly brown and dried out.

It will be necessary to consider how rain water is retained and used during very dry periods. This is potentially very expensive and could take up a lot of space. What happens if the current trees and plants are not able to survive in the long term. The cost and disruption caused by replacing them would be very considerable. Critically with different, more heat and drought tolerant trees and plants, parks may start to look very different. Would the large areas of grass be sustainable in the long term?

We need to consider these questions now, before it is too late. ●

My Newham

Julia Omari interviews Justine Rose

How long have you been connected to Newham?

I have lived in Newham since 2002

What's your favourite Newham moment?

Volunteering at the Olympic Games in 2012. I was at the driver check in area on the park and my husband was at the water polo arena. The closing ceremony was our wedding anniversary, we watched the fireworks from the bridge on Olympic Park Avenue (now student accommodation). It was the perfect end to an incredible two weeks.

Favourite place to eat in Newham?

I love the Sunday roasts at Barge East (where Carpenters Road crosses into Hackney Wick). They use seasonal

produce and have even created their own fruit and vegetable garden alongside the canal.

Favourite Newham outdoor space?

The Olympic Park. It has gone from strength to strength since the games ended, and was a real lifeline during lockdown.

How would you spend a free day in Newham?

I would walk down the river Lea via Cody Dock to Trinity Buoy Wharf, enjoying the views along the way. They are both great spaces with history, activities, events, garden and an exhibition space. There is always something on.

In the evening I would see the latest show at Stratford East Theatre. I have been a regular visitor the whole time I have lived in Newham. The range and quality of productions is always excellent.

Tell us about Stratford Station's book swap library.

The book swap was set up in December 2012. Someone at the place I was working at the time was involved in encouraging TFL to set up book swaps at all their stations. They asked if anyone would like to try and get their local station involved. The station managers at Stratford have been very helpful.

The swap has gone through a few versions of shelves. The current ones are going to have Elizabeth Line branding and signage added to them soon.

The shelves are available for anyone to use anytime the station is open. They can be found in the tunnel on the WH Smith side of the station. Next to the kiosk and the stairs to central line west / Elizabeth Line west. All books are welcome, any genre, age and language. There is a huge throughput of books and anything seems to go! Magazines are welcome too. If the swap is full, the station requests that users don't leave bags of books. Excess books can be taken to the Westfield book swap, at the first floor food court.

Finish the sentence, Newham is...

Diverse, eclectic and vibrant.



Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park

Custom House community demands further action on development plans

Custom House residents are impatient for change and they want to work with the Newham Council to make sure the £300 million masterplan for redevelopment goes ahead with the right priorities. Here **Becky Turner** of PEACH explains the issues that still have to be resolved.

PEACH members have never been against this regeneration, but we have always wanted to make sure the regeneration was fair, and the community was kept together.

There are good steps forward, for example, temporary tenants have been offered secure tenancies in the new development, but there are also setbacks.

Some residents will be pushed out, rents will rise for many, and there is no Community Centre or Community Land Trust in the plans.

Most residents left in phase one are "Temporary Tenants" who will have to pay higher rent, the so-called London Affordable Rent in the new development.

A three-bedroom Council flat in the Custom House regeneration area costs about £120 per week and under the regeneration a similar three-bedroom flat at the new London Affordable Rent is currently £180 per week.

When challenging this rent increase the Independent Tenants Leaseholder Advisor said that 'It won't affect them because the rent will be covered by housing benefit' which assumes everyone is receiving housing benefit, which is not true but anyway can trap people into being on benefits because they would be worse off if they worked.

Private tenants like Larisa who has lived in her home for 20 years and who's heart is in the community - will be evicted as a result of this regeneration.

Despite voicing her concerns about the regeneration plans in Co-Production steering group meetings, she was told that they wouldn't change the plans.

Homeowners are also not happy. There is no guarantee what ownership model they will be eligible for. They fear high service charges and shared ownership rents.

Newham Council claims these plans have been co-produced with residents, however the landlord offer booklet is also very similar to the Carpenters Estate in Stratford, clear evidence that the council decided the plans separately from the residents.

PEACH members want to negotiate with Newham Council, to make sure the regeneration plans are changed so that the Custom House community can stick together.

Our People's Vote demands are essential for ensuring the redevelopment meets the needs of our community and includes calls to repair our homes now, we want healthy homes to live in, keep and refurbish the homes that are structurally safe and, above all, no unnecessary demolition.

We also demand an end to temporary tenancies and for council tenants to

stay in current homes where possible. Also homeowners should be able to stay in their current homes if they want, as should private tenants who have lived in the area for more than five years.

Finally, we support community owned and managed land with a PEACH run community centre, a Community Owned High Street - community owned, affordable rents for local shops and businesses that employ local people and Community Land Trust Homes in the regeneration area - affordable homes owned by the community.

PEACH members want their community to be thriving and healthy today, not in years to come and not after they have been pushed out.

PEACH is People's Empowerment Alliance for Custom House. Find out more at www.peach-e16.org.uk

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Above: Visualisation of Custom House redevelopment by Adam Khan Architects via adamkhan.co.uk

Newham celebrates LGBTQ+ History Month

'Art – behind the lens' theme for 2023

NEANDRA ETIENNE

Newham will celebrate February LGBTQ+ History Month with a programme of activities and events in the theme of 'Art – Behind the Lens'.

There will be speeches, followed by refreshments at the Intersex Progress Flag raising event at East Ham Town Hall to launch Newham's LGBTQ+ History Month programme.

Raze Collective, a charity dedicated

to promoting the very best and boldest of queer performance in the UK, will curate the opening evening event by hosting a night of Cabaret.

Raze Collective previously participated in the Newham Unlocked Festival 2022.

On the night there will also be a chance to get your portraits taken by Holly Revell, a photographer and artist specialising in queer performance, theatre and portraiture.

The activities which include film screenings, talks, Drag Queen Storytelling, workshops and performances, will celebrate and highlight the culture, history and achievements of the LGBTQ+ community.

Newham based SheHerTheyThem is included in the events line-up. Dominique Holmes from SheHerTheyThem told *Newham Voices*, "SheHerTheyThem will be holding community building socials on the first Thursday of each month at Tracks

E7, as we continue to hold space for Newham's queer women and gender nonconforming community.

"Our monthly events commence with a Games Night Social on Thursday 2 February, a fun and relaxed opportunity to meet and connect with like-minded individuals from the local area in a safe space."

This programme is part of Newham Unlocked, the Council's cultural festival of events and activities which highlight the rich and diverse mix of creativity that exists in the Borough and ensure that residents get the chance to experience their local vibrant and diverse cultural community.

LGBTQ+ History Month Flag Raising event, Wednesday 1 February, 12-2pm, East Ham Town Hall

Find out more about Newham's LGBTQ+ History Month at:

www.newhamlgbthistory.org
www.shehertheythem.com/events



RuPaul's DragCon UK sashays back to London

NEANDRA ETIENNE

RuPaul's Drag Race host and Emmy Award-winner RuPaul opened the second year of RuPaul's DragCon 2023 by cutting the pink ribbon with Michelle Visage and the queens from across the global franchise.

The drag queens were cheered on by visitors who watched as the queens made a grand entrance, strutting down the legendary pink carpet.

Created by RuPaul and World of Wonder Productions, RuPaul's DragCon UK featured performances from an array of queens, including the newly crowned winner of Season 4 Danny Beard and Just May who I previously interviewed for

Newham Voices.

Visitors enjoyed meet and greet opportunities, a makeup competition judged by RuPaul's very own make-up artist Raven and an in conversation with chat show host and author Graham Norton.

The Main Stage, sponsored by WOW Presents Plus, featured two DJ sets by RuPaul as well as iconic performances by Drag Race fan-favourites.

The dedicated Kids Zone sponsored by WildBrain's Teletubbies provided fun for the whole family throughout the three-day celebrations, allowing kids (and kids at heart) to meet and greet the Teletubbies.

Fenton Bailey and Randy Barbato, Co-Founders of World of Wonder, said: "We are so excited that DragCon UK is back. Huge thanks to the more than 150 queens from the Drag Race Universe who participated, and to everyone who came out to see them. A special shout out to the legendary and iconic Teletubbies who are reminders of the spirit of love and inclusiveness that DragCon represents."



©World of Wonder Productions/
Getty Images/Dave Benett

[@dragraceukbbc](https://www.instagram.com/dragraceukbbc)
[@dragraceukbbc](https://www.twitter.com/dragraceukbbc)

Advertisement

Join us to celebrate the contribution of LGBTQ+ people in our borough.

This one year project includes a book club, oral history training, and recording and archiving our stories online.

Full programme available at www.newhampoetrygroup.com
To join us email newhampoetrygroup@gmail.com
Find us on Facebook / Twitter / Instagram / Flickr / YouTube



Forest Gate school closing the class achievement gap

An Ofsted-rated outstanding Forest Gate school has been ranked in the top 50 schools nationally for a remarkable five years in a row.

Forest Gate Community School pupils earn on average roughly one grade higher than at other schools according to the Progress 8 government benchmark for measuring school success, charting pupils' progress from when they start and leave school.

Since 2016, the school has been consistently among the top performing in the country, one year coming fourth in the UK. The school was ranked equal 34th in this year's list.

The run of success does not include 2020 and 2021 when teachers assessed grades due to Covid.

The school has also bucked a national trend of a widening attainment gap between rich and poor children post pandemic.

On average disadvantaged kids are a half grade worse off than richer students. At Forest Gate Community School they outperformed their middle-class peers.

Disadvantaged students at the school have a progress score of plus 0.91 – which puts the school in the top ten nationally for GCSE results for youngsters from poor backgrounds.

Headteacher Shuabur Rahman said: "Ten years ago if you came to this school your chances of going on to A Levels, then university and getting into a successful and fulfilling career were pretty low.

"We are now consistently able to help our students take that crucial first step

on a journey which will change the entire course of their lives.

"These results are life changing, not just for the students but the entire community we serve. It is life affirming proof of what a force for positive change a school can be."

The school is operated by The Community Schools Trust which also runs fellow Newham school Cumberland Community School which placed 446th out of over 3500 schools nationally.

CEO Simon Elliott added: "We keep

the children behind every day for an hour after school so that our parents can get access to free tutoring because we want to level the playing field with those in more affluent areas.

"The end result is that despite serving one of the poorest communities in the country, Forest Gate Community School has been among the best in the country for five years in a row.

"That level of consistency doesn't happen by accident. It's due to a constant desire to improve in every department." ●



Left to right Daisy Olney, Tanveer Hussain, headteacher Shuabur Rahman, Ayus Gurung and Sarae John

Newham's memories of the Queen

A display of messages and tributes from Newham residents to Queen Elizabeth II who died in September has been unveiled at East Ham Library.

On show are messages of sympathy and thanks in public condolence books which were opened in libraries and special sites across the Borough.

The display was opened by the Mayor of Newham, Rokhsana Fiaz and the Council's Interim Chief Executive Colin Ansell. The Mayor said: "The Queen was much loved and this display is our token of appreciation in recognition of her life of dedicated service and unwavering duty."

The Council has collected this material for permanent preservation in Newham's archives as a legacy of cherished memories of Queen Elizabeth II and her long reign. Items from this collection selected for display include individual books of condolence and the Proclamation of the King, alongside archive images of Queen Elizabeth visiting Newham.

The display is in place from 18 January to 14 March. All the items, including a slideshow of over 100 written messages, can be viewed at <http://www.newham.gov.uk/libraries-arts-culture/local-history-archives/1>.

Newham residents who want to share memories or photographs of Queen Elizabeth can still get in touch with Newham archives at archives-localstudies@newham.gov.uk.



Newham Council's Mayor and Chief Executive view collection in memory of the late Queen

Local doctor who called out discrimination and championed patient rights

Dr S Velupillai, a former GP based in Plaistow who built a reputation around fighting for social justice, died peacefully at home in Devon on Boxing Day.

Dr Velupillai was a former Balaam Street Practice GP who re-established the practice after it was refurbished in the late 1980s. Initially he worked as a single-handed GP establishing strong working relationships within the practice team and with the wider multidisciplinary team. Later he formed a partnership with Dr Mollie McBride and Dr Ghassan Al-Mudallal.

Dr Velupillai was known for his quiet calm approach, his astute medical knowledge and his compas-



sion. Those close to him said he had a strong sense of social justice and used his influence to uphold people's rights if they were encountering

obstacles in accessing appropriate support, housing, benefits, or specialist health care.

He was quick to challenge suspected discrimination and championed the rights and needs of his patients. Colleagues loved working with him. He respected them, trusted them, listened to them and brought out the best in them.

But his greatest gift was the support he gave his patients to navigate whatever issue brought them to his consultation room. They knew he was on their team. He leaves his wife Patsy, a former Newham Clinical Psychologist, and their much-loved dog, Iona. ●

Mayor Khan urged to block Sphere

The MSG Sphere, the new brightly-lit spherical concert hall and events venue planned for Stratford has moved another step closer.

But opponents, including Newham Mayor Rokhsana Fiaz, are appealing to London Mayor Sadiq Khan to stop the development.

Despite passionate appeals against the Sphere the planning committee of the London Legacy Development Corporation gave it the go ahead at a crucial meeting on January 24.

Local residents, councils and Stratford Labour MP Lyn Brown have long opposed the sphere amidst concerns that the arena with its 21,500 capacity will blight the area with light and noise pollution.

The US firm Madison Square Garden Company (MSG), owner of the New York concert and sports venue, plans to open a new nightclub, shops and restaurants on the empty parcel of land between Stratford station and the Olympic park.

Lyn Brown had urged the authority to use its “last chance” to block the development of the Sphere, whose facade will be covered with more than 1m LEDs and show videos and adverts from dawn till late.

She told *The Guardian*: “The proposed development is a monstrosity” adding the meeting was “the LLDC’s last chance to demonstrate they are able to prioritise residents’ health and wellbeing over MSG’s interests and profits”.

But last minute interventions by campaigners and local Green councillors failed to sway planners. There were no votes against the plan on the committee which includes council representatives from local boroughs.

The campaign group Stop MSG Sphere were dismayed at the outcome. “We gave it our best shot” they said on Twitter and expressed disappointment that in the end no-one voted against the plans. They complained that the



Image via london.msg.com

review process agreed by the planning committee of a 5-year evaluation of the impact of the advertising consent for 25 years was “paltry”. ●

Samuel Gurney – the remarkable man behind the monument

In our regular series on memoirs across the Borough, Irfan Badshah finds a philanthropist for Newham to be proud of

It is difficult to miss it – though at its base these days linger young men with their bicycles waiting for their next takeaway delivery on Uber or Deliveroo. I am talking about the memorial obelisk to Sir Samuel Gurney in Stratford. Yes, that tall pillar of grey marble – gradually slimming as you crane your neck upwards at the sky – and crowned with a pyramid.

The obelisk was put up in the mid-19th century in front of the Martyr’s Church and Stratford Town Hall – the town hall where Sir Keir Hardie famously stood on the balcony and waved to West Ham’s

working men and women after being elected Britain’s first Labour Member of the House of Commons. A small quadrangle containing Stratford’s history.

Samuel was born into a Quaker family of mercantile background in Norfolk. He continued this tradition first by trading sugar and then working for a local Norfolk bank founded by his father, which he later rebranded and brought to London.

He ploughed his profits into buying land and was a landowner of large parts of what is now West Ham and Plaistow, including the land which is now West Ham Park and Plashet Park. But it was his achievements in the realm of philanthropy that earned him the affection of his peers and the memory of posterity.

This included work on relief of pain

and ill health. On his initiative in 1855 a committee founded the Poplar Hospital for Accidents, the first casualty hospital for dock workers in East London.

Gurney took part in the campaign for penal reform at a time when prison conditions in England were based entirely on the principle of punishment and deterrence. He campaigned with Elizabeth Fry for the reform of the penal code, the improvements of prison discipline and conditions for inmates, especially women. He worked to introduce the principle of rehabilitation into the treatment of offenders.

In 1843 he became treasurer of the British and Foreign School society and in that capacity visited Ireland in 1849 to distribute aid to Irish people suffering from the effects of famine.

Of all his achievements, however, the most important and possibly most relevant in our debates today was the role he played in the campaign to end slavery in the British Empire led by William Pitt the Younger.

The mechanism of their reform campaign was Parliament, and it was along with the Great Reform Act passed in the same year that Parliament began to absorb and reflect in new legislation the pressures developing on the ground across England. These were produced by reformers like the Chartists, local societies, radical members as individuals and men of religious non-conformist belief like Gurney himself.

The bulk of enslaved African people were in the Americas and a group of freed American slaves founded an independent colony in Africa named

Liberia. Throughout the remainder of his life Samuel Gurney became a patron of that nation and corresponded with its President Roberts. For this he had a town named in his honour.

After his crusade against the slave trade, Gurney returned to East Ham and settled at Ham Hall in Portway (later sold and now the Territorial Army barracks). He died in 1856 – a time of great expansion in the population of East Ham.

Sir Samuel Gurney was a remarkably active man from a remarkably active family of brothers and sisters almost all driven by their Quaker beliefs. Among them was prison reformer Elizabeth Fry whose face was printed in green on the old paper five-pound notes. Elizabeth too was an East Ham woman and lived next to Plashet Park which was a popular new residential area where many Quakers settled.

Whether dock worker or African slave in the Americas, Gurney’s heart burned with the knowledge their treatment merited attention and concern. He translated that feeling into steady, constant, and often defiant work (in the face of prevailing attitudes) to improve their condition.

The work that was to be done for the Quaker faithful was here on earth – Jerusalem was to be built in Britain – and, nearly 200 years later the society he was striving to create is still a work in progress.

So, spare a thought the next time you pass the grey plinth for Sir Samuel Gurney and everything his life’s efforts represent. ●



Memorial obelisk in Stratford and portrait of Samuel Gurney (inset)



SOMETHING'S BREWING



Love 'em or hate 'em, Phil Mellows is anxious about the loss of two Wetherspoon's pubs

Two of Newham's three J D Wetherspoon pubs were put up for sale at the end of last year. The Miller's Well in East Ham and the Hudson Bay in Forest Gate are among some 50 of the group's houses on the market, leaving the Goldengrove in Stratford as its sole presence in the Borough.

There are those who will be celebrating this. The maverick free marketer, Spoons chair Tim Martin, who founded the company with one pub in 1979, has angered many by using his pubs as a platform to promote Brexit, and then, when lockdown came, by some careless comments about the plight of his staff – though he later adjusted his position on that, at least.

Both the Miller's Well and the Hudson Bay, which are still open, are under offer, but with negotiations under way, we don't know who the buyers might be. And we don't know whether they'll want these rather large sites as pubs.

These will be nervous times for the

regulars. While the fact these pubs are up for sale suggests business hasn't been great, thanks to the pandemic and now the cost-of-living crisis, there will be a substantial number of people who use their local Spoons as a kind of second living room, providing warmth and company as well as beer, coffee and food much more cheaply than most alternatives.

Older people in particular rely on these relaxed, undemanding social spaces to ease their loneliness. In a recent study by a sociologist Spoons customers spoke about how "comfortable" they felt there, within certain rules left to do their own thing under the unimposing supervision of friendly bar staff who know them by name.

Wetherspoon's has its failings, but I'm uneasy, too, about the possibility of losing these pubs altogether. Of course, they might remain pubs. They might become better pubs. Some of us are watching anxiously. ●



Cecilia Cran dreams of producing more of her own fruit and veg, starting with the humble tomato

As we emerge from another cold snap, it is hard to remember the days when we could sit outside in balmy weather, enjoying long sunny days. As I cast my mind back to those glorious days one memory sticks out – visiting a friend's house, where she made a meal for us purely using ingredients from her garden.

I was bowled over – not only is she an exceptionally adept cook, but also clearly very green-fingered. The meal was filling and delicious! I distinctly remember tasting the sweetest tomatoes, which she casually mentioned she'd grown from seed. I'm keen to try and reduce my food waste and produce more of my own fruit and vegetables – starting with tomatoes.



of each pot (I tend to just use a pencil for this) and carefully transplant one seedling from the group pot into its new single pot home. Add soil to ensure the root of the plant is secure and add water. Keep the plants in a sunny spot and continue to water when the top soil gets damp. After a few more weeks the plants should be ready to start to go outside and then look forward to your tomato harvest!

Before fruit appears, you will see very small, delicate yellow flowers begin to grow, these will develop into the tomatoes, so do not be tempted to remove or cut these off. At this stage, you can consider adding some specialised liquid plant food to promote tomato fruit growth every couple of weeks. Depending on the types of tomato plants you grow, fruits will likely start to appear from mid-summer onwards.

Green escape

Manor Park community garden was originally said to have been the site of riding stables, then a garage, then a car park, before an overgrown car park. This spot is now a flourishing, beautifully designed community garden.

Having received £20,000 funding through Newham Council's community assembly programme (see Page Five), the space was truly transformed. The garden is home to a variety of trees, vegetables, herbs and flowers and is a wonderful space open to all the community.

The garden is such a friendly, tranquil space. Whether you just want to get your green-fix, meet new people in the area or learn new gardening skills, it offers a wonderful idyll in the middle of the hustle and bustle of E12, free to enter and open to all.

The garden is a registered charity, with a board of trustees who help support the overall direction and decision making of the area. Trustees are accompanied by a host of regular gardeners who help manage and maintain the space. The team are always looking for friendly faces to help out, so please do connect with them over email: e12garden@gmail.com and visit the website to find out what's going on, new activities and when the latest series of excellent, free gardening workshops run via their website: www.manorparkcommunitygarden.co.uk



Photos courtesy Cecilia Cran

Bird's Eye View

By E7 Blackbird



In the first of her regular columns Lia Rees highlights some major events in E7

This abbreviated calendar for the first half of the year aims to take the mystery out of local events.

February

This month at the Gate Library there is Fothergill's Flowers exhibition, 2-23 February. A collaboration between artist Eleanor Pearce, Friends of West Ham Park and Forest Gate Community Garden, combining nature, art and local history. Another Fothergill event is planned for Saturday 25 February in the Community Garden. Wrap up warm! fgcommunitygarden.org friendsofwesthampark.co.uk

April

Forest Gate Community Garden on 8 April hosts its annual Spring Celebration, welcoming the warmer weather and longer opening hours.

In late April will be the new Sustainability Fair looks very interesting – a showcase for "environmental or sustainability projects". Currently in Forest Gate and Maryland, with Newham-wide plans.

May

The UP Garden has its first Spring event: let's welcome them to the

neighbourhood! A new community garden built with upcycled materials: that explains the name. The space is always open. See them at theupgarden.org The UP Garden, Eric Close, E7 0AY

There are three Bank Holidays this month including an extra one for the coronation (May 6). E7 Blackbird will be avoiding coronation events, and would love to hear about anything else happening.

The fairground normally comes to town (Wanstead Flats by Dames Road), and there's often a party at Woodgrange Market – but nothing confirmed yet. The "Green Man" might make an appearance at the Marketplace to welcome summer.

On Sunday May 7, 11am-1pm there's a Plant Sale at the Community Garden. Get down there early and prepare for a queue.

Janet Daniels on Latimer Road has her own Open Garden for the Asha Trust charity. Well worth a visit.

June

Midsummer brings a wave of community festivals and fun. Forest Gayte Pride weekend is 23-25 June, with the main day Saturday 24 June. There's music and family-friendly events in the marketplace, then late night cabaret and drag artists at the Forest Tavern. forestgaytepride.com

Bonham-Carter to play East Ham's Crossroads star

NEANDRA ETIENNE

Academy Award nominee and BAFTA-winning actor Helena Bonham Carter is the star of a new TV drama *Nolly*, playing the role of Noele Gordon, the East Ham girl who made her name in the TV soap *Crossroads*.

The drama was influenced by co-stars and friends, because Noele's closest relations are no longer around. However, her friends are said to be thrilled that it is being produced and know Noele herself would be delighted with it.

Newham Voices interviewed Paul Greenfield, a friend of Noele who oversees the Noele Gordon Archive. She rented one of her houses to Paul in the 1980s and they became friends, which is how he was given her collection of documents and photographs.

Paul provided material and information for the documentary about Noele titled *The Real Nolly*.

Noele was born in Clements Road, East Ham on 25 December 1919. She attended Lathom Junior School in East Ham and was brought up mainly by her mother Joan and some aunts who lived nearby. Her father was rarely at home because he was travelling with the Navy.

Paul said Noele told him that when she started school she had a strong Scottish accent as her parents Joan and dad James were both from North of the Border. She remembered the other children thinking she was quite different to them, but she soon lost the accent.

Her theatrical learning was with Maude Wells at St Barnabas Church Hall every weekend up until she moved to Ilford when she was a young teenager.

Maude regularly put on performances at the East Ham Palace and Noele played several parts in those productions. She performed songs like *Dear Little Jammy Face* and *Oh What the Navy's Done for Me*. She also had the star role in a version of *Minister of Mirth*, just without the saucy jokes.

Paul told *Newham Voices* how Noele recalled her earliest memories in East Ham.

"I've always had a good memory," she told him, "which is why I don't have much trouble learning lines, and I can remember Mother and me living at Clements Road, East Ham, when I wasn't much more than two-years-old.

"We had a typical, suburban house with a paved garden in the front and a small garden at the back. I remember my mother's Victorian brass bed, a beautiful piece of furniture... I enjoyed every moment of my years with Maude [Wells] and performing at the East Ham Palace in the revue shows."

Noele performed with East Ham's Forces Sweetheart Dame Vera Lynn,



Images courtesy of Paul Greenfield/The Noele Gordon Archive, Geoff Lancashire Collection and Gregory and Vera/Ilford neighbours of Noele

who was born in 1917.

They worked together during the Second World War with ENSA, entertaining the British troops in a number of Variety Bills.

Paul said there used to be a photograph of the two of them together (a reunion many years later from when they first met) - which unfortunately he doesn't have - but it was published in a local newspaper in the south of England many years ago.

Noele often went back to East Ham during the 1970s when her aunts were still alive and lived there. She also did a photo shoot with the *TV Times* outside the house in the mid-1970s when she was winning all her awards - she even took her Rolls Royce along to the street to be photographed with it.

Noele helped establish a charity called Caring for Carers and opened the branch in 1976 that covers East Ham. She kept in regular contact with it to see how it was

progressing over the following years.

In tribute to Noele, Paul said: "Noele Gordon became one of television's female pioneers in the UK, along with a celebrated West End theatre career which all began aged two and a half at East Ham Palace back in 1922.

"While she became one of the most famous faces on TV in the sixties and seventies, off screen she was simply Nolly and wanted to be treated just like everyone else. In public, she was a star, and I am thrilled her star is shining again thanks to the renewed interest in Noele through the ITV drama."

The three-part drama 'Nolly' and documentary *The Real Nolly* will begin streaming on ITVX from Thursday 2 February with a later screening on ITV1

www.itv.com
www.nolegordon.co.uk

Noele Gordon, 1919-1985

Hallsville final phase gets go-ahead

The fourth and final phase of the Hallsville development in Canning Town has been given the go ahead. Planning permission has been granted for the final part of the plan which includes 377 purpose-built student accommodation rooms, more space for shops and landscaping. Work will start by the end of the year.

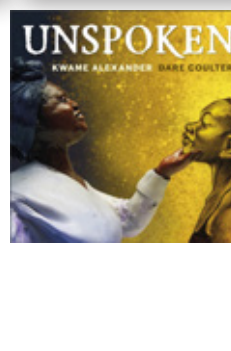
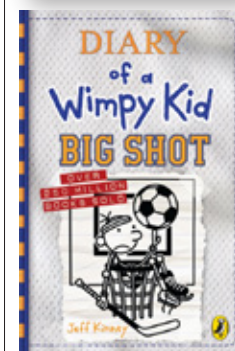
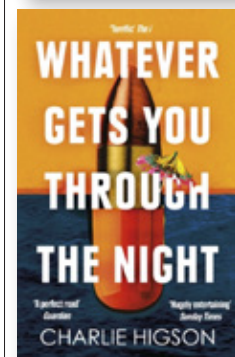
The Hallsville Quarter masterplan is expected to complete in Summer 2025 and in total will provide more than 1,100 new homes, a new hotel, up to 30,000m² of leisure, work and retail space with a new art-house style cinema, and community facilities including a new public health centre close to the Canning Town transport hub.



Good reads in Newham

The Newham Bookshop in Barking Road tells us these are the top sellers this month:

- **Whatever Gets You Through the Night**
By Charlie Higson
- **The Shards**
By Bret Easton Ellis
- **Those People Next Door**
By Kia Abdullah (local author)
- **Unspoken: Talking About Slavery**
By Kwame Alexander
- **Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Big Shot**
By Jeff Kinney
- **Wearing My Mother's Heart**
By Sophia Thakur



Compiled by David Ceen,
Newham Bookshop
newhambooks.co.uk
@NewhamBookshop



SPORTS SHORTS

Compiled by **Neandra Etienne**

NewVic media student's take over BT Sport for the 4th year!

The students produced their own studio show with Clare Balding CBE, Haroon Mota, Asylum Welcome, Javeno Mclean from J7 Health Centre and Afro swing artist and Newham local, Kimbofficial1! The show airs nationally at 6.45pm on 28 January on BT Sport 2 advanced-television.com/2023/01/18/newvic-sixth-form-college-takeover-bt-sport/



Clare Balding CBE with NewVic media students

Bike Works, in partnership with Dr Bike, will be facilitating free bike MOTs. All attending will get a Hi-Vis jacket for each booking. Saturday 18 February, 10am-3pm, Memorial Community Church, E13. You must book to attend a free bike MOT appointment. Contact malaka@psbl.org.uk

Clapton CFC introduced their newest 5s team the Clapton Kickers! who were formed from the Open Access set-up and are coached by Haze. The Kickers made their debut in the Super5League Beginners Division in a game against Islington Reds. Well done to Gigi who scored the first ever goal!

Clapton CFC women's first team are scheduled to play Brentford Women in a London and South East Regional Women's League Division One North game. Sunday 26 February, Old Spotted Dog Ground, 2pm kick off.

www.claptoncfc.co.uk

Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park has a variety of free sporting activities to help keep you in shape. They include wall climbing, you can walk or run and explore their 500 acres of parkland or ride a Santander Bike from the cycle stations situated around the park. Bikeworks all ability cycling classes are Thursdays from 10-3

queenelizabetholympicpark.co.uk



Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park Climbing Wall

Active Newham's free girls football sessions are open for ages 13-19 year olds Thursdays, 7pm-8pm, Little Ilford Youth Zone, 1a Rectory Road, Manor Park E12. Contact sports@activenewham.org.uk for further information and bookings.

📍 [@littleilfordyouthzone1bn](https://www.instagram.com/littleilfordyouthzone1bn)

No Strings Badminton (NSB) is a national participation programme offering low-cost, fun 'pay and play' sessions, providing participants with a friendly and welcoming environment to play badminton, socialise and keep fit on their terms. NSB is fully inclusive and open to adult players of any age or ability.

Cost is £3 per person per week.

Tuesdays, 6pm-8pm, Lister Community School, St Mary's Road, Plaistow, E13

For more information, please email sports@activenewham.org.uk or book at eventbrite.co.uk/e/no-strings-badminton-tickets-507654808197

Windy Pandas London Dragon Boat club accepts anyone aged 14 and over who is a competent swimmer (up to 50 metres). They do not split their training sessions into a younger team or an older team as they are just one mixed crew and generally only have one training session a week.



Windy Pandas at their last international last year in Alkmaar, Amsterdam

The first sessions are always free and a newbie officer will get in contact with anyone interested in trying out the sport.

After the first session the newbie officer will stay in contact in the hope that they will want to become a member and paddle with them for races to come around the country or at their annual international trip.

Training takes place every Saturday (wind dependent) from 10am-12pm with the occasional social dim sum lunch at Yi-Ban (which is just upstairs) to follow. They train at the London Regatta Centre with a great view of City airport.

www.windyandas.co.uk



Cycle Sisters

Cycle Sisters is an award winning charity that inspires and enables Muslim women to cycle in a welcoming and supportive environment.

Cycle Sisters Newham offers:

- Weekly led group rides on Sundays at 9.15am starting from The View Tube on the Olympic Park
- Free bikes available to borrow for rides
- Rides led by trained female volunteers from the local Muslim community who provide support and encouragement
- Help with accessing FREE cycle lessons (via Cycle Confident) for women who are unable to cycle or who would like to develop on-road cycling skills

For further information please see their website or to join email newham@cyclesisters.org.uk

www.cyclesisters.org.uk

Well done to the Stratford based basketball club **London Lions**, who became the first British team to record five EuroCup wins.

Congratulations also goes to the London Lions Women's Basketball team for achieving 50 consecutive Women's British Basketball League (WBBL) wins. The longest win streak in WBBL history.

London Lions play their home games at The Copper Box Arena Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park

www.thelondonlions.com

Congratulations to **Newham Swords** fencers Daniel Juras and Mihkel (Miku) Archer who have been selected to fence for Lithuania and GB respectively at next month's Cadet European Championships.

Well Done Daniel and Miku!!

www.newhamswords.org.uk



Miku Gain

The **Renewal Programme's Youth Services** free sports activities include non-contact boxing, archery, and table tennis.

Their Youth Services programme is purely community based, often taking place in their main office space as well as various locations around the Borough including community centres, libraries and schools.

Through a wide range of activities such as sports, young people learn about respect for themselves and others, self-sufficiency and how to achieve their ambitions.

www.renewalprogramme.org.uk/our-projects/youth-services



Renewal Programme's Youth Services activities

Central Park FC start February with the second back to back game against league leaders Amro FC.

They then go on to face New Beginnings FC on Saturday 18 February, who they recently beat 7-1 in the first game of 2023.

Their final match of February is against Blackhorse Road on Saturday 25 February, before they play in a cup match in March.

All games will kick off at 10am and the location is Wanstead Flats Playing Fields.

📍 [@centralparkfc](https://www.instagram.com/centralparkfc)

Plaistow South Big Local (PSBL) and **Modern Arnis Martial Arts and Self-Defence** have teamed up to offer a series of FREE weekday and weekend classes to girls aged 11-18 and women 18+ with childcare provisions.

Their self-defence classes which are female only are designed to teach women and girls in the community how to defend themselves in a safe environment.

The sessions will focus on de-escalation techniques as well as active self-defence and most importantly confidence building.

Classes will be running across February to March 2023.

To book your free four-week course in February please sign up via Eventbrite or for further details contact malaka@psbl.org.uk or visit www.psbl.org.uk

SCK Fitness Team free community Boxing sessions take place every Sunday at Diesel Gym. This session is aimed at ages 14+.

4pm-6pm, 1012 Dockside Road, E16 2QT

www.dieselgym.co.uk

📍 [@sckfitnessteam](https://www.instagram.com/sckfitnessteam)

**All games are subject to change. Please email March sports news or game fixtures to neandra.etienne@newhamvoices.co.uk

Remembering David Gold • 1936–2023

A winning tribute to David Gold

Mickey Ambrose pays tribute to David Gold, a club owner with all the right credentials

It was an emotional weekend for all West Ham Season Ticket Holders as they bade farewell to the late West Ham Chairman David Gold, whose vision and drive transformed the club, moving from the outdated Upton Park, to the wonderful new facilities of the Olympic Stadium.

As Mark Noble stood alongside the Gold Family, with David's image around the ground and on the programme cover, the rousing and emotional round of applause which echoed around the stadium, was finished with a roar, for a local lad who grew-up in poverty, before finding success in busi-

balling gods are real and each season they find new diabolical ways to test our nerves and loyalties. Last season it was the mystical Quadruple, which Liverpool aspired to and nearly grasped in the last 105 minutes of League and European Football. This season it is the plight of Everton Football Club.

The two clubs which have enjoyed the longest uninterrupted stint since their last relegations from the top tier of football are Arsenal, since 1913, and Everton, in 1951. So as Everton struggle, just one place off the foot of the table, the footballing gods have naturally decreed that Arsenal should sit aloft in the Premier League, rubbing salt into the wounds of the Evertonians, mocking the club's desperate attempts, to survive in the harshest League of them all.

and David Moyes have nothing against each other in real-life and probably have a good relationship, however this weekend they were both battling for their very managerial existence as their respective Chairmen invariably contemplated the sack for the loser.

The emotion of the tribute to David Gold seemed to energise West Ham, who put in an energetic display, that defied their place in the Premier League, winning 3 points, with two well taken goals that lifted them out of the relegation places.

Jarrod Bowen put in a fine display, scoring two goals, through his sheer strength and passion, while Everton looked lacklustre and completely out of sorts, if it was not for the determination and belief of Jordan Pickford in the Everton goal, the loss could have

been far greater.

As Frank Lampard walked dejectedly off the pitch, as an ex-hammer, who began his career at the Boleyn Ground, he must have known it was not a fair match, for West Ham had 12 Players on the pitch that day and that extra man was David Gold.



L-R: Sir Geoff Hurst, David Moyes, David Gold and Declan Rice; Below left: Players, family and colleagues pay tribute to West Ham's local hero. Images from www.whufc.com



This is what football club ownership should always be about, not faceless billionaire overseas conglomerates, but fans who have done good in life and have a genuine passion for the club they buy.

ness and fulfilling his dream of buying his beloved Hammers in 2010. This is what football club ownership should always be about, not faceless billionaire overseas conglomerates, but fans who have done good in life and have a genuine passion for the club they buy.

With this in mind, of all the sad Evertonian faces at the London Stadium on 21 January, the glummiest face of all belonged to the Everton impresario and Chairman Bill Kenwright - he cut a lonely figure as he watched his beloved side fall to a resurgent West Ham United.

While in the wider society we have devout believers and atheists, within the world of football there is no such divide. We all know that the foot-

As things stand, as we pass the halfway point of the season, with 20 games played, this was a genuine six-pointer, such as occurs in both title ambitions and relegation scrambles. Both Everton and West Ham have struggled this season, not living up to their ambitions or the on-paper talent of their squads.

Ex-footballers, as I can attest, are usually affable men and women, who enjoy the company of other ex-professionals, regaling our war-stories and humour, which we look back upon fondly. However, sometimes the footballing gods cast two of these folk into what feels like mortal combat, such was the atmosphere at the London Stadium. I am sure that Frank Lampard

Local hero with a big heart

West Ham Joint-Chairman David Gold played a significant role in West Ham's Foundation's mission to connect the power of football to meet the needs of the local community - a community he grew up in.

Foundation CEO Joseph Lyons told the West Ham website:

"On a personal level, he reached out to us at the Foundation very early on and said: 'What can I do? How can I help more?' He gave up his time and his resources to come and support our community work. You can't get any better than having a personal approach."

David helped launch Any Old Irons in partnership with Friends of the

Elderly back in 2015, he was also a frequent visitor at their events.

"We've seen the Any Old Irons come and pay their respects," said Joseph Lyons. "We have hundreds of members now, but it came from him. From his generosity, his time, his desire to come and meet them and talk about how important West Ham was to him."

Before their home game against Everton, as reported here, there was a tribute to the life and career of David, who grew up at 442 Green Street, Upton Park, opposite the Boleyn Ground, played for the Club as a schoolboy, and took over as Joint-Chairman in 2010.

www.whufc.com



David Gold was guest of honour at the 'Any Old Irons' Afternoon Tea party

Pele and me: worlds apart but our friendship endured



The death of football's greatest player brought the personal loss of a friend for Mickey Ambrose

As regular readers of my column will know, my late Mother Mona has been the greatest of all influences in my life. After she arrived in Britain on the Windrush, her positivity and belief in equality and a better life never waned. As a young boy growing-up in the East End, she would often tell me: "Child, you can be anything in life, meet and talk to anybody, but always be kind, polite and respectful."

weeks after the Blitz had started in London. Little could anybody have known, as they huddled together in the bomb-shelters and underground stations, that across the Atlantic Ocean, a new-born baby boy would bring such joy to the football mad locals of the East End at the 1958 World Cup Finals in Sweden.

Edson, was actually meant to be christened 'Edison,' after Thomas



Pele, Archbishop Bishop Desmond Tutu, my son Kobie and myself on 12 July 2008

I have always held my mother's teachings close to heart, but little could I have realised, as a nine-year-old boy clutching a tattered football, with my nose pressed against a black and white television screen, watching the genius of the 1970s Brazil team winning the World Cup, that I, Michael Ambrose from the humblest of origins in Poplar, would become friends with arguably the most talented player of all-time, Pele.

Edson Arantes do Nascimento, was born on 23 October 1940, just a few

Edison, the Inventor of the light bulb, as his parents wanted him to bring light to the world, but there was a typo on his birth certificate.

However, his parents' wishes came true and he lit up the football world, as his nickname 'Pele', for over 20 years. He remains the only player to have won three world cups, in 1958 as a 17-year-old, then again in 1962, then finishing in arguably the greatest team of all time, the Brazilian side of 1970, that beat Italy 4-1 in the final in Mexico.

Pelé grew up in poverty in Bauru in the state of São Paulo. He earned extra money by working in tea shops as a servant. Taught to play by his father, he could not afford a proper football and usually played with either a sock stuffed with newspaper, tied with string, or a grapefruit.

Another of Pele's remarkable contributions to the game we all love so much, is the enduring legacy of 'The Save' and his relationship with Gordon Banks, which is how we came to meet 38 years later at the Britannia Stadium in Stoke.

While football fans around the world will argue forever-and-a-day about which player scored the greatest goal of all-time, the greatest save of all-time stands alone, undisputed, a physics defying leap, worthy of a salmon swimming up an Alaskan river, of which all gymnasts would be justifiably jealous.

It was England vs Brazil at the 1970 World Cup Final, Pele executed the perfect downward header, everyone in the stadium thought it was a goal, yet Banks' gravity-defying save stunned the entire planet.

So, fast-forward to 12 July 2008. I had been asked to help organise a special testimonial match for Gordon Banks at the new stadium to celebrate his remarkable career and to unveil a statue in his beloved city of Stoke.

I knew of Pele's genuine affection for Gordon and to everyone's surprise, we managed to contact his team and bring him to the potteries for a remarkable day.

Over the years, I have been very lucky to have met many of the legends of football, including the late-great Bobby Moore and George Best. However, sometimes two men just meet, who share the same ethics, values, morals and principles and just gel. We spent a lot of time in Stoke that evening just talking, with his PA who sometimes needed to interpret for Pele.

After leaving football, we had both dedicated ourselves to work in our local communities, we shared a passion for charities, especially helping young people and believed in the future and that the world can be a better place.

After that day in Staffordshire, I would receive calls from Pele, maybe a couple of times a year, with a PA on the phone. While Pele could speak some English, he never mastered the language and would rely upon his team around him. Funnily enough, looking back, we always spoke about charity work and helping young people, I don't think we ever discussed football.

In 1994, Pelé was appointed a UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador.



Mickey Ambrose

I shed a tear when the greatest player of all-time passed on to the next world, but I was not remembering Pele as a sportsman, but my friend, his ethics and values, and what he stood for.

Our paths would cross on several occasions over the coming years: in 1997, Edson received an honorary knighthood from Queen Elizabeth II at a ceremony in Buckingham Palace. I was already an Ambassador for the Royal Charities, having started with the Duke of Edinburgh Awards.

We also met again during the London Olympics, where I was an Ambassador for the organising committee, having been approached by the late Tessa Jowell, the Sports Minister, to get local people involved in the 2012 games.

The last time we met was at the Football Legends Award, in London on the 29 October 2013. We did speak a few more times on the phone, after which age and illness took its toll on the great man and our calls petered out.

I shed a tear on 29 December 2022, when the greatest player of all-time passed away, but I was not remembering Pele as a sportsman, but my friend, his ethics and values, and what he stood for.

This has been a difficult article to write, as it has been so deeply personal, but I wanted to end it by sending a message to any young readers. "Child, you can be anything in life, meet and talk to anybody, but always be kind, polite and respectful." That isn't just my message, or my mother Mona's message to you, but it would have been what Pele would have told you as well. ●

Mickey Ambrose is a former Chelsea and Charlton player who lives in Stratford