Trampling on our rich heritage

BY FRAN HERON

7 FEBRUARY 2017: the day we lost our
High Court challenge to take the London
Borough of Camden to a full judicial
review into their grubby consultation and
planning process. It will go down in local
history as the beginning of the end of
Somers Town as we know and love it.

Our rich cultural and historical heritage
is about to be replaced by a monumental
catastrophe symbolised by the grossly
inappropriate 25-storey skyscraper. It is
completely against the grain and character
of the neighbourhood and would face
planning rejection elsewhere.

For sure there will be no ‘poor doors’ in
the phallic monster but the equally grossly
elevated cost of floor space per square inch
is a tower too far – ‘golden bricks’ opposed
by Mr Mayor.

How did this monstrous outrage against
decent architecture get approval? Every
national heritage organisation voiced
strong disapproval but, so what!

The council dismissed these objections
as irrelevant. Can’t you just hear the howls
from Judd Street at their prestige project
being described as ‘grubby’? But I stick by
my opinion of a sordid deal – and more
evidence of duplicity is trickling into the
open as I write.

And if Cllr Blackwell’s reference to the
’shrillest voices against development’
(Camden New Journal) is aimed at people
like me, I for one will wear that as a badge
of pride. Did he really expect us to lie down
and be flattened by powerful interests
without uttering a murmur?

To suggest that there is no other way
without uttering a murmur?

Make no mistake, building the monolithic
eyesore will spawn others in the not too
distant future and Somers Town will be
transformed into a mini Manhattan for the
rich and privileged; the disadvantaged
and displaced having endured decades of
reduced quality of life from noise, traffic
and air pollution – exacerbating further the
known prevalence of cardiac and respiratory
disease – to pave the way for the affluent
inhabitants of their trials and tribulations.

Meanwhile, with health a priority in
Central Somers Town, what do the
administration at Judd Street do to protect
local people from the negative impacts
likely to damage their health further? They
destroy the only bit of green space within
Central Somers Town along with scores
of valued trees and greenery known to
improve health and well-being.

The Leader of the Council repeatedly
expressed strong public opposition to the
loss of open space, trees, playgrounds and
community facilities during the protracted
planning process. It will go down in local
history as the beginning of the end of
Somers Town as we know it.

Diana Foster speaks to
Slaney Devlin, Chair of the Somers
Town Neighbourhood Forum, to find
out more.

WITH the erection of the 25-storey tower,
Somers Town faces an estimated seven years of concurrent
construction including HS2, Crossrail 2 (building a
station beneath us), the rebuilding of Maria Fidelis
School, and, in all likelihood, an extension to the
British Library.

We interview Slaney Devlin, who played a pivotal
role in the fight, leading the campaign to raise over
£5,000 via crowdfunding for the judicial review,
with the backing of the Neighbourhood Forum.

We asked Slaney about the case...

Why did the judge decide against us?
Mr Justice Jay sided with Camden Council and
refused our application for Judicial Review. His
reasoning appeared to be that London Plan policy
does not offer sufficient protection to private open
space to halt the application.

He was also convinced that the planning
committee at Camden Council was aware that
Somers Town was an ‘Area Of More Limited
Change’ when it agreed that the tallest residential
tower in the borough should be built on one of its
parks, and thus the committee was within its rights
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BETWEEN THE TRACKS

ISSUE 4  THE SPIRIT OF SOMERS TOWN  SPRING 2017

The Free Admission www.crick.ac.uk

Running until 29th March 2017
Free admission www.crick.ac.uk

Kings Cross
DEMOCRACY? IT COULD BE A LOTTERY

BY JOHN ORD
Somers Town Big Local Rep

IS THERE anything more democratic than our parliamentary democracy? I say yes – there is. It’s called random selection. Also known as sorition, it can be used to allot people to public office at any level. Today, it is commonly used to select prospective jurors in our legal system by picking names randomly from the electoral register.

Why not pioneer an innovative and imaginative random selection trial here in Somers Town. Why should we? Firstly, we need to harness the knowledge, skills and experience spread throughout Somers Town. Tom Paine, many years ago, asked why the ‘mass of sense’ of ordinary people should be allowed to ‘descend with them into the grave’. Secondly, there are well recognised problems with our current system of representation. There is a gap between people and their elected representatives. It may be that they feel left behind and even abandoned. Thirdly, how as citizens, do we deal with deep issues of public concern? There’s no shortage of such concerns in Somers Town; so how best to secure truth and justice?

Finally, we need to remember that we have a government backed empire of patronage and appointment. A Parliamentary Select Committee in 2003 calculated that about one third of a million people were ‘appointed’ to important public bodies making crucial decisions about our national health and wellbeing.

It is problems such as these that provide a justification for use of random selection of ordinary people to public office. I certainly believe that most people, selected by lot would engage at any level – particularly in our local communities – if they knew that their contribution mattered. This would accord greater integrity and legitimacy, for instance to local appointments in education, housing, community development and social and health care services; all randomly selected. It would help build an agenda based on grounded issues and not electoral priorities.

I am not suggesting that random selection or sorition replaces our elective model. A citizen based democracy could mix use of lot with the ballot box and reinforce the use of representative elections. It would also extend opportunities for public participation and add strength to the principle of voluntarism.

So why not get involved and join us in planning a way forward for a new and bold initiative in Somers Town.

If you are interested in any way to carry this project forward please get in touch with John Ord via email: john_ord1@hotmail.co.uk

Some will ask: why was this so important to fight? We cannot just accept that it is OK to build all over our open spaces. Over five tennis courts worth of open space will be lost with the Central Somers Town GP. Dozens of mature trees will be cut down. It’s bad for people’s health and bad for the environment.

I also think that the type of housing being built, particularly in the tower, is unacceptable.

There’s a housing shortage and yet the Council are building investment flats. They are building on our park so that millionaires can make more money. Why?

What do you think will happen to Somers Town with the construction of this tower?

There is an obvious impact in building a tower of that height in our community – it’s oppressive, casting a shadow over Phoenix Court, Coopers Lane and what will be left of the park. Land at the bottom of the tower is likely to be deceased. There could be a wind tunnel along Brill Place. I suspect the tower will change Somers Town in other ways.

Throughout the 20th century, housing associations and the Council invested in social housing in Somers Town.

The tower signals a move away from that policy towards very expensive private flats.

Presumably there will be a distinct demographic difference between residents in the tower and those of us in the rest of Somers Town. Who can afford to live there? Sale prices in the tower are predicted to be significantly over £2,000 per square foot, so only the super rich will be able to live there – or at least have an empty flat in their property portfolios. I suppose you might get the odd sly renting a flat that overlooks the Crick!

You worked very hard, and put in your own money. Are you liable for costs?

Yes. The court case was in my name and costs of £5,000 were awarded against me. It is possible that Camden may not charge me, as I was representing local stakeholders. We’ll see. Although my name was on the court papers, a lot of local people and organizations have donated or pledged money, so the burden is shared.

It was a great disappointment to many of us. How did you personally feel when you heard the decision? Were you convinced of a win?

I felt really sad. Poor Somers Town. My lawyers thought we had a good chance of winning through to a judicial review, and it took the judge a long time to make his mind up. I don’t think you can ever be convinced of a win when you go to court, but I think you have to stand up for the things you believe in. It’s important to try.

In the early stages of the campaign there was a petition against the tower, but we heard that parents of children at Edith Neville School were in support of the project. Do you think they were misled?

People in Somers Town were given a choice. Support this plan or let your children learn and play in substandard accommodation. What kind of a choice is that? I’ve talked to hundreds of people in Somers Town over the past year, and not a single person has voiced support for the tower. No one wants it. People were misled because they were told the plan put before them was the only solution. That simply isn’t true.

Do you think this split the community?

I hope not. I don’t think so. People in Somers Town are not stupid. We have the ability to see both sides. I can understand why a parent might fight for their child’s school. That same parent can understand why I’m fighting to stop building on the parks. The villains in this piece don’t live in Somers Town.

For some locals, they cannot remember a single year without construction. An alternative view is that this is inevitable in Central London. What is your view?

People may be surprised to hear that I’m pro-development, but I am. The Neighbourhood Plan is all about our community deciding how Somers Town should develop. It’s not about keeping the status quo, but of managed change that allows existing residents to stay and benefit.

Our location between two of London’s biggest transport hubs means we will be surrounded by development for decades to come. HS2 received Royal Assent last month, and works will be ongoing until 2033. Crossrail 2 wants to build a station beneath us connecting Euston and St. Pancras. The British Library needs an extension. Euston Station itself is looking to rebuild. There is a housing crisis and we know that many people in Somers Town are living in overcrowded accommodation or in homes that no longer suit their needs.

My view is that construction is inevitable, but that it needs to be managed so that our roads are safe, we aren’t driven mad by noise and the quality of our air doesn’t deteriorate further. Developers in and around Somers Town should respect and try to improve the quality of life and the opportunities of the people living here.

Is there anything left that Somers Town can do to fight this?

Planning permission has been granted and I’ve heard that work on Edith Neville Primary School is starting in June, and Plot 10 is moving in September. I think it is important to hold the Council to the promises they have made to the people of Somers Town, including:

- All the money generated by the sale of private homes will be invested back into Somers Town.
- All 44 of the new, socially rented homes will be for Somers Town residents in housing need.
- There will be more trees in Somers Town when the work is completed than there are now.
- The proposals will not make air quality worse.
- People will feel safer.
- Parking won’t become a problem.
- We have been asked to sacrifice our open space so that a new school, nursery and play centre can be built. The Council now has a moral obligation to properly fund those organizations in the face of spending cuts, and to make sure that existing nurseries and schools in Somers Town receive similar support.

Michael Parkes announced his resignation from the fight recently. As a retired Town Planner he helped us enormously. Do you have any thoughts?

Michael put his heart and soul into the Somers Town Neighbourhood Plan and was devastated by the Council’s view that it carried no weight and the judge’s dismissal of our case. I can understand why he wants to take a step back now, but am hopeful that we will still be able to call on his wise counsel in the future.

Do you think the planning policies now are different from those of 20-30 years ago?

Planning policies are constantly evolving. They are stronger than it used to be. The Localism Bill gave communities a much greater say through neighbourhood planning. There is more emphasis on sustainability and the environment.

At the same time, the population of London has exploded in recent decades and this means both the GLA and Camden Council are planning for people to live in increasingly dense communities.

What is the future for Somers Town?

Somers Town is a really special place. People tell me it’s not like it was, but I think there’s still a great sense of community here. Who knows what the future holds?

Some residents had people trying to make big money out of property here before. In the 18th century, Jacob Leroux thought to attract wealthy people to Somers Town, building ‘handsome homes’ including the original Polygon building.

Unforeseen circumstances led to a property crash. Some of the first homes to be built were sold for less than the cost of the materials. They were soon filled with radicals and émigrés from the French Revolution. Maybe history will repeat itself in post-Brexit Camden!

How about you. How do you feel now?

I’m OK. Disappointed, of course. And tired. But I don’t see the court case as the final word. It is part of an ongoing struggle to force developers (including Camden Council) to properly consider the residents of Somers Town when making their plans. That takes a certain stubbornness. So yes, I’m feeling stubborn!
I first came to Somers Town in 1988 after I’d moved to Camden from Vancouver for work I went to a temp agency called Catch 22 on the ground floor of the Capital Radio building.

One job I had was digging a ditch in Tooting with this other guy. To get to Tooting Catch 22 told me and the other guy to go next door to the Rover car hire on Euston Road. So me and this other guy hired a Rover, drove down to Tooting, dug a ditch for a couple of hours, drove back to Euston Road, went into Catch 22, signed our timesheet and were given twenty quid.

The other guy lived on the Regent’s Park Estate and he said his mates were in a band called Flowered Up and they were playing that night somewhere in Somers Town. We went to what I think might have been Basil Jellicoe Hall and watched Flowered Up – and drank our twenty quid.

Later on I used to come every month to Barry Stillwell’s legendary Tapestry Club in the St. Aloysius Social Club underneath the church on Phoenix Road. That social club was a thing of beauty but it’s been done over and now looks like corporate meeting rooms.

For many Between The Tracks readers the story of the Big Local goes back a few years but for me it started last June when I began work as the Development Manager at what was then called Somers Town Futures. We changed the name because there’s a football team called Somers Town Future!

We’ve got several resident-led projects up and running already including this very newspaper. Editor Jaimie Denholm says of Big Local backing for the paper: “The establishment of Between The Tracks has been of great benefit to a community which is set to face substantial challenges over the next few years. The paper has enabled community organisations and residents to share important news regarding upcoming developments and celebrate the history and cultural diversity of our locality.”

Check some of the other projects Somers Town Big Local are funding:

- The Dance Club attracts 25 kids age 4-12 every week, they’ve given five public performances at community festivals and events around Somers Town. They plan to offer classes for older children and this year are hosting adult classes at the Living Centre which will cumulate in a joint adult/kids performance.
- The Club is embarking on its first community film project this year.
- Boxing/Youth Intervention have really hit the ground running this year. They are now a constituted community organisation and have been hosting twenty under 12s every Saturday at the Sports Centre.
- They are beginning to introduce intervention techniques for some of the older kids and reaching out to the community to get kids involved early who are in danger of getting into trouble. They will be linking with youth intervention services to get referrals and feedback from kids and parents and have been overwhelmingly positive.
- Parents are asking for adult courses as soon as funding can be secured.
- Chalton Gallery have been holding ten weeks of Saturday art classes and trips to museums for children and adults.
- Creative Creatures are delivering a six week pilot programme of after school arts workshops at Coopers Lane TRA for children and their carers. The aim is to expand the children’s imaginations and help them with emotional and social development through various art and design activities. Oh, and it’s a lot of fun as well.
- There’s lots of ways for Somers Town residents to get involved with the Big Local. You can apply for funding for your idea, serve on the Steering Committee, work on the newspaper, volunteer for one of the projects or any number of other things. This is your money, to be spent how you see fit, so get involved and have your say.

Contact Somers Town Big Local at info@somerstownbiglocal.co.uk

Strong preference for local Somers Town residents
Hidden dangers of demolition

With regard to the new school currently under construction in Drummond Crescent, set to replace Maria Fidelis School (which is being demolished by HS2), I wonder if anyone knows or cares that the environmental pollution created by HS2 in this instance is already fourfold?

As had they not wanted to demolish Maria Fidelis School, in North Gower Street, in the first place, it would not have been necessary to demolish the former building in Drummond Crescent, to build a new school! The hundreds of people living opposite, in very close proximity to the site in Drummond Crescent, have had no say whatsoever, and cannot have escaped the toxic filth, dirt (and asbestos?) emanating from this massive demolition work, and they should demand that The Director of Public Health (Dr Quentin Sandifer) monitors their health, as they endure further pollution, destruction, demolition, noise and disruption to their lives, for the next 17 years of the HS2 construction.

Bear in mind the fact that the life expectancy of the inhabitants of Somers Town and Euston is already one of the lowest in the country. We certainly don’t need HS2 to add to this statistic by lowering our life expectancies even further – and destroying any quality of life we have left!

The biggest current threat to our health is air pollution. We have the highest levels ever recorded, with toxic air contributing to over 10,000 deaths a year in London alone. Furthermore, with four very large schools in Somers Town, I would suggest that parents unite and take legal action to protect their children from HS2. It is the statutory responsibility and legal duty of The Secretary of State for Education (The Rt Hon Justine Greening MP) to preserve the safety, and well-being of school children whilst on school premises! So whilst children are breathing in toxic particles for eight hours a day and their health is being endangered, parents should question what action the schools are taking to protect the children in their care.

Likewise, with regard to Council and Housing Association accommodation. The ‘Right To Quiet Enjoyment’ clause must come into play. As landlords, surely they are in breach of this clause, by allowing HS2 to create noise, pollution and stress to its tenants.

Why aren’t people being protected by their bodies, by their politicians, public officials, and the House of Lords (with the exception of Lord Framlington) be ashamed of themselves. By making unacceptable concessions to HS2 (which should never have come to fruition in the first place) they have not protected the people that they represent and have put profits before lives!

Furthermore, with the NHS in this crisis, why is the Government determined to waste £65-90 billion pounds of public money on HS2?

A White Elephant that nobody wants (see Jeremy Paxman’s recent comments, as well as the many eminent and distinguished Anti-HS2 voices of reason, not taken into consideration by MPs and the Lords). The mere fact that Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth have joined forces against HS2 shows the gravity of the situation. (Sign the friends of the earth petition against HS2 online: www.foe.co.uk/g/hs2).

Finally, when we aren’t being listened to – or allowed to get justice through the normal democratic channels – we need to take action, and bring back the ghosts of Swampy, and Greenham Common! Stop HS2 are holding a Day of Action on the 8th April 2017 – please support this.

HS2 recently put a large advert in the Camden New Journal, inviting the public to come to their headquarters, to receive help and advice regarding the construction.

However, this invitation was not as kind and helpful as it seemed, as the advert was published in the journal on the very same day as the meeting was being held, giving the public only a few hours notice to get to the meeting on time.

Of course, had HS2 genuinely wanted to be helpful, and offer reassuring advice, they would have given them at least a week of notice to make sure that people knew about it and could make arrangements to get to the meeting! This is just another example of the contempt with which HS2 holds for the people whose lives they are ruining!

Mimi Romilly

Tree health and safety gone mad

My morning was disturbed by trees being mechanically shorn of all their remaining twig-like branches, to the trunk, leaving ugly stumps, inside the Levita House car park.

A couple of years ago, on ringing Camden, I was told the reason is that ‘a branch may fall on a car’.

Using this logic, would one then get rid of cars for the same rationale, that they kill pedestrians – surely the rate of such incidences is so much higher.

I question why such pruning is necessary when to call these branches is laughable, these were thin twigs, posing no threat to anyone, as you can see in the photo. Common sense suggests action was not necessary.

In contrast in Hammersmith, the trees, are full with their wintry branches in a park full of people and overhanging a busy road. That borough clearly sees no need to prune so drastically.

I wonder what kind of contract Camden have which specifies this needs to be done quite so frequently. This is excessive and it no doubt costs us.

I also learnt, from a leaked Council missive, that signs announcing tree cutting are to be ‘eliminated’ (of course) on the 8th April 2017 – please support this.

Common sense suggests action was not necessary.

Why aren't people being protected by allowing HS2 to create noise, pollution and stress to its tenants?

The blast wiped out an entire family including a soldier on leave. Post-War, Jim started a romance with his sweetheart Edith who lived on the top floor of the opposite block – often waving to each other at night. Eventually he married Edith (Peggy) Atchinson at St. Pancras New Church.

Stephen McCarthy

Just how does this benefit the community?

SLANEY

Devlin and Michael Parkes should be thanked for leading the campaign to protect Somers Town against the CIP development. Ultimately doomed, Somers Town can now look forward to a tsunami of development coming our way.

This has also raised issues that are commonly overlooked. In a letter to the Camden New Journal, Slaney made the point that those who profit from rampant development, which, in turn, adds pressure for shiny new community centres – the extent of which Somers Town locals can't afford the room hire costs. In Somers Town. The need to build more facilities for a community that is already over-supplied with schools, schools and institutions moving into the area are not arguably over-supplied with schools, schools and institutions benefit from community resources in a manner, using deprived community involvement as a lever to gain funds from community efforts.

Where the developers rejoice over King’s Cross, Slaney made the point that those who profit from this, are attempting to set up the same. In Somers Town, the cultural and social capital to submit and win grants, are being captured by unscrupulous individual who offered courses to a local charity on the basis that ‘funds can be applied as required by those entities.

While the developers rejoice over King’s Cross, which has met with general appreciation and great fanfare, particularly because of what it replaced – rundown backstreets riddled with drugs and prostitution – Slaney’s article highlights the impacts which air particles for eight hours a day in Somers Town. The need to build more facilities for a new population, the resulting pollution and effects of construction and years of disruption. It seems Somers Town is to bear the brunt of the need to raise funds to counteract budget cuts, to also fund schools, in an area arguably over-supplied with schools, schools full of children who actually are not from Somers Town. In addition, by reducing social housing, you also alter the profile of an area, and in turn, displace a problem demographic, and wealthier individuals and institutions benefit from community resources meant for the original demographic.

What is often overlooked is the fact that even cultural institutions moving into the area are not neutral in their effects. The move of Central St. Martins into King’s Cross was a coup for the developers, and applauded for making efforts to integrate students into schools, the community albeit often quietly, and in a manner, using deprived community involvement as a lever to gain funds from bodies who award funds to projects, community, artistic or heritage, to benefit deprived communities, I know of a number of examples, notably one unscrupulous individual who offered courses to a local charity on the basis that ‘funds can be applied to cover their exorbitant cost.’

Surely larger institutions cannot behave in this manner, using deprived community involvement as a pretext? Perhaps, but with far superior resources, cultural and social capital to submit and win proposals, will succeed against smaller less well- resourced local groups or individuals, ironically displacing the attempts of those same individuals they purport to help.

Oh those unintended consequences! They may, in fact, add to the unemployment and overshadow those local community groups who were providing those very services, and disempower locals who were attempting to get up the ranks. In Somers town, we have a Big local initiative, whose aim is to help deprived areas, with funds that can be applied for, to those who live or work in the area. Let’s just hope that support does go to the correct recipients.

Diana Foster

Resident

Love and War in Levita House

While delivering the last issue of this publication early in January this year I happened upon a group of people taking a photograph of an elderly gentleman taken outside 83 Levita House. The name of the gentleman was simply McAlpine, canvassing the area for many years absence.

Jim at the age of four had moved into the ground floor flat in 1936 with his family when Levita House had just opened. He spent a happy childhood throughout the outbreak of the war, when a direct hit from a parachute mine destroyed the top floor of his block.

The blast wiped out an entire family including a soldier on leave. Post-War, Jim started a romance with his sweetheart Edith who lived on the top floor of the opposite block – often waving to each other at night. Eventually he married Edith (Peggy) Atchinson at St. Pancras New Church.

Hans de Winter

President

THE FREE INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER FOR SOMERS TOWN
THE SPIRIT OF SOMERS TOWN

SOMERS TOWN HISTORY CLUB

I Remember: Memories of Somers Town

BY GEORGE SHARP

IN THE middle of Chalton Street was a church called Christ Church. In the Second World War it was very badly bombed, with only three walls and the bell tower left. After the war, it was a great challenge for the boys of Somers Town.

We would climb up the metal ladder, fixed to the inside of the tower, but the last five foot of the ladder was missing, so to get on to the landing where the bell was you had to jump across from the ladder to the landing, so as to ring the bell. The most dangerous part was to try and get back on to the ladder – with a 40 foot drop! If you missed the ladder...the ladder was the only way back down.

Events

APRIL 5
A Walk: ghosts of Somers Town Shops
Fill in your interactive map of the old shops Led by George Sharp. Meet 6.30pm at Basil Jellicoe Community Hall for refreshments. Free to locals; donations others.

MAY 3
Ghost pub Crawl: lost pubs
Guided walk by locals round round the ghosts of Somers Town pubs. Led by locals Dave and Alan – ending up in a live pub. Leaving at 6.30pm from outside Basil Jellicoe Community Hall. Free to locals; donations others.

WANTED:
Your MEMORIES!

Do you have memories of the mum’s club?
Or pubs or the Pram race?
Did you perform in Somers Town?
Were you involved in early Festivals?

WE’RE looking for photos and memories. We would love to hear from you. If you’re interested join our community film project. We are also seeking local researchers and interviewers. Free training and expenses paid to locals.

■ CONTACT historyclub@aspaceforus.club www.aspaceforus.club

LETTERS

Will our Police help us to live longer?
Are Cressida Dick, Penelope and Sarah in pole position to sort the butts and idlers and allow us to live longer?

If you have glanced through the Camden New Journal (23/2/17) you will have noticed an article on page 9, “Cops dragged into cig’s dispute.” Two Police haranguing a female shopkeeper for an hour and a half in front of her customers about cigarette ends littering the public pavement outside her shop in our nearby historic pedestrian passage, Woburn Walk, WC1.

What was the offence? Lack of sweeping by Veolia? You work it out, but was it worth for Police to spend their resources on such a case which mightn’t be a Police matter at all?

At the same time, we are being treated in the most damaging and uncaring way by excess toxic fumes from engine idlers up and down our streets. This is a Police enforcement matter. While I am writing this near a café window I see a Police personnel carrier van parked outside with about 12 Police or Cadets inside. The uniformed driver left his vehicle and started to queue in the cafe for sandwiches and coffee while he left his van’s engine running. This took well over 10 minutes. A kind reminder to the co-driver half way through this did not result in the engine being turned off. What a terrible example this gives to other drivers who insist in keeping their engine running when not in traffic.

The Camden Environment Department, or Cabinet, is very inactive in this matter. Why? Lethargy? Believing in its own fake-rhetoric? Westminster and many other learned Boroughs up and down this Kingdom have instituted awareness training and warning to motorists, or fining them. In Westminster the fine is £20 for a single offence, or £40 for late payment, operated through their existing parking control staff. In Camden we call them ‘Civil Enforcement Officers’. What a job title. The name has little relevance to their activity. Can we review this?

Leaving an engine idling away when not in traffic is an offence. The Law exists. The Road Traffic Vehicle Emissions Regulations 2002. The Road Traffic Act 1988 s42. Anyone who has taken a driving licence test since 1988 will be aware of the Rule 123 of the Highway Code exactly because of the harmful emissions from engines on our environment and health of living organisms.

Somers Town is most likely affected heavier by air pollution than other localities elsewhere. Heavy road traffic and diesel trains’ emission and engine idlers of all sorts, yes, that includes diesel trains idling away on the platforms, often for hours, because of Somers Town’s physical make-up and location within the transport network matrix of all modes and population composition.

If motorists and transport operators are not being shown their responsibility by authority, be that the Police or the Camden Environmental Health Department, or Cabinet, or others, and their offences not being enforced, the local population of all ages will suffer, as it already does, and their health will be a downward spiral including the schoolchildren of the many schools in the area.

Camden’s program of cutting down healthy trees right and centre and is not too experienced in planting durably new ones, for whatever environmental replacement value they make, is heighten this concern.

Two diabetes, asthma, weight-gain, mental behaviour and increased danger of stroke all affected and caused by breathing in diesel particulates and NOx is the established norm and it will be ‘Somers Town experienced’ again like decades ago due to then ample intake of alcohol, or be like a version of the demise of Kim Jong-Nam at Kuala Lumpur Airport by VX killer gas which must rank quite close to the toxic air mix we take in at times bad.

With these life or death air mix we take in at times bad. Must rank quite close to the toxic air mix we take in at times bad. With this life or death options at our door why devote Police officers’ time to discarded ciggy ends in front of someone’s private convenience shop?

Herman Tribelnig

Losing Our Trees

Somers Town faces losing more trees for no apparent reason – a leaked council letter reveals. Anyone with a modicum of dementia and in slow learning in children, and rightly high on Mayor Sadiq Khan’s agenda. But not content with plans to build towers on green spaces, it seems how Camden Council are intent on hacking down perfectly healthy trees – not those dead or dying – for the spurious reasons of the threat of roots expanding and potential for insurance claims.

Notices are to be placed on trees only 10 days in advance, giving locals little chance to challenge decision to cut down these trees. A letter leaked to this blog sent to ward councillors from Camden’s Arboricultural Manager outlines their proposed ‘communication plan’ which, because this ‘can be a sensitive and emotive subject for local residents’ states that the notices will say the trees are ‘dead, dying, dangerous or hazardous’ – even when they are not. Is it that we are being lied to? We certainly are in a post-truth world...

This programme is different to the routine tree removal notifications you may have received previously, which normally would be for dead, dying or dangerous trees identified during our cyclical inspection regime.

We have a number of trees which are too big for the streets and their roots are causing or about to cause problems to nearby buildings and infrastructure. Some of them are subject to insurance claims. These are large trees which are not suited to regular pollarding work so the only solution is to remove them. All the trees will be replaced”

In Somers Town it seems the council are all too keen to chop down trees or hack off branches, without consultation, leaving stunted trunks, replacing mature trees with bare saplings which often don’t survive. Tree are vital to health, and the lungs of our area, and often the only splash of green in a barren urban landscape.

...Oh, if you are concerned about the haste with which this is happening, do contact your ward councillors with concerns and do by all means contact Camden Council’s Arboricultural Dept: 020 7974 2097.

Name and Address Supplied

THE FREE INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER FOR SOMERS TOWN

Postcards From Somers Town History Club

HERE are two of the recent postcards to commemorate our history. ‘If you would like a set of nine, please come to the club or, to order online, contact Diana at historyclub@aspaceforus.club

■ For more, look at www.aspaceforus.club

WANTED: Your MEMORIES!

Do you have memories of the mum’s club?
Or pubs or the Pram race?
Did you perform in Somers Town?
Were you involved in early Festivals?

WE’RE looking for photos and memories. We would love to hear from you. If you’re interested join our community film project. We are also seeking local researchers and interviewers. Free training and expenses paid to locals.

■ CONTACT historyclub@aspaceforus.club www.aspaceforus.club

The spi RiT oF some Rs Town

the Camden New Journal

For some Rs Town

The History Club

When not in traffic is an offence. This is a Police enforcement matter. Can we review this?

To their activity. Can we review this?

To their activity. Can we review this?

To their activity. Can we review this?

To their activity. Can we review this?

To their activity. Can we review this?
WHEN Lord Longford and Jack Profumo set up New Horizon Youth Centre in 1967 they could not have predicted that 50 years later we would still be in operation and more effective than ever, helping over 2000 of London’s homeless and most vulnerable young people per year.

Established with the aim of supporting homeless youth and particularly those with substance abuse issues around the Soho area, the centre soon moved to new premises in Covent Garden. Board member and former student volunteer Ellie Roy recalls, “It was not a place of refinement!

But it was in a great location for reaching out to the clients the project had been set up to help and offered welcome refuge and support to many whose lives were otherwise chaotic.”

New Horizon Youth Centre’s first co-ordinator was Martin Walker, who wrote a book about the establishment of the charity and its clients, “Poor Man, Beggar Man, Thief” in 1972.

Walker summed up the ethos of the organisation in those early days “It was the intention of New Horizon to foster an environment which was conducive to the development of the individual’s personality… Any rules or regulations we were forced to impose on people in the Centre grew only out of the need to sustain an environment where a large group could co-exist peacefully.”

Jon Snow, now a renowned broadcaster and our Patron, became our first director in 1970. In comparing his time as director to the present day, Jon states that “The ingredients that bring people here are still very much the same. It’s still a consequence of bad family housing, of poverty, of a breakdown in the care system.”

The centre moved once more before settling in its current location in the famous Somers Town area between Euston and Kings Cross in 1995. A transformation of the building was unveiled in 2010 at a ceremony attended by Jon Snow, then-Prime Minister’s wife Sarah Brown, comedian Rory Bremner, novelist Kathy Lette and ex-schools minister Vernon Coaker.

We now offer a unique, wrap-around service to young people from the local area, throughout Camden, across London and beyond who find themselves facing homelessness.

They can access expert housing advice, get training and education, see a counsellor, receive drug and alcohol support, be assessed by a nurse, take part in any number of creative and health workshops, as well as showering, washing their clothes and getting free breakfast and lunch.

No other service provides so much under one roof. Our pioneering approach to supporting young people was recognised by the Children and Young People Now Awards, who gave us their Youth Work Award in 2016. Shelagh O’Connor, CEO says “While our longevity is undoubtedly a marker of our success as an organisation it also has a less positive implication: young people still need us because so many of them have been forced into desperate situations”. Back in 1967 the main factors leading to homelessness were the clearance of inner-city slums and inadequate legislation, and whilst these issues may have been addressed in the intervening years we now have new problems blighting the lives of marginalised young people impossible: an unprecedented housing crisis, the effective absence of council housing, underfunded local authorities, low wages and unstable work. Indeed, the following quote from our founder Lord Longford could easily have been written about any number of the young people we are supporting today.

“One young boy of 19 years of age came to London from Liverpool a year ago… He soon spent the money that he brought with him on bed and breakfast accommodation. After a few days of sleeping rough he came to our New Horizon Youth Centre. The staff tried to help him find accommodation but the resources available to them were either full or had waiting lists. The young man spent weeks moving from night shelter to lodging house, sometimes sleeping rough and sometimes spending the night in cafes. He soon lost sight of any plans to get a job. Because of his lack of accommodation, he was unable to obtain any work that lasted, and the few casual jobs he had did not enable him to pay for any accommodation that was at all secure. A year after his arrival in London he no longer has any personal possessions. His health has deteriorated and repeated failure to get out of the West End has destroyed his confidence and he feels that he has no future.”

New Horizon Youth Centre is part of the community in Somers Town and is delighted to support local initiatives such as the market redevelopment, the Living Centre and the outstanding Festival of Cultures. We deliver training at the job hub on developing your own social enterprise and young people gain valuable work experience on our ‘Crepe Up’ stall every Friday in the market.

The community in Somers Town is second to none and has given and continues to give us amazing support in many different ways.

50 Years of New Horizon Youth Centre

HealthWatch Camden: Our Role In The Community

BY LINDI MAQHUBELA

FROM February 2017 Healthwatch Camden will be at the St Pancras & Somers Town Living Centre meeting local people and giving out information on health and social care services in Camden.

Local people can visit the centre to see our live demonstrations of Healthwatch Camden’s Start Here… guide, an online resource designed to make it easier for people to access information on health and social care.

The guide aims to answer queries on health and social care services, for example, it can help you to find organisations, find services to suit your needs, find out what your choices are as well as finding out your rights.

Healthwatch Camden gives local people a voice and choice in the provision of health and social care services. We also work in partnership with local organisations including BME groups that represent people in the community.

An example is the Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust (CNWL) commissioning us to find out the views of local Bangladeshi, Somali and African women on future options for locating the sexual health services which are provided in Camden. We worked with some local community groups to set up events where we could talk to women from the Bangladeshi, Somali and African community to find out their views on the issue. Our work is now influencing the provision of health and social care services to these communities and has given local people a voice.

Healthwatch Camden is an independent, registered charity tasked with ensuring that local people’s voices are heard and influence the delivery of health and social care services in the borough. The Health and Social Care Act 2012 gives Healthwatch Camden the power to encourage change in services and to make them better to reflect Camden’s diverse community.

The St Pancras & Somers Town Living Centre - where we will have a presence, is a new space dedicated to the local community based within the Francis Crick Institute building. It’s run and managed by Somers Town Community Association on behalf of the community with a Consortia of partners, one of which is Healthwatch Camden.

Healthwatch Camden will be at the centre 1-4pm every Tuesday and Thursday. So you’ll get a chance to find out more about what we do.

You can also visit our website at healthwatchcamden.co.uk

THE FREE INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER FOR SOMERS TOWN
A Street Charter For Accessibility In Somers Town?

BY STEPHEN PORTLOCK

ONE question that I am commonly asked as a blind person is whether or not I find that people are generally helpful. The answer is that I don’t know since I can’t see if I’m being ignored! However overall the answer would appear to be that, yes, I am all too often shunned by people who would rather not get involved. To the many who just feel nervous about assisting lest they make matters worse or appear patronising I have two things to say.

Firstly an ego heals quicker than a broken leg! Secondly, if I was given a penny for every person who apologised for their dire guiding skills, I would have felt comfortable living in the Age of the Selfie.

A young Charles Dickens was one of those who attended St Mary’s in the early days. A schoolfriend recalled, I met him one Sunday morning shortly after he left the school, and we very piously attending the morning service at Seymour Street Chapel. I am sorry to say Master Dickens did not attend in the slightest degree to the service, but incited me to laughter by declaring his dinner was ready and the potatoes would be spoiled, and in fact behaved in such a manner that it was lucky for us we were not ejected from the chapel.

Perhaps the most famous churchman connected to St Mary’s was Fr Basil Jellicoe. In 1921, while still a layman, Jellicoe was given charge of the Magdalen College mission in Somers Town. At that time, more than 22,000 people were living in the area, with an average of two to three persons per room. Perhaps referring to the clearances of the railway lands in the nineteenth century, Jellicoe described Somers Town as ‘a gigantic theft’. Realizing that the fundamental need was better housing, towards the end of 1924, and by now a curate at St Mary’s, he founded the St Pancras House Improvement Society. Beginning with a share capital of £250, it became the vanguard of a widespread campaign of voluntary housing. By 1930 the society’s capital had reached £160,000, and some hundreds of the poorest families in London had been rehoused in blocks of flats at low but economic rents. Today, that work is continued in Somers Town by the society’s successor –Origin Housing.

The last decades have seen St Mary’s trying to fill some of the gaps created by government cuts. As under-five drop-ins were lost across the neighbourhood, The Friendly Hand – a Spanish benevolent society – stepped in to fund a twice-weekly Mums and Tots group. Hundreds of children and their parents and carers have benefited from this opportunity to play and relax together. The closure of Hilwood House day centre left many older people very isolated. A weekly bingo club is an attempt to address what we all know is a very great need in our community. A winter night shelter provides a hot meal, shower and bed for those who would otherwise be sleeping rough on the streets.

Tom Hollandier came to St Mary’s when researching his character in the sitcom “Rev.” and learned of the present-day church’s increasing role in making up for the shortfall in state provision for the poorest, saying in the Guardian newspaper: The most moving scene I saw was a church in Somers Town in London, near King’s Cross, which has been a poor place historically and continues to be. It was full of people who were sleeping there – asylum seekers and local people. We represented it in the background in the Christmas special. Keeping St Mary’s Church open is a struggle. The Grade II listed building is in constant need of repair. The heating system is archaic, the roof needs patching and the lighting is inadequate. This Lent, the church has decided to focus on fundraising for a new sound system, including hearing loop. The times when you really need to be able to hear the speaker – a bride’s hesitant wedding vows or a man’s emotional eulogy at the funeral of his best friend – can be some of life’s most significant. A properly functioning sound system would also be of great benefit to the schools, music groups and public meetings that happen in the church. Looking back at 190 years of St Mary’s history, it is clear that the church has taken it’s function to ease the lives of the people of Somers Town seriously.

To donate to the St Mary’s sound system appeal, please make cheques payable to “St Mary’s Church” and send to: The Treasurer, St Mary’s Church, Eversholt Street, London NW1 1BN

WHAT’S ON

● There are Masses at St Mary’s throughout the week, including a Sunday Parish Mass and Kids’ Club at 11am.
● Mums & Tots, Tuesday and Thursdays 1–3pm. All welcome
● Bingo Club, Tuesdays, 1.30pm. All welcome.

COOKERY

HELLO SOMERS TOWN,

Name is Priya, I am a local Somers Town resident who has lived here for the last 14 years. My passion is food and I love creating new recipes. I have worked on television presenting cookery shows and have catered many different occasions. I am delighted to contribute to the community newspaper and felt that with so many easily available fruits and vegetables in our local area I wanted to share with you all a dish which is an absolute haven for foodies.

Wheat Berry Salad

1/2 cup wheat steamed.
1/2 cup sweet corn.
1/2 cup chopped mixed coloured capsicums.
1/2 cup whole blanched almonds.
Blanch the night before in cold water.
1/2 cup pomegranate.
1 table spoon soaked raisins.
1 table spoon of chopped dates.
1 cup freshly grated coconut.
Two red chillies finely chopped.
1 cup chopped coriander.
Juice of 1 orange.
Juice of 2 limes.
Salt to taste.
Mix all the above and serve in a large wide platter.

This dish is absolutely great on its own or with some bread and olive oil.
I had to look into her eyes They were deeper than outer space I have no idea how I wish I had a longer gaze

Ignorance rules By Berlioz Hidasi

Intelligence-disappearing

An Apocalyptic mythography approach The materialists are running our homes They are enslaving our humanity While information is still in-dying Global reality has never been far away Back to society and life

Ignorance rules

Intelligence-disappearing

Compassion towards suffering, violence is excised in silence Under the veil of the double nods Under the glove of the scientists It is not what it feels like

Do you get older do you hold it harder or saltier? No difference. In fact, it is quite up to you whatever you want to do with it My poetry is like the wind, constantly blowing by politicising your services, an eternal mating process, the most genteel force ever

Anything else? Today I saw two magpies outside my window. Twice in the same minute, below them in the rubbish I saw somone walking in the nature. Can you see signs of migration and the will and the bird rumored how doesn’t learn from its mistakes.

Q&A by CHallon Gallery

What does CHallon Gallery do and what work does it support? CHallon Gallery showcases contemporary artists from British and Irish Art. We support the project in partnership with writers and performers of the early stages of their careers where it can be very difficult for many artists to find an audience for their work. Our aim is to bring great contemporary art to local audiences including people in Somers Town and the surrounding areas. We shall also be a platform for artists to network with potential collectors and institutions.

What will you do? CHallon Gallery and the Somers Town History Club would like to organise several events that might engage a local audience. These are the ambitions:

• A genuine interest, commitment, writing and online documentation included.

• Email us with your CV and letter of interest: historyclub@aspaceforus.club

www.aspaceforus.club

Once a month attendance at History Club and write up.

What will you do? CHallon Gallery and the Somers Town History Club would like to organise several events that might engage a local audience. These are the ambitions:

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What would you like to see more of in Somers Town? The community feels that there are things they want to do here but in the space, we would love to work with them. We will offer huge discounts to the community to do so.

What do you do? CHallon Gallery and the Somers Town History Club would like to organise several events that might engage a local audience. These are the ambitions:

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Once a month attendance at History Club and write up.
Anti Social Behaviour: The cavalry are here!

BY JOHN WOOD

SO, A BIG welcome to our two new police officers, well one is new, Giuseppe Murtori and the other is an officer many of you will know, Dave Cooper; they will be joining Beta Tauwenbergh and Ed Shmer and long may they be with us. All of these officers are on Facebook and the Internet and their number is 0208 721 2810.

This is actually very good news for our community, as in living memory, we have grown from one officer serving St Pancras and Somerstown ward, to two and now four; watch this space for eight…

Obviously, things will not improve overnight, but to use a simple factory analogy double the workforce, double the output; and so I think we can confidently look forward to improvements across the ward in such anti-social behaviour problems as drug dealing and drug use and stolen motorbikes. I had a meeting with Dave Cooper and we know it will take time, but with the help of the Somerstown community things will improve for us all.

As a first step, it has been proposed to request the police, the council and ward councillors to hold meetings in the north and south of the ward for us to meet our officers and for them to hear about our concerns. Venues, dates and times will be announced as soon as possible.

Despite Camden’s No Second Night initiative to help rough sleepers, a problem of growing concern is the number of people sleeping in bin sheds, or using them as toilets, in addition to the usual drug users. Personally, I think it is disgusting that our caretakers have to clean up this sort of mess on a daily basis; they not only deal with human faeces, but also the garbage, used needles and the like left behind. Used needles have also been found in local parks where children are playing, which poses serious health concerns for children and parents.

As in previous years, Walker House TRA is organising a community clean up. Each time about 20 or so local people have turned out and provided with equipment by CleanUp UK filled a lot of rubbish sacs. It really is good, as we can clean up behind railings and sites off the pavements or under bushes and the like; places which will never usually ever be cleaned. Lunch is provided and a free prize raffle for volunteers. Notices will be put up shortly.

FREE EVENTS FOR FAMILIES IN CAMDEN!

Every Wednesday of the schools holidays, come along to the Skip Garden in King’s Cross for an afternoon of gardening and cooking. Spend time as a family, have fun and learn a new skill.

Ages 7-12.

UPCOMING DATES: 5 April, 2–4pm; 12 April, 2–4pm.

To sign up or for more info robyn@globalgeneration.org.uk

Places limited at 12 children per session.

Would you like to advertise in Between the Tracks?

Email: info@somerstownbiglocal.co.uk

THE FREE INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER FOR SOMERSTOWN
Hello Somers Town!

MY NAME is Amber Perrier and I am the new Community Engagement trainee at the British Library. I will be working with Emma Morgan, supporting with our outreach and local engagement activities. I will be around for a year and I am very much looking forward to getting to know you. Every Thursday I’ll be with Emma at the Training Link offices on Phoenix Road so do pop in and say hi!

I applied for the position through a programme called ‘Strengthening Our Common Lives’ which you can read more about here: www.culturaco-operation.org/pages/social-engagement-training

So far I have been blown away by what the British Library has to offer! From exhibitions and events to Business Start-up support and Learning activities! Part of my role is going to be to support with ensuring these opportunities are spread far and wide within the local community.

My highlights for the first couple of weeks has been visiting the Maps and the 20th Century exhibition; it was incredible to look at a decorative dress made out of World War II escape maps printed on German silk, a detailed view of the Russian moon globe which was produced in 1961 including the GPS maps printed on German silk, a detailed view of the Russian culture.

I’ve also really enjoyed roaming through The Treasures Gallery (which is free of charge!) In particular I enjoyed Dahl’s stories. Of the most celebrated characters from this phizz-whizzing anniversary, Sir Quentin Blake has drawn special portraits of some of the most celebrated characters from Dahl’s stories.

Second Floor Gallery

Get in touch with the Community Engagement Team!

See us at Training Link on Phoenix Road on a Thursday.

Email us:
Emma.morgan@bl.uk
(Community Engagement Manager)
Amber.perrier@bl.uk
(Community Engagement Trainee)

Call us: 07595 464 363

And don’t forget to follow us on Twitter @BL_Local

**Ethiopian Show and Tell**

IN FEBRUARY the our community engagement team welcomed a group of local residents into the British Library for a free tour, lunch and an exclusive ‘Show and Tell’ event to get up close and personal with some of our magnificent Ethiopian Manuscripts.

Coordinated by our new Community Engagement Trainee Amber and supported by our Visitor team who lead on our tours and our Curator for Ethiopian Collection our local visitors were truly delighted with the time they spent with us.

If you are interested in coming along for a show and tell at the British Library of our Ethiopian collection, or indeed any other area of our collection, please get in touch and Amber and Emma will try to accommodate your particular interests.

“I would like to thank for the amazing British Library collection tour. Thank you for inviting me to the Ethiopian event. The curator went through the collection well and I was pleased that he explained what each artifact consists of. I found it very informative and learnt a lot about early Ethiopian culture. Please do more of these sessions as it opens up awareness of other cultures and broadens people’s understanding of the world.”

Ahmed

“Thank you for inviting me to the Ethiopian event. The curator went through the collection well and I was pleased that he explained what each artifact consists of. I found it very informative and learnt a lot about early Ethiopian culture. Please do more of these sessions as it opens up awareness of other cultures and broadens people’s understanding of the world.”

Chery

**Coming up at the British Library**

**March – June 2017**

**Quentin Blake: The Roald Dahl Centenary Portraits**

Open until 21 May 2017
Happy 100th birthday Roald Dahl! To mark this phizz-whizzing anniversary, Sir Quentin Blake has drawn special portraits of some of the most celebrated characters from Dahl’s stories.

Second Floor Gallery

**Family Activities**

**Play on Words** (Free)
Saturday 25 March
10.30 – 12.00
13.00 – 14.30

Fancy a family fun day? Come and join us to create a masterpiece and engage in a performance inspired by a variety of words found in the British Library.

**Family Day:**

**What is in a book?** (Free)
Saturday 1 April
12.00 – 16.00

Fancy making a book? Get involved in decorating your very own book cover, including making your own puppets to create a storytelling performance to real and imagined places.

**Tellling Tales**

Sunday 21 May
11:30 – 13:00
14:00 – 15:30

Listen to Norwegian tales of terrible trolls and fantastic foxes. Then become a storyteller yourself, and discover how to create a story fit for a giant!

**Travelling Words**

Sunday 25 June
11:30 – 13:00
14:00 – 15:30

Celebrate Refugee Week in this creative workshop using games, words, music, and pictures to tell stories and explore our different pasts and shared futures.

**Family Trails** (Free)

Pick up an activity trail to explore the Library building.

British Library
96 Euston Road, London NW1 2DB
020 7412 7797
www.bl.uk/events/family-events

**ADVERTISEMENT**

Fancy a family fun day? Come and join us to create a masterpiece and engage in a performance inspired by a variety of words found in the British Library.

Fancy a family fun day? Come and join us to create a masterpiece and engage in a performance inspired by a variety of words found in the British Library.
FORGOTTEN PEOPLE: Drugs And Homelessness In Somers Town

OVER the last year, we noticed an influx of homeless and seemingly drug-addicted youth sleeping rough in Somers Town, even in the freezing weather over winter. And in our midst a young woman’s tragic death was overlooked. Her declining mental health was accompanied by drug addiction. Too late to be helped by the services, her case was not even reported in local media.

This prompted us to investigate the issues surrounding the increasing incidence of homelessness and drug dependence in Somers Town. Is there a link between homelessness, mental health and drugs? Is this the result of draconian cuts in provision for homeless people?

Death undiscovered for a week
A young woman who died lay undiscovered in her flat in Chalton Street for a week. Neighbours were shocked to learn of the death undiscovered for a week in her flat in Chalton Street for a week.

The mental health authorities – and the relevant housing association – were alerted several times in the period leading up to her death by neighbours, alarmed at her declining mental health and her increased contact with teenagers known to deal drugs. These young dealers regularly caused damage and exhibited anti-social behaviour in the block of flats.

The woman was known to the mental health authorities. ‘I’m angry that nothing was done’, said one neighbour, who did not wish to be identified. ‘She was vulnerable as she had mental health issues’, he added.

He had reported his concerns to the mental health services, who did not seem to take on board the severity of the situation.

Months later, I came across young teenagers on bicycles, calling on her, unaware of her demise.

The inquest will take place in June.

FACTS

● The numbers of rough sleepers have doubled since 2010 in England to about 4000 each night.
● About 30% of those in accommodation projects for the homeless have complex needs; 32% have mental health issues, with drug issues affecting 30%.
● 73% of projects turn away people whose needs are ‘too great’. Ref: www.homeless.org.uk

OPINION:
Make ‘em legal?

I HAVE noticed that recently in Somers Town there has been an influx of unfortunate homeless people – as well as low-level drug-dealing – in an otherwise relatively crime-free area.

Studies have shown a link between homelessness and drug addiction. A recent interview with a homeless person revealed that he needed £400 a week – roughly £60 a day – for his crack habit. (The Guardian). For him, the harshness and cold meant that drugs and alcohol were necessary to combat an almost unbearable environment.

On the one hand, it is clear that these are desperately sick people, possibly also suffering with mental health issues, who are, in effect, self-medicating to survive.

On the other hand, who hasn’t rejected whining junkies asking for – or increasingly demanding – money, using homelessness as an excuse, when we know the money is to score for drugs?

The largely overlooked recent death of a young woman with mental health issues, caught in a spiral of drug addiction, highlights the human cost. The addicts at the end of this resort to low-level dealing, instantly criminalising them, and indeed, this is often an entry into the justice system. Drug addiction thus leads to criminalisation since, in order to fund a drug habit, the addict may be drawn to selling, and this illegal activity also brings that person into contact with potentially dangerous criminal elements. And policing is not having any effect: as one local police officer noted, you lock one up and another takes his place. The cost to the taxpayer is immense, with each prisoner costing over £50,000 per year.

The beneficiaries of this are the dealers at the end of the chain; not the (often extremely young) dealers we see on bicycles – and the addicts are victims.

The problem requires a dynamic and speedy solution.

One solution would be to follow the Portuguese example, where all drugs have been decriminalised, resulting in a decrease in gang-related criminality. Furthermore, there are fewer junkies in the country than there were when this system was introduced.

It is now a medical problem and drugs are obtained via prescription. Marijuana has also been decriminalised in six US states, and for medical use in 23 others, and its success is such, not least in the resulting huge tax benefits for the states involved, that more are to follow. Marijuana has been shown to be effective in multiple sclerosis, pain relief, anxiety and some cancers. It is a life changer for many. Research is uncovering more benefits.

Yet in the UK, desperately ill people are forced into illegal activity under the current system to get help. If drugs were legalised, softer drugs, such as marijuana, could be sold and taxed by the government and in fact, the profits could be used for the rehabilitation of users of hard drugs, within the NHS.

Unfortunately, in the UK, except for a few enlightened souls, this solution has not been taken seriously, and the problem is ignored. It is seen as a vote loser.

So although hard drugs cause rapid decline and much unhappiness to those who use them and those around them, and criminalise users at huge cost to society, the problem is still not being addressed.

Had the unfortunate young woman who died before Christmas lived in a country where drugs were legal (Portugal, for instance), her addiction would have been dealt with as a medical matter with the care and the attention that her mental health deserved.

Perhaps her death could have been prevented with the keener intervention of mental health and medical services rather than police surveillance.

What are your views?

Have you noticed an increase in homelessness or drug-related activity in Somers Town?

INTERVIEW:
Owen Duff, New Horizon Youth Centre

SOMERS Town is home to a charity, New Horizon Youth Centre (NHYC), which aims to support vulnerable young people – for whom homelessness is a key factor.

We asked them about the issues. ‘We’re seeing a rise in the “hidden homeless”,’ 75% of those 16-21 year olds we supported last year had been ‘sofa-surfing’ and therefore not seen on the streets. ‘As a lot of the efforts to tackle homelessness focus on rough-sleeping, this lack of visibility for young homeless people is a big problem.’

What are the issues for young people, specifically?

The major issue for young people is the disparity between the housing market and their wages. The minimum wage for 18-21 year olds is £5.55 per hour, with no entitlement to the living wage, and the average room rent is £552 per month, so you can see these figures don’t match up if you don’t have any family support while trying to establish a career. Also a lot of the young people we see have to leave home before they are ready to due to family breakdown or domestic violence, and therefore don’t have the skills to begin to build up a life as independent people.

What is the relationship between drugs, mental health and homelessness?

Homelessness, substance issues and mental health are often tied up together. Sometimes people become homeless due to substance abuse, which is often related to mental health problems that they are trying to self-medicate, but often young people become homeless first, and it’s the stress, anxiety and depression that homelessness causes which leads them to seek anything which makes them temporarily feel better.

That’s why we run a weekly drop-in with Camden FWD drug and alcohol support, so young people using our service can get the help they need.

How does NHYC help?

We provide holistic support for homeless and vulnerable 16-21 year olds, aimed at stopping them from becoming trapped in a cycle of homelessness.

We help primarily with accommodation, but also refer to services that deal with mental and physical health, skills, employment and training, and benefits. We offer accredited learning – so it’s helping not only with practical things like food and showers, but everything they need to support them along the way, such as counselling, healthcare, workshops, and skills.

THE FREE INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER FOR SOMERS TOWN
Eyes On The Bottom Line
For Somers Town Medical Centre?

BY WHEEZY JOE

FOR over a year, Somers Town Medical Centre has been transformed from one of the worst practices in Camden, if not London. Gone are the surly, secretive receptionists; the apparent siege mentality of the GP's; the weeks of long waiting to see a medical professional; the endless waiting room times and the miserable air of a practice that knows if it is failing.

Replacing it has been the not-for-profit company Haverstock Health, with its committed, friendly, helpful reception team, to a bunch of GPs who apologise for keeping you waiting for all of ten minutes. Evening surgeries? Yep. Weekend appointments? Yep. And although word of mouth is hardly scientific as a method of assessing success, it'll have to do; I haven't met anyone with a bad word to say about it. And this is Somers Town.

But these are Tory times, folks, and a bad word to say about it. And this is Somers Town. A practice that knows it is failing.

Recently, I suddenly realised I had got it all wrong. I mentioned Virginia Healthcare disparagingly, and he informed me that he had worked for them. When pressed he refused to say what they were like, but he doubted that they could make a profit from the practice. Then why do it? I asked. Again no answer, but he did mention that perhaps I was looking at things through the 'old socialist model' of healthcare, as though this was merely one of many such models.

Then it hit me: after the Second World War things could, in the eyes of the population, never return to the squaller and poverty they had grown up in. The ruling classes for once understood that their ascendancy was, if not over, then at least to be placed in the service of the people rather than their own interests. The Welfare State was built on the rubble of war and a history of exploitation and destitution which finally had to stop. Previously unheard of access to healthcare became a fundamental tenet of the new system, open to all, and free at the point of use. It became the backbone of the Welfare State and was one of the springboards of this country's phenomenal post-war growth. I, and everyone else, grew up in this system, was nurtured by it, all encompassing reach, from the cradle of my sisters to the graves of my parents.

And now, to get back to the Medical Centre, is it to be dismissed as 'the old socialist model', like some old discredited doctrine, whose days are numbered by some brave new world of private corporations who promise the earth but with both eyes on the bottom line rather than the health of its new clients.

Hopefully, Haverstock have done enough to keep the tender, but what happens if they don't? How will we, the patients, know what the process was that handed over our Practice to one of the parasites rather than Haverstock? Will the decision be published, criteria itemised, explanations given? And what, when the decision is made, can we do about it?

Somers Town have no educational outreach. They have no educational opportunities. They have no educational openings.

And here, is the point. During a conversation with one of the GPs for two days, I was unable to decide whether she had bronchitis (hopefully) or asthma. When she told me that she hadn't slept for four days, I must confess that I don't really either empathise or sympathise with homeless people. There is a part of me that feels they are largely the authors of their own misfortune. I believe there are three types of people: those who make things happen, those who watch what happens and those who wonder what happened. To me, homeless people tend largely to fall into the last-named category.

But Debbie was clearly different. She had been a student prior to her spell in hospital and fate, or rather Westminster Council, had thrown a curve ball at her. When she told me that she hadn't slept for four days, I had no hesitation in inviting her to my flat to catch up on her lost sleep. And no, there was no hidden agenda. I'm far too old to do prison cell-time on a sexual assault wrap. She also had a racking cough and I was unable to decide whether she had bronchitis (hopefully) or tuberculosis.

We had a coffee and she lay down – and aside from spending perhaps an hour and a half awake, slept solidly for two days. She obviously trusted me, because her handbag remained open but untouched in my lounge and my stuff, including money, likewise remained untouched.

Nor was she an expensive “date” – half a chocolate was all she ate in two days. I shouldn’t think our paths will cross again.

But the intellectually and spiritually enlightened would have us believe that every encounter, even those of the “chaps passing in the night” variety, has a purpose. That being the case, all I can ask is: what was that all about?
Somers Town Community Association is your Community Centre

Q. Would you like to know more about what services and activities we run?
Q. What would you like to see run in the Community Centre?
Q. Ready to tell us how we can improve?
Q. Up for helping to shape our next business plan?

have your say...

If the answer is YES

Please drop in at any time and add your views to our feedback wall, 13th to 27th March, 9am to 6pm, Monday to Friday

Somers Town Community Centre
150 Ossulston Street, London NW1 1EE

For more information call 020 7388 6088 or email admin@somerstown.org.uk
Chalton Street Market

BY TANIA JACOBS

IN JANUARY there was a meeting at the New Horizons Youth Centre to discuss improvements to the Chalton Street market. It is no secret that residents and local traders have been frustrated with what has been described by locals as slow progress and lack of development and sufficient investment in the market. The meeting was to give participants the opportunity to share their concerns and offer suggestions for moving forward.

Recent surveys conducted by Camden council revealed that:

- 50% of the traders had been trading at Chalton for ten years or more
- 100% of the traders wanted to see more commodities such as fruit & veg, pet food, cakes, shoes
- 100% of the traders interviewed wanted to see more advertising of the market
- 80% of the traders and 100% of local residents interviewed wanting online advertising.

The discussions during the meeting had a similar tone.

“I live on Chalton Street but know nothing about how to become a trader”

“There needs to be a more diverse range of goods sold”

“Why don’t we form links with local big businesses to attract people and new opportunities to the market”?

People raised concerns about awareness and offered suggestions for improved signage for engaging new business and breathing new life into the market.

There was even a suggestion to put in an application with the Somers Town Big Local to offer the opportunity for local residents to try out new business ideas on a permanent community stall.

Camden has now taken on the project of raising awareness across the borough to businesses, residents and visitors that the market is open for business. They are also increasing public involvement by developing a market focus group and increasing interest from local stakeholders on events.

“We hope to introduce a hot food offer to Chalton Street to encourage the business and working community to come and visit Chalton Street in their lunch break. There are many large businesses operating in the area with a growing workforce. The market needs to attract these visitors in addition to the local community”. If you think you may want to try your hand at running a stall in the market, why not visit the market to see where you feel your stall would be best placed, and to develop ideas about what you may be able to contribute to our local market.

Promotional Period Offer

FOR CASUAL License holders, they will require a three month commitment, Wednesday to Friday, for this period, commencing from 5 April to 30 June (13 weeks of trading) for £390 to be paid upfront. Which works out to be £10 a day (less than half of the normal fee). No application fee will be charged (usually £60).

To be ready to start trading for the 5 April will require the application and paperwork in by Friday 31 March.

Permanent traders, who are also interested in participating at Chalton Street, would be required to apply for a casual license.

We will waive the application fee of £60 once a trader has confirmed and made payment, Camden will allow the traders to trade for the rest of May free of charge as an additional incentive. There will be planned events taking place throughout this twelve-week period and footfall is expected to be high.

For more info and to find out how to apply please contact the Markets Team: marketsteam@camden.gov.uk or 07717 888956

Somers Town Community Association would very much like your help in developing our new logo.

Please take a look at the following 2 options and let us know what you think.

OPTION 1

Somers Town Community Association
150 Ossulston Street, London NW1 1EE

OPTION 2

Somers Town Community Association
150 Ossulston Street, London NW1 1EE

Please email your comments by 31st March 2017 to logo@somerstown.org.uk
Fun for all at Football Tournament

BY DON TAE JACOBS

IN DECEMBER I took part in a fun football tournament that was organised by local resident and community activist Rienzi. There were four teams of mixed genders and people of all ages involved.

It was an absolutely fantastic experience and great to see that everyone involved was having good time and participating no matter what skill level they were at.

Each of the teams played twice until the the team with the most points won. There wasn’t just football on the day, there was a bouncy castle and face activities taking place, ensuring that people were enjoying themselves on and off of the pitch. I later met with Rienzi to discuss what he thought about the tournament.

Rienzi told me that he was really impressed with how the day went and said that it was a great way to get the community together.

He talked about the plans for more events like this in the future and to expand on the activities. “The vision is that there will be events for the whole family and more than one sport and activity to take part in”. Rienzi told me that his goal behind these activities is to empower the community and get everyone together. “A small voice can make a big noise.”

Another point to mention is that after a quick catch up with the coaches from plot 10 I was delighted to hear that one of their teams have not lost a game all year so a big congratulations to everyone at Plot 10.

What makes you feel good?

You’re invited to a conversation about health and wellbeing in St Pancras and Somers Town.

- Share your thoughts on being active, eating well and feeling positive
- Help shape a new public health project in the local area
- Take steps towards creating a healthier place to live and thrive

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<tr>
<th>Men’s group</th>
<th>60+ group</th>
<th>Parents’ group (with créche)</th>
<th>Women’s group</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday 22 March, 1.30 – 3.45pm</td>
<td>Wednesday 29 March, 10am – 12.15pm</td>
<td>Friday 24 March, 9.30 – 11.45am</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Living Centre, Ossulston Road</td>
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Mixed group
Thursday 30 March, 11am – 1pm
The Cock Tavern Pub, Phoenix Road

Parents’ group
Saturday 9 March, 10am – 12.15pm
Hopscotch Asian Women’s Centre, Hampstead Road

Participants will receive a £10 Love2Shop voucher for attending a full session; snacks and refreshments will also be available. Please book in advance as spaces are limited. You must be a St Pancras and Somers Town resident to participate and only attend one session.

To book a space or for more information, contact
Vijya Patel: stca.vpatel@gmail.com, 07898164725 or
Lana Simpson: lana.simpson@camden.gov.uk, 07766635431

The St Pancras and Somers Town Living Centre is NOW OPEN
We look forward to seeing you!

The St Pancras and Somers Town Living Centre, 2 Ossulston Street, London NW1 1DF
Tel 020 7380 0453 email hello@thelivingcentre.org www.thelivingcentre.org