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Dec 2023, N° 105

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Les (back) and Clive (front) at work mixing paint at the Forest Recycling Project in Leyton – see page 13 for more Credit Joanne Segars

Government registers significant increase in rough sleeping

by Marco Marcelline

The number of rough sleepers in Waltham Forest greatly increased last year. 27 people were estimated to be sleeping rough in Waltham Forest on a single given night last autumn, compared to just five people in the same period in 2021,

government statistics reveal.

The figures represent a staggering 444% increase from Autumn 2021, or a rise of 22 people. The percentage increase in rough sleepers is higher than any other local authority in England.

Forest Churches Emergency Night Shelter (FCENS), who have been providing winter shelter and food for people who are

homeless in Waltham Forest for the past 15 years, says that it is dealing with 28 active cases of homeless people this November, compared with 10 in November 2022. The charity told the *Echo* it is expecting to see 180 people use the service during the year April 2023 – March 2024.

According to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and

Communities, the local authority with the highest number of people sleeping rough on a single night in autumn 2022 was Westminster where 250 people were estimated to be on the street on a given night. Nearly half (47%) of all people sleeping rough on a single night in autumn are in London and the South East.

The largest increase in the number of people estimated to be sleeping rough in the UK was in London, where there were 858 people this year compared to 640 people last year, an increase of 218 people or 34%.

From 2009 until 2020, FCENS ran a roving communal shelter

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NEWS



FELLOWSHIP IS LIFE

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Waltham Forest Echo is the borough's free community newspaper. We publish monthly and distribute 15,000 free copies of each issue

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Whipps Cross is one of seven hospitals managed by Barts
Credit Barts Health NHS Trust

Barts Health slammed for charging migrant women

by Josh Mellor,
Local Democracy Reporter

An East London NHS trust has been accused by a health campaigner of targeting vulnerable women migrants who have uncertain immigration statuses with treatment bills.

Under rules first introduced by the government in 2015, patients classed as "overseas visitors" are not entitled to free NHS care and must pay for their treatment unless their condition is urgent.

Those charged for care often have an uncertain visa status, with restrictions on their ability to work or access public services.

Rosamund Mykura, a campaigner at Newham Save Our NHS, has compiled figures showing that Barts Health NHS Trust has charged more women than men in the last four financial years.

Barts, which runs five hospital sites in East London (Whipps Cross, Newham, The Royal London, St Bartholomew's and Mile End), charged 1,389 patients for their care in 2022/23 – 800 of those patients were women and 581 were men.

Rosamund said: "We know that many frightened women, including vulnerable residents who live

in boroughs served by Barts three maternity units, may delay or not attend for their ante-natal or in-patient maternity care because they cannot afford to pay for it.

"Our residents fear NHS debt – this sad and dangerous plan to target our vulnerable women residents is the opposite of what our NHS was set up to do.

"Our NHS should be a safe place not a place of fear."

It is unclear why Barts Health charges more women than men, but Rosamund suggested that the government's "hostile environment" policies towards immigrants requires hospital trusts to "over-interrogate and under-protect" vulnerable pregnant women.

The East London trust's overseas patients team, which attempts to recover thousands of pounds of debt from patients, has also been singled out by charity Maternity Action as "slow to resolve" cases of vulnerable maternity patients who faced large healthcare bills.

Last month at a Newham Council scrutiny meeting, the charity's director Ros Bragg said a woman was charged £10,000 for her miscarriage treatment, which was later reduced to £1,500.

She added: "I should emphasise, these are women who have been trafficked, have claimed

asylum, and are domestic abuse victims – many are in very vulnerable circumstances."

Maternity Action said that, unlike other NHS trusts, Barts Health does not refer maternity patients it attempts to charge to the charity's service.

According to Barts Health's 2022/23 annual report, those "overseas patients" were charged £11million in total, amounting to about £8,380 per patient.

However, about half of this income was written off and only £1.1m has been paid. The board report notes that recovery of debt from these patients is "challenging".

A spokesperson for Barts Health NHS Trust told the Local Democracy Reporting Service: "Like all NHS trusts we have a legal duty to recover costs from patients who are not eligible for NHS treatment.

"We recognise that payment is a sensitive issue, strive to be fair and transparent with patients, and are committed to continually improving our processes to handle all cases with compassion."

The spokesperson said the trust has now had discussions with internal and external groups, and will review its online maternity booking form to identify, support and reassure patients who may be charged.

Over half of homes have poor energy efficiency

Over one half of Waltham Forest homes have been handed an energy efficiency rating of 'D' or below.

According to figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS), 55% of households in the borough were living in a house rated 'D' or lower as of March. The figures only reflect homes that have received ratings in the past decade.

Called an Energy Performance of Buildings Certificate (EPC), buildings and houses are ranked from A+ to G (or A to G in the case of a building that is a dwelling), where A+ is very efficient and G is the least efficient.

The ONS report revealed dwellings in England have an average rating of D, with a score of 68. D ratings are given to buildings that score between 55 and 68. A score of 69–80 translates to a C rating, 81–91 equals a B rating, and 92 plus garners an A rating.

The median energy efficiency rating in London homes was 69, which ranks as a C rating. 41% of Waltham Forest homes have an energy efficiency rating of C or above, which compares to 74% of homes in Tower Hamlets, and 52% of homes in Newham.

The report also reveals that 80% of dwellings built before 1930 in England and in Wales were rated in bands D to G.

According to a report in 2019 published by Waltham Forest Council, 70% of the borough's 107,216 homes pre-date 1944.

The council has said it is investing over £50million in "specific energy projects" as part of the council climate emergency for a zero-carbon future which includes wall, roof, and floor insulation, air pumps, and solar PV panels.

The council's aim is for all of its social housing to have an EPC rated B by 2030, which it says is in line with London Council's targets.

NEWS

Council cancelled homeless mother's hotel room without making new accommodation offer

The council allegedly accused the mother-of-four of 'abandoning' a room she says was overcrowded and had a mouldy mattress

by Josh Mellor,
Local Democracy Reporter

A homeless Walthamstow mum who fled domestic violence in June had her hotel room abruptly cancelled by Waltham Forest Council without being offered alternative accommodation.

Mother-of-four Stephanie*, who says feels like she is "failing" her children after spending months staying in hotels and sofa surfing, left her partner in June this year after a violent incident and asked the council for help.

The council had provided her an overcrowded hotel room in Newham but cancelled it in early October without offering anywhere else to stay.

She told the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) the council had accused her of "abandoning" the hotel room, which was provided because she cannot afford private rents and due to her experience of domestic abuse.

However, she had told the council the four-bed hotel room was overcrowded, lacked facilities for cooking and had a mouldy mattress which was only "wiped" when she complained.

The mother was given the hotel room after moving between a series of other hotels at short notice, adding additional stress to the domestic situation she had left.

Stephanie told the LDRS: "The housing side took over everything, there was no time to be upset about what happened [with the breakup]... it's been really stressful.

"I'm feeling a bit lost. I've had to be [together], but my head is at 101mph, it's just getting to the point now where I feel like I'm stuck, really really stuck.

"There's no other way to explain it, there's no light at the end of the tunnel, I'm trying to open a door and there's a brick wall behind it.

"I'm thinking about having a safe place, I can't provide that for them and that's what is so upsetting and that I'm



Homeless mother Stephanie* has been living in hotels and sofa surfing since fleeing domestic violence in June Credit LDRS

almost failing them."

Two weeks after evicting the family from the home in early October, the council offered them the same room in the same hotel.

After leaving her partner in June, the family spent two months staying in a relative's small flat, despite the children's social worker making an "urgent request" to her council colleagues for housing support due to overcrowding.

At an initial housing needs assessment, a male council officer interviewed her by video call with his camera off and asked to take a photograph of her.

He then suggested that the council could help her move to Liverpool, Telford [in Shropshire], or "somewhere else up north".

Stephanie said she was then "left lost and not knowing what to do, like I had failed my kids."

Accommodation was not provided until her local councillor, Kisha Green, inter-

vened and cabinet member for housing and regeneration Ahsan Khan asked for a review of the mother's "concerning" case.

The mother-of-four refused to return to the Newham room for the same reasons she had already complained about, and has now been offered a similar-sized room in a hotel in Ilford that appears to be run by the same company.

If she accepts the room, she will have overstayed the government's six-week limit on how long families should be kept in temporary accommodation for.

She told the LDRS that at one point her room cost the council £800 per week, money which she felt would be better spent on private accommodation where she could cook for her family.

Cllr Khan said: "The shortage of suitable housing for social rent in general, in Waltham Forest, London, and the South East is well known.

"As a local authority we are build-

ing more social homes, but despite our proud record demand continues to outstrip supply.

"In the meantime, we do our best to provide local properties to homeless households in need of emergency accommodation.

"Using B&Bs and hotels is never our first choice, but the chronic housing crisis across London and the UK means that, unfortunately, sometimes there is no alternative.

"We continue to work with local landlords and letting agents to increase the supply of private rented sector properties available to homeless households and have a number of incentive schemes which are designed to support this.

"Any properties identified are subject to a range of suitability checks including whether the accommodation is affordable to the prospective tenant."

* The mother's name was changed to protect her anonymity.

NEWS

Labour councillor resigns as junior whip after Israel-Hamas war tweet

Higham Hill councillor Kira Lewis had tweeted an article that described Israel's actions in Gaza as 'bad...but not evil'. A petition signed by over 300 people has called for their suspension while an investigation takes place

by Marco Marcelline

A Waltham Forest councillor has resigned from their role as Labour junior whip after receiving backlash for a social media post they made about the Israel-Hamas war.

In a since deleted tweet, Kira Lewis, a Labour councillor for Higham Hill, had quoted lines from an opinion piece in *The Jerusalem Post* that described Israel's bombardment of the Gaza Strip as "bad...but not evil".

Cllr Lewis posted the tweet at 11.36pm on Friday 10th November before deleting it the following morning (11th November). The tweet and complaints about it are currently being reviewed by the council's monitoring officer.

The quote, which is available to read in full on the online version of this article, included the line: "What Israel faces now in Gaza is a moral dilemma. Hamas wanted the IDF to retaliate so it could make Israel look bad. It worked. What Israel is doing is bad – killing thousands of innocent people, including children. But not evil. Hamas is evil."

The post prompted a petition calling for Cllr Lewis' suspension from the council "until a thorough investigation into [their] conduct" is completed. Kira Lewis' resignation as Waltham Forest Labour junior whip was tendered and made effective on 13th November. They had held the role since May 2023.

In their call for suspension, the anonymous petition-makers wrote: "Inflammatory, ignorant and inhumane comments made by Cllr Kira Lewis has [sic] encouraged division and threats amongst our community. Such behaviour is not only detrimental to our community but also undermines the democratic values that we hold dear."

In a statement to the *Echo*, council leader Grace Williams said she recognised "the distress caused by the X/Twitter post" and confirmed that the post and the complaints about it have been referred to the council's monitoring officer.

She said: "As councillors we have a vital role in the community to ensure that our deeds and our words support and promote community cohesion. Words that offend or divide make this task harder not only for us, but in our joint endeavours



with faith and community leaders to unite our community around a strong set of shared values. As leader of the council and Waltham Forest Labour, I take this matter very seriously."

Cllr Lewis has not publicly acknowledged the tweet and did not respond when approached to comment by the *Echo*. According to Cllr Williams, they made an unreserved apology internally within Labour.

The petition, which has received a total of 324 signatures at the time of publication, calls for the suspension of Cllr Lewis for demonstrating a "lack of compassion and unity" and causing "growing distrust among constituents" due to their "public statements" on the Israel-Hamas conflict.

Since the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war, the council has sought to take a non-sides stance to the conflict and has said its primary motive is to serve the "whole community" and maintain community cohesion.

Kira, who identifies as non-binary, became the first transgender councillor to serve on Waltham Forest Council when they were elected in May 2022. Cllr Lewis is originally from Somerset, and prior to becoming a councillor Lewis worked for the national Labour Party's communications team.

The British Israeli Communications and Research Centre (BICOM), a pro-Israel advocacy group, lists Kira on its website as having worked as their "communications associate" since August 2022. The *Echo* asked BICOM if Kira was still employed with them but we did not receive a response.

A short biography on BICOM's website also states that Kira was the "national organiser" at Labour First, a faction formed in the 1980s by MPs on the right-wing of the Labour Party. Its website describes one of its key aims as keeping Labour "safe from the organised hard left".

Cllr Lewis also sits on Waltham Forest planning and health scrutiny committees. A council spokesperson said: "Waltham Forest Council can confirm it has received complaints that are currently being reviewed under the member complaints procedures. We will not be making any further comment at this time."

Hundreds participate in Palestine demonstrations across the borough

by Marco Marcelline

Various pro-Palestine protests have taken place throughout the borough since the breakout of the Israel-Hamas war in October.

Hundreds of predominantly Muslim families with young children protested outside Waltham Forest Town Hall in Walthamstow on Friday 24th November. The protest, co-organised by the Waltham Forest Council of Mosques, criticised the banning of symbols, clothing, and messages of support for Palestine worn by children at various schools and colleges in the borough.

Organiser Aysha Patel told the *Echo* she was there to call on schools to "change"

their "dire" policies. Aysha said: "I know schools across the borough that are now having Palestine/Gaza fundraising bake sales, but then you've got other schools a couple roads down that are taking badges off the kids, wiping face paints off the kids, sending children home in lost property clothes. The stories are endless and [children] are being silenced. Parents are getting phone call, after phone call. Let's see if there can be changes."

The protest represented one of the largest actions in Walthamstow since over 500 people took part in a vigil at the town square on Sunday 5th November.

The Israel-Hamas war has claimed the lives of over 14,800 Palestinians and began after Hamas killed 1,200 Israelis

and seized 240 hostages during a surprise terror attack in southern Israel on 7th October. At the time of writing, a temporary pause in fighting between Hamas and Israel is in effect while they participate in a hostage and prisoner exchange.

On 18th November, protesters accusing Barclays of "banking on [Israeli] apartheid" demonstrated in front of the bank's Hoe Street branch.

The Waltham Forest Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) said 250 people attended. Protesters demanded that the bank end its investments and loans to companies that supply Israel with weapons and military technology that is used against Palestinians.

Tony Phillips, the trade union liaison

officer at the PSC told the *Echo* the protest was called because Barclays "invest in Raytheon, who make cluster bombs that are used in Gaza; they invest in Caterpillar, who make bulldozers that demolish [Palestinian] homes".

Protesters at the demonstration chanted various lines including, "Barclays, you can't hide, you're supporting genocide."

Meanwhile, on 9th November over 80 people demonstrated outside Leyton and Wanstead MP John Cryer's office in Leytonstone and called him to back a ceasefire. Organisers say over 100 people returned to his office on 23rd November to protest his decision to abstain on a Scottish National Party led motion calling for a ceasefire.

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FEATURE

Rewilding ambitions

After a successful crowdfunding campaign, Kelly Bewers asks what's next for the East London Waterworks Park project?

The project's volunteer crew Credit East London Waterworks Park



East London Waterworks Park is an ambitious, volunteer-run project to transform a 5.68 hectare former Thames Water depot on Lea Bridge Road into a vibrant, biodiverse community-owned park for wild swimming, with a forest school space, arts and science buildings, as well as varied habitats for wildlife and people to enjoy.

The idea to rescue the old water works site was first discussed in 2019 at a meeting of Save Lea Marshes, a local campaigning group. A public meeting was convened, in partnership with CPRE (the Campaign to Protect Rural England) to

share the vision of rewilding the site and creating public swimming ponds. Over the next two years a committed group of volunteers developed detailed proposals and submitted a business plan to the government in 2022.

After a successful crowdfunding campaign earlier this year, which exceeded the target, raising £540,509 with over 5,000 supporters, I spoke to Abigail Woodman who sits as chair of the East London Waterworks Park Charity and Caroline Day who is co-chair of the project's communications team, about what's next for this exciting project.

The website describes the idea for a "brownfield rainforest offering people the opportunity to immerse themselves in nature." Caroline explains that the term rainforest doesn't mean we'll have tropical beasts in the Marshes, rather land that is "teeming with wildlife instead of boarded-up buildings" – as she tells me it's "about letting nature lead". The plans include cracked concrete, inspired by the amazing resilience of plants growing through pavements; the team wants to work with the existing features of the site to see what emerges.

"Land isn't something to be imposed upon"

One of the project's values is being 'radically imaginative', and communities are asked to dream the park into being. Imagining these cracked concrete slabs with cornflowers, primrose and cow parsley in abundance, the park could showcase ways for local people to create habitats in their own front gardens or roadsides, working alongside human influences within our cities.

The organising principles of the project

feel deeply rooted in the cycles of nature. Abigail describes a "mycelial network" (mirroring the way fungi connect underground), that enables individuals to believe they can affect change when they collaborate as part of a movement at peace with nature.

In the same way that trees, pond life, grasses, mushrooms, wetland birds and woodland creatures thrive together in a reciprocal, nurturing environment, so too does the community that sustains the East London Waterworks Park project.

Volunteers meet in 'circles' around themes (like fundraising, design, communications) and decisions are made by consent, creating a democratic organisation where a wide range of views are heard and diverse voices participate. And, like the wild flowers the park will hopefully one day be home to, the project wants to grow organically, which means being flexible about how volunteers can support and encourage "offshoots" (passion projects led by local residents; for example one Masters student is writing their dissertation on the scheme).



An illustration showing what the park will look like Credit East London Waterworks Park

Another core value of the project is 'courageously inclusive' and this is where the need for more volunteers comes in.

Abigail and Caroline both acknowledge that diversity and inclusion is challenging to get right and the team is committed to stewarding a vision for the park that emerges from community needs; that the land isn't something to be "imposed upon" but a space that belongs to people and nature together.

It's expected that the government (which currently owns the site) will bring forward a planning application and the team is gearing up to respond to it.

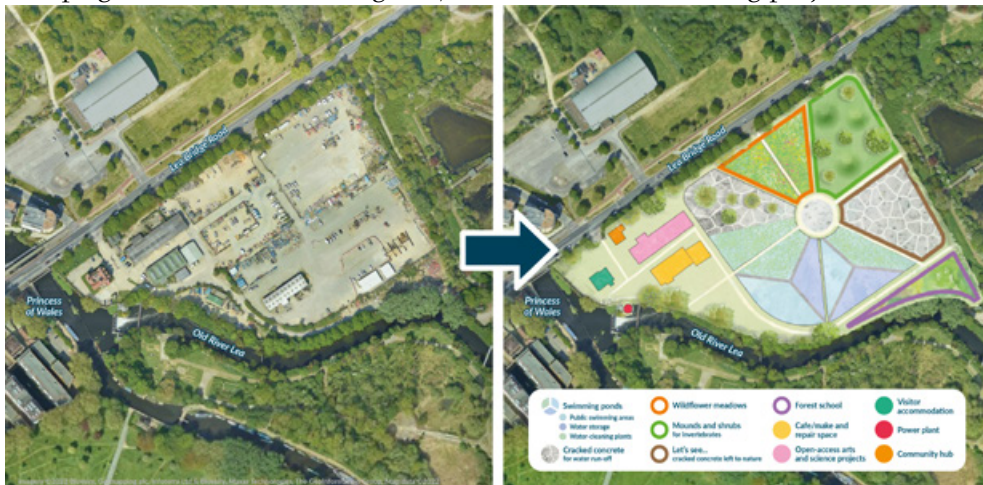
Smiling, Abigail says: "East London Waterworks Park is not going to go away as a vision, as an organisation. So stick with us!"

You can get involved by joining one of the six volunteer circles: elwp.org.uk/Joinus

The ELWP's crowdfunder is still open.

You can donate here: crowdfunder.co.uk/p/elwp

You can see the winners from the project's photography competition at the Princess of Wales pub at 146 Lea Bridge Road.



The goal is to turn a lorry depot into a community-owned park with wild swimming spots Credit East London Waterworks Park

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HEALTH

Campaigners urge NHS to keep Whipps Cross end-of-life unit

Activists handed in a petition signed by 6,449 local people calling on the health body to keep the provision

by Marco Marcelline

Campaigners handed in a petition to NHS North East London (NHS NEL) head office in Stratford on 16th November that calls for the only end-of-life facility in Waltham Forest to be included in plans for the Whipps Cross Hospital rebuild.

Specialist palliative care unit The Margaret Centre currently provides eleven beds to patients who are coming to the end of their life or have a life-limiting disease, such as cancer, neurological conditions and end stage heart or lung conditions.

The petition, signed by 6,449 local people, has signatories including Wanstead and Leyton MP John Cryer, as well as Chingford MP Iain Duncan Smith and Waltham Forest councillors.

In the last five months, Action4Whipps held street stalls across the Whipps Cross catchment area in a bid to draw attention to the uncertain future of the Margaret Centre.

In a speech, Ann Gross, a representative from Action4Whipps said: “As local people, we were shocked and disappointed when we first discovered that the plans for the new hospital did not include the re-provision of the Margaret Centre. Its high quality NHS services are greatly valued in the local community.

“There is no other hospice provision in Waltham Forest or Redbridge and Waltham Forest doesn’t even have a hospice at home service, so the Margaret Centre as a specialist NHS unit on the hospital site brings many strengths and advantages for patients and staff alike, and should be enhanced and not abandoned.”

Ann added: “The Margaret Centre has touched the lives of so many, and people just cannot believe that the current plans for the



new hospital mean it will not exist in future. It is both a scandal and a missed opportunity.”

At the hand-in, Chingford resident Tessa Shelley told the *Echo* how the Margaret Centre had been of help to her when Whipps Cross consultants informed her elderly father was close to death following a sudden health issue.

“We had very difficult end-of-life conversations in an open A&E ward [with consultants] about whether or not they could go ahead with surgery for him. I said I want him to go to the Margaret Centre because I knew it was there for end-of-life support.

“They got him to the Margaret Centre, I stayed there all night, there brought me a toiletry set. I was there for two days almost, and I was able to lay and sleep next to him in a chair there.

Tessa explained: “We had end-of-life challenges in terms of the pain relief and

the things they [health workers] had to do but the conversation was person-centered and it was about making sure that my dad was comfortable and we were alright. It wasn’t about freeing a bed, which was how it was in A&E.”

Previously, NHS NEL had argued that staffing a small, specialist team in a new community end-of-life unit like the Margaret Centre would be “more expensive than other options”.

No decisions have yet been made on the future of end-of-life care provision in Waltham Forest, Redbridge or West Essex.

A secondary phase of engagement on end-of-life care is currently underway, which NHS NEL has said will hear a “a broader range of voices in order to ensure services work in the right way for local people” and “will enable previous proposals to be developed and refined ahead of a further consultation process”.

Dr Sarah Heyes, clinical director for Whipps Cross End of Life Care Transformation, said: “We know it’s important to get end-of-life care right. People should die in dignity, comfort and with their wishes respected – whether they want to die at home, in hospital or at a hospice.

“We are talking to local people about their experiences and working together with them to develop proposals for improving end-of-life care in the area around Whipps Cross Hospital, and we acknowledge that this petition highlights the strong local interest in our plans.

“No decisions have been made and we will continue working with the communities we serve to ensure future services respond to the needs of local people. This includes members of the campaign group who we have involved in our work with residents, and we remain willing to meet them to discuss their concerns.”

The campaigners had expected to present the petition in person to Zena Etheridge, CEO of the NHS North East London (NHS NEL), and described it as “disappointing” and “disrespectful” that she had not received the petition in person.

In early 2022 campaigners presented a petition with over 2,000 signatures in-person to Alwen Williams, the then-CEO of Barts Health NHS Trust.

A spokesperson for the NHS NEL said: “We offered to meet representatives from the campaign group [on 16th November] to discuss the issues raised in the petition but they declined and chose not to attend. However, we acknowledge the petition highlights the strong local interest in our emerging plans and we remain willing to continue talking to them about their concerns.”

Continued from Page-1

in seven church venues across the week for people to bed down in church halls, with separate rooms for up to 30 people each night.

Since the pandemic, FCENS has moved to a model that provides individual rooms after a shift in government policy. It has operated an emergency night shelter for the last three winters using contracted hotel provision and is working in partnership with the YMCA on Forest Road in Walthamstow, where

15 rooms are available for emergency shelter during winter months.

David Hoskins, charity director at FCENS commented: “There is a perfect storm in homelessness this winter. With the cost of living, people are struggling to manage the high cost of housing, councils have limited housing stock and are competing for temporary accommodation, which is already full of people in priority need.

“Thousands of young adults are leaving home office accommodation at very short notice, while the government clears

the backlog of asylum applications, adding to the demand for homelessness services. We are seeing a big increase of people rough sleeping.

“The number of emergency beds has reduced and there are not enough beds for everyone who needs them. We need more emergency beds for people who are homeless in Waltham Forest. We are looking for a permanent home to continue this essential work to help people into sustainable housing.”

The council’s housing lead Ahsan Khan said reasons for the rise in people

sleeping rough included the end of the government’s pandemic ‘Everyone In’ scheme, and an “increase in EU nationals who are ineligible for homelessness support”. Cllr Khan said the council “expect the pressures to get worse without more [government] help”. He added that the council works with and funds a range of partners, including Change Grow Live and the YMCA, “to not only help people who are already sleeping rough but crucially to prevent it happening in the first place.”

CRIME

Caribbean takeaway hit by smash and grab



A Caribbean takeaway in Walthamstow was the victim of a smash and grab that has left the owner with a likely repair bill of “at least £800”.

Thieves smashed a window at Jerk Fusion, at 4 Walthamstow High Street, and took off with the contents of the till. The till was smashed open and the tray was taken. Only loose change including two five pound notes were inside.

The incident happened while the shop was closed between 10pm on Thursday 16th November and 7am on Friday 17th November.

An employee at the shop noted the smashed window on his arrival at 7am, and rang owner Jonathan Bryan. Jonathan told the *Echo* that thieves smashed the window with a brick, and then made off with the contents of the till.

A video shared with the *Echo* shows a huge hole in the window of the front door, and a brick lying on the floor behind a

counter. The kitchen and upstairs storage room appear to be left undisturbed.

Jonathan, who opened the takeaway in 2019 after running it as a stall on Walthamstow Market for four years previously, said replacing the tempered glass window would set him back around £800. He is opting to avoid paying inflated insurance premiums that would kick in if he made an insurance claim.

Jonathan told the *Echo* that the cost of living crisis was having a stifling effect on their ability to operate: “We’re a small family-run business, and the cost of living is killing us. The price of electricity and gas is extremely high. This year has been difficult because of the cost of living crisis. Before we used to buy oil that cost us £18–20 for 20 litres, and now it’s £36. Before Covid-19, we paid £14 for 18–20 quarter pieces of chicken and now it’s £22.”

Jonathan added: “Police said 8 break-ins have occurred within a two week period [in the surrounding area]. I can’t remember the last time there’s been this many break-ins in such a short period of time.”

Despite being left “depressed and saddened” by the situation, Jonathan said he was “grateful” that they didn’t “ransack the store and steal everything”. If they did, Jerk Fusion “would’ve been taken out of business”, he said.

Waltham Forest drugs gang busted over ‘largest ever’ synthetic opioid stash

by James Cracknell

Eleven members of a criminal gang have been arrested and charged by detectives who have seized the UK’s largest-ever stash of synthetic opioids.

Officers working with the UK Border Agency raided a number of addresses in Waltham Forest and Enfield as part of a national UK law enforcement effort to investigate the increase in synthetic opioid products being “adulterated” into the drugs supply network.

At a Waltham Forest address they recovered approximately 150,000 tablets of Nitazene, a synthetic opioid, in a sophisticated factory set up.

A substantial amount of other class A and B drugs, a firearm, a pill-pressing machine, over £60,000 in cash and £8,000 in cryptocurrency stored in various hard drives were also seized, along with a large quantity of mobile phones and laptops.

It is suspected the drugs were sold via

the dark web, using encrypted chat applications and social media.

The eleven people were arrested between 21st August and 21st November. All have been charged with conspiracy to supply class A and class B drugs.

Detective Superintendent Helen Rance, leading the investigation, said: “Synthetic opioids have been detected in batches of heroin found in London and across the UK; they substantially raise the risk of incredibly serious harm to the user and are believed to be linked to a number of deaths.

“There are support services available for people who need help. Anyone who has consumed synthetic opioids and experiences the symptoms described should seek urgent medical treatment.”

Anyone wanting to provide information, seek advice or request help should contact their local drug information system (LDIS) or talktofrank.com or from the FRANK helpline on 0800776600.



The incident took place close to the junction between Walthamstow High Street, Hoe Street and Churchill Hill
Credit: Google Streetview

Four men stabbed in Walthamstow town centre

Four men were taken in hospital after a stabbing on Hoe Street, Walthamstow last month.

Police were called to reports of a triple stabbing on Hoe Street at 9.22pm on Sunday (5th November).

Upon arriving, they found three men with stab injuries who were treated by paramedics from the London Ambulance Service before being taken to hospital. A fourth man was also found with stab injuries and was taken to hospital.

The Met added: “The conditions of the four men have been assessed as non life-threatening. All four have been arrested on suspicion of affray and they remain in police custody.”

The incident caused several road closures, including a section of Walthamstow High Street, Hoe Street and Churchill Hill. All were reopened following the incident.

A London Ambulance Service spokesperson said: “We sent a number of resources to the scene

including five ambulance crews, two incident response officers and members of our tactical response unit. We also dispatched London’s Air Ambulance.

“We treated four patients at the scene and took them all to a major trauma centre as a priority.”

If you have information on this incident, call 101 quoting CAD6807/05NOV. To remain anonymous, call the independent charity Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111 or visit crimestoppers-uk.org.

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Trustees Opportunities!

Would you consider bringing your skills, knowledge, and experience to the Management Committee of Community Transport Waltham Forest?

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- Health and Social Care experience and understanding of working in the health or care sector
- Community and lived experience of working in or with a range of community organisations with a knowledge and understanding of current impacts of transport provision on preventing active citizenship.

Diversity is critical for the Management Committee to be effective, and representative of our community needs. We encourage applications from people with lived experience from all ethnic, socio-economic, and professional and personal backgrounds. Whether you are an experienced trustee or thinking of taking up a trustee role we want to hear from you.



For application information please contact:
Helen Tredoux, Director, Community Transport Waltham Forest,
Low Hall Business Park, Leyton, E10 7AS.
Email: helen@ctwf.co.uk • Tel: 020 8521 0665

LETTERS

Free speech row

Dear WFE

MANY THANKS FOR YOUR article about the free speech row after a screening of the film *Oh Jeremy Corbyn; The Big Lie* was cancelled without any consultation with the organisers.

As a Jewish person who appears in the film and was looking forward to take part in a discussion after the planned screening at the Walthamstow Trades Hall, I object most strongly to the assertion by the "Campaign Against Antisemitism" that the film is "propaganda by anti-semitism deniers".

They are attacking a film which was narrated by a well-known Jew-

ish comedian, writer and broadcaster, Alexei Sayle, and which includes interviews with at least five other Jews, including myself.

It's very alarming that Waltham Forest Labour Party is quoted as wanting the film banned based on allegations about it which are simply untrue. Can they not tolerate debate about issues which are of huge importance to people in the party and the wider labour movement? For them to suggest that this issue has anything to do with the council keeping people safe from hate is frankly laughable.

Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi
Former vice-chair, Chingford and Woodford Green Labour Party

Historic car

Dear WFE

LOCAL HERITAGE GROUPS are requesting that the historic Bremer car remains within the borough whilst the Vestry House Museum is being redeveloped.

They also argued that the car could go to the Walthamstow Pumphouse Museum or the Town Hall during this period instead of the National Motor Museum in Hampshire.

They have also argued that the conditions that the car is currently kept in would be no

different if it were moved to one of these alternative venues.

The car was given to the residents of Walthamstow by Fredrick Bremer and was the first British four-wheeled internal combustion engine car which was built at his works in Walthamstow in 1894.

It is a travesty that there are no guarantees that Britain's first car with an internal combustion engine will return to Waltham Forest in the future.

Lindsay Collier,
Chairman of the Lea Valley Heritage Alliance, Chingford

Email your letters by Monday 11th December wfecho@socialspider.com

Advertisement

LICENSING ACT 2003

Application for the Grant of a Premises Licence

Notice is hereby given that **The Every Space Studio Ltd** has applied to the London Borough of Waltham Forest for the grant of a Premises Licence at 5 Central Parade, 137 Hoe St, London, E17 4RT. The nature of the application is as follows:

- To permit the sale of alcohol from Monday – Friday, 10.00–17.00; Saturday, 10.00–18.00; Sunday 11.00–17.00

The Licensing register listing full details of the application is kept by the Licensing Section, Town Hall, Fellowship Square, Forest Road, Walthamstow, London E17 4JF. The application may be viewed Monday to Friday between the hours of 9am – 5pm (except Bank Holidays).

Any person wishing to make a representation in respect of the above activities may do so in writing to the Licensing Section, London Borough of Waltham Forest, Town Hall, Fellowship Square, Forest Road, Walthamstow, London E17 4JF or via email: Licensing@walthamforest.gov.uk

Representations must be received no later than **18th December 2023**.

It is an offence to knowingly or recklessly make a false statement in connection with this application. A person is liable to an unlimited fine on conviction should such a false statement be made.

LICENSING ACT 2003

Application for the Variation of a Premises Licence

Notice is hereby given that **That's So PaPo's Ltd** has applied to the London Borough of Waltham Forest for the variation of an existing Premises Licence at: **Clandestino, Unit 2 & 10 Georgian Village, 100 Wood Street, Walthamstow E17 3HX**

- The nature of the application is to extend sale of alcohol hours on: Sun–Thurs 9:00 to 23:00, Fri–Sat, 9:00 to 24:00
- 9.00am is to sell online, public will only be on the premises from 11:00 to buy for on-site consumption at the bar, or off-site (canned products) to take away.

The Licensing register listing full details of the application is kept by the Licensing Service, Town Hall, Fellowship Square, Forest Road, London E17 4JF. The application may be viewed Monday to Friday between the hours of 9am – 5pm (except Bank Holidays).

Any person wishing to make a representation in respect of the above activities may do so in writing to the Licensing Service, Town Hall, Fellowship Square, Forest Road, London E17 4JF or via Licensing@walthamforest.gov.uk

Representations must be received no later than: **14th December 2023**. It is an offence under Section 158 of the Licensing Act 2003 to knowingly or recklessly make a false statement in connection with an application. A person is liable to an unlimited fine on conviction should such a false statement be made.

COMMENT

Activists present a petition to save the Margaret Centre to the NHS East London HQ in Stratford Credit Adam Scott



Why we're fighting to save the Margaret Centre

Mary Burnett, from Action4Whipps, sets out why the only end-of-life facility in the borough needs to stay

Why is the Margaret Centre at such risk? On 16th November, 35 people braved the cold to hand in a petition signed by nearly 6,500 residents to save the Margaret Centre at Whipps Cross hospital, which is the only specialist, in patient, end-of-life unit in Waltham Forest and Redbridge.

In the same week the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), which scrutinises the work of the government, published a damning report about Boris Johnson's 2019 "40 new Hospitals" pledge. Whipps Cross is one of those hospitals.

The programme to build the new hospitals has been dogged by uncertainty, delays and such a squeeze on funding that the need to keep costs down has pretty much trumped everything else. And this has put both the Margaret Centre and the viability of our new hospital at risk. It is no accident; we've had a decade of governments underfunding the NHS while promoting an increased reliance on the private sector.

The 40 hospitals have been divided into groups. Whipps Cross is in a group of eight so-called "Pathfinders", or guinea pigs, for a standardised, off-site method of construction called Hospital 2.0, which is largely untested in the hospital sector.

The model for Hospital 2.0 services – a "minimum viable product", or MVP model, is truly scandalous. It is a commercial model for piloting new products. Applied to Hospital 2.0 it means a "minimum viable set of services, in the minimum viable building size, to the minimum viable specifications, and at the minimum viable time and cost to build."

It is assumed that MVP will reduce the cost of building some of the new hospitals by anything between 27% and 43%. So, the primary consideration is very clear. The model has been criticised by the National Audit Office, a government spending watchdog, and the PAC. Both say it will result in hospitals that are too small, with insufficient beds, and unable to cope with increases in need – like flu epidemics, or another pandemic.

Funding for the new Whipps Cross Hospital is being cut to the bone. When it is finally rebuilt, the Margaret Centre itself will be demolished, because it sits on land that will be sold with planning permission for 1,500 homes. Standardised plans mean that Barts Health, who run Whipps Cross, have neither the flexibility, nor the funding, to rebuild the Margaret Centre.

Proposals for end-of-life care in the Whipps Cross catchment area are now being led by NHS

North East London, a new organisation that plans and pays for our health services.

Their initial proposal in January this year for people who are dying and are too ill to be cared for at home, or whose home circumstances mean they cannot be supported there, was to designate part of a ward in the new hospital for end-of-life care. This is despite them acknowledging that reserved beds may be needed for other emergency admissions, especially in a new hospital with too few beds.

Our petition called on Barts Health and NHS North East London to include rebuilding the Margaret Centre at Whipps Cross when the latter's plans go out for formal public consultation at some point in the next few months.

However, NHS North East London is also grossly underfunded and by September this year it had an "unplanned" deficit of over £70million.

So what chance does our campaign have to save the Margaret Centre? It can only survive if we continue to fight and also if we get a government that reverses the entrenched practice of increasing the role of the private sector while downgrading the capacity of the NHS. What we need is a government that is truly committed to funding the NHS and its buildings, its staff and its services.

COLUMN

Government cuts are making it harder for Waltham Forest to provide a safety net for vulnerable residents

In our latest councillor's column, Waltham Forest Council leader Grace Williams says 'difficult' financial decisions will have to be made to address funding challenges

Local government finances are in crisis. Up and down the country, councils of every size and political persuasion are facing a perfect storm of ongoing increases in demand for services, high inflation, and insufficient government funding. Waltham Forest is not immune to these challenges.

We all know that everything is getting more expensive. We see it in our utility bills, in our weekly shop, in the clothes we buy, in the services we use, and in the journeys we take.

Interest rate rises may be on pause for now, but as anyone coming off a fixed rate mortgage will tell you they are still much higher than they were just a couple of years ago and have been for the last 20 years. Renters have also felt the burden of price rises as landlords push increased costs onto tenants.

As a local authority we are the safety net that supports the most vulnerable in our society and prevents people falling through the cracks.

We help 3,385 elderly and disabled people live independently in their homes. It's a lifeline for residents with higher needs that allows them to live comfortably and with dignity. But the number of people in Waltham Forest we are supporting has risen by over 1,000 in the past four years alone.

Not only have the numbers of those needing help risen but so have the average weekly

costs - up by 24% in just four years. Or to put it another way, 13p out of every £1 the council has is spent meeting residents' adult social care needs. For a typical Band D household that's £183 of council tax a year.

It's not just adult social care. Three years ago, we had 1,800 children and young people who needed bespoke educational health and care plans. Now that figure is over 3,000. The number of children in the council's care has risen from 303 in March 2020 to 342 by this August.

We all know that London is the epicentre of a housing crisis that causes misery for many of our residents. As of October 2023, we had 8,060 people on our housing waiting list and demand is rising. We are already the landlord for 12,000 households across the borough. We continue to increase our social housing stock despite our budget constraints, but even though we built the second most council homes anywhere in the country last year we are still not able to meet demand.

The costs of providing accommodation in the private rented sector have gone up too. Temporary accommodation costs were nearly £50 a week higher in April 2023 than a year before, and the pace at which rates are increasing continues to grow. Landlords facing higher interest rates are selling up, and those that remain can get higher rents from



Grace Williams has led the council since July 2021
Credit Waltham Forest Council

those looking to escape the astronomical prices of inner London boroughs.

This would not be so bad if the government had allowed the local housing allowance rate, the maximum amount people renting from a private landlord can claim in housing benefit or Universal Credit, to increase.

But it has been frozen for the past three years. We want to see the local housing allowance rate increased so that it covers at least the bottom 30% of market rents. This will help us offer local accommodation to people who approach us at risk of being made homeless rather than having to look

outside of the borough.

And we need more freedom to build the right homes in the right places – especially homes for social rent. This is a crisis that requires urgent action. As of September 2023, the number of people coming to us at imminent risk of homelessness is 50% higher than last year.

This increased demand for our services comes at a time when central government funding for councils has been slashed. The deliberate policies of the last five Conservative prime ministers and chancellors to reduce central government support for local authorities and have an active policy of 'managed decline' for our communities continues to have a negative impact on those in most need of help.

The cost of absolutely essential provision for the elderly and children, and for carrying out life-line services such as child protection, household rubbish collections, recycling, social care, street cleaning, trading standards, food hygiene, roads, and libraries has fallen on local taxpayers.

When council tax bills landed on people's doormats in 2013, 57% of our funding came from the government. Ten years on that has fallen to 34%. Council tax now accounts for 55p of every pound that we spend, up from 35p in 2013/14. Much of the rest comes from local business rates.

Waltham Forest prides itself on sound financial management. We have made and will continue to make difficult decisions in the long-term interests of our residents. Like every council we are legally bound to balance our budget or go bankrupt. After 13 years of austerity and having already made over £120million in savings there is very little left to cut.

Ahead of the Autumn Statement I wrote to Chancellor Jeremy Hunt asking him to do more to help us and other local authorities. We are facing a significant budget deficit that will mean many tough decisions over the coming months. Our priorities are clear: our residents come first in everything we do and every decision we make – always.

Council to implement voluntary redundancy scheme to plug budget gap

by Josh Mellor,
Local Democracy Reporter

Waltham Forest Council is asking its staff to consider redundancy in a bid to close a budget shortfall of "£20-30million" in the next three years.

Council leader Grace Williams said the redundancy scheme, to be implemented next year, is needed to make "essential savings".

The Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) understands that the council is predicting a £28m budget gap by 2026/27. This year, it is also on track to spend £16m more than planned.

Measures like staff cuts are being considered as, unlike other government services

such as the NHS, councils like Waltham Forest have a legal duty to balance their budget each year.

When asked whether the council has a target for the number of staff it wishes to let go, or whether every department is included in the scheme, the leader did not respond.

The borough's branch secretary for Unite the Union Kevin Parslow told the LDRS: "Obviously, a reduction in staff may have consequences for the council's clients and residents in terms of effects on some services, and we have warned the council of that."

Launching voluntary redundancies is an early sign of cost-cutting measures next year's budget is likely to include.

However, other than statements from Cllr

Williams about "difficult decisions" due to financial pressures, limited details have been revealed of other potential cuts and "savings".

The council has also said it will need to "go further and deeper" in the long term by changing some services to "digital self-serve wherever appropriate" and targeting residents with the highest needs to prevent them from needing even more council support in the future.

A council spokesperson told the LDRS it will not consult residents on its overall budget, but will ask residents for their views on cuts and savings "where applicable".

In previous years, Waltham Forest's Labour administration has avoided making drastic cuts or savings to council services by

tapping into its financial reserves.

Although these fluctuate over the years, Cllr Williams has said the reserves Waltham Forest has available to use have almost halved to £47m.

She added: "Like many others we have already been using reserves to continue to provide the essential services on which residents rely. In the long run this is simply unsustainable."

Further details of the council's medium term financial plan are due to be published in early December. The government is then due to confirm its final funding figures for local authorities in January.

Full details of the council's 2024/25 budget including potential council tax increases, will not be published in full until mid-February.

HOUSING

Student halls set to be built on St James health centre site

by Josh Mellor,
Local Democracy Reporter

Plans for a new student halls building have been approved on the site of the St James Health Centre in Walthamstow.

Tribe Student Housing, which has built halls on three sites in South London, won permission to build the halls once the health centre relocates to nearby Brunner Road in October 2024.

The halls containing 224 student rooms will be three to six storeys tall, built around a courtyard with an entrance on St James Street.

Neighbours living opposite the health centre, in the seven storey Hops House, attended the meeting to raise concerns about overshadowing and loss of privacy to their homes.

But councillors on Waltham Forest’s planning committee approved the scheme following the advice of planning officers, who said the impact of the buildings would be “acceptable”.

In their report which advised the committee to grant approval, the planning team concluded that light would not be lost at a “significant” enough amount to justify refusing planning permission.

They also found that the loss of light to the set of bedroom windows affected on

neighbouring Essex Brewery would be “relatively small” compared to the benefits of the development.

John Moss, the committee’s only Conservative member, proposed to delay a decision until the light issue could be clarified, but Labour’s Kira Lewis backed out of supporting his suggestion after assistant director of development management building control Justin Carr said the main cause of loss of light was balconies.

The plans for the large development will bypass the Mayor of London’s planning stage for major developments as 35% of the rooms will be classed as “affordable”.

Affordable student hall rents are about £600 per month, which is 55% of the maximum student loan available in London.

The 224 student rooms will include 99 bedrooms with ensuite bathrooms in a “cluster” around a shared living space, while 125 will be self-contained studios. They will be exclusively marketed to students at Portsmouth University’s Walthamstow campus for the first three months.

The ground floor will have 525 square metres of commercial space facing the street.

According to Tribe Student Living’s financial viability assessment, the development will cost £42million to build with an estimated profit of £6m.



Council approves plan to turn former stables into homes

by Josh Mellor,
Local Democracy Reporter

A historic former riding school stable in Chingford is facing demolition after councillors green-lit plans to replace it with new-build homes.

The former Queen Elizabeth Riding School, next to the Queen Elizabeth pub on Forest Side, is a century-old stable building that has been left unused for a decade.

Waltham Forest Council’s planning committee granted developer Keir Goldstein, of VFund, permission on 7th November to replace the stables with seven flats and two semi-detached houses.

The committee’s four Labour members voted to approve the scheme, while Conservative John Moss voted to reject it, after which a resident shouted that the decision was “an absolute disgrace”.

Local residents arguing for its preservation said the “well-known and loved” building is one of Chingford’s few traditional Essex weatherboarded coach houses.

The stables reportedly contain features such as a forge, traditional paving, hay lofts and stables.

Many residents feel the building has sentimental value both as a riding school with easy access to Epping Forest and as a local cultural landmark.

Addressing the planning committee, neighbour Louise Street argued the former riding school should be restored and repurposed into a museum, but council planning officer Neil Hoddesworth said this was “unlikely to be viable”.

Neither concerned residents nor the council appeared to have drawn up detailed proposals for the museum idea.

The building ceased being used as a

riding school about a decade ago when the pub chain landlord The Orchid Group, reportedly raised the rent from £10,000 to £18,000 per year.

At the time, business owner Kevin Raby told the *Local Guardian* the rent had “crippled” him.

After the riding school closed, the pub chain – now owned by Mitchells & Butlers Retail – appears to have let the building fall into disrepair.

Part of the roof has now collapsed and boards used to block the open doors have fallen off, exposing the buildings to the elements.

A report by heritage consultant Laurie Handcock, commissioned by the developer, suggests that any possible renovation would result in a “Trigger’s Broom” building lacking most of its original fabric.

In his advice to the committee, which recommended granting permission, Hoddesworth said the building’s heritage value is “at the lower end of the scale” and provoked laughter from residents after suggesting “a memorial of some description”.

The planning officer found that although demolition of the building – which he described as a “non-designated heritage asset” – would harm the recently-approved North Chingford Station Road Conservation Area, the design of the new buildings would be “an improvement to the localised setting”.

Plans for the new homes suggest they will be brick and tile-faced with a low-pitched gabled roof that would “successfully reinterpret the architectural form of the existing stable building”.

Hoddesworth added that the area has a range of privately owned stables and that Chingford residents can also access the Lee Valley Riding Centre by public transport.

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ARTS & CULTURE

Paint the town green



Recycled paints for sale
Credit Joanne Segars

Photographer Joanne Segars has documented the work of Forest Recycling Project (FRP), a charity that has been recycling the borough's paint, fabrics, wood, and tools since its inauguration in 1989.

FRP has a goal of saving as much paint from the rubbish tip as possible.

It does this by collecting usable paint from recycling centres in Waltham Forest and distributing

it across the local community, selling it to the public at affordable prices while saving good quality paint from incineration.

The charity sells its reclaimed paint out of its warehouse in The Sidings, near Leyton Midland Road, and from its Bakers Avenue shop in Walthamstow. FRP also runs the popular Walthamstow Tool Library on the Priory Court Estate.

Find out more: frpuk.org or email info@frpuk.org



The FRP's warehouse in Leyton Photo
Credit Joanne Segars

Soho Theatre opening pushed back to 2025

The council has said delays to construction work have been due to 'challenges of returning' the Grade II listed venue to its 'former glory'



What the Soho Theatre will look like when completed Credit Waltham Forest Council

by Marco Marcelline

The much anticipated Soho Theatre Walthamstow will not open to the public until "2025", the council has confirmed.

The delay comes amid con-

struction "challenges" experienced by Willmott Dixon, the company leading the renovation works on the former EMD cinema. The £30million theatre had been previously projected to "soft launch" this month, followed by an official public opening in February 2024.

In a statement to the *Echo*, a spokesperson for the council said that delays to work "have been due to the challenges of returning a much-loved Grade II* listed venue, much of which was unused and derelict for over twenty years, to its former glory".

The council said that construction work is now due to finish at an unspecified time in "2024",

with the first performances now set to take place in "2025".

A selection of "soft launch" events including tours, test activities, and performances will be announced next year once building works are "closer to completion", the council added.

Work on the 970-seat venue began in September 2020 and had initially been earmarked for a March 2023 grand opening before being pushed back to February 2024. The second delay comes as a blow to the council's vision for Walthamstow to become a "cultural quarter".

Willmott Dixon did not respond to repeated requests for comment.

FEATURED EVENT

PRINT EXHIBITION

Saturday 9th December (12–3pm) – 7th January
St Peters in the Forest, 18
Woodford New Road E17 3PP

Walthamstow artist Jason Hawkrigge is to exhibit prints inspired by the fluidity and movement of the changing seasons and the colours they create.

He says: "The 12 evolving prints form moments of a print transition created with found objects from Walthamstow market and the local area, printed on recycled papers and suspension files from the The Mill Community Centre on Coppermill Lane.

The inks have been donated from Paekakariki Letter Press, from Mitre Studios, Walthamstow.

They are all unique prints. The process is never stationary, never still, evolving from one print session to the next. Exploration, letting go, and encouraging



Credit Jason Hawkrigge

serendipity is a fundamental part of my practice.

When lifting the paper, the image is revealed, which in turn inspires further exploration, celebrating the process-driven idiosyncrasies and the vibrant dynamism of each print."

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Join CREST Waltham Forest as a Trustee! Embrace our mental health hub, The Snug, champion day care at Colby Lodge, and foster community development at Harmony Hall. Shape our 2024 strategies with your skills. Be the positive change. Contact: admincrest@crestwf.org.uk

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AROUND THE BOROUGH

CHINGFORD

Freemasons donate £4,000 to hospice



Former Metropolitan Lodge 1507 chair Paul Keska and his wife Debbie hand a cheque to Sami Shulton from St Clare Hospice (left) Credit: Metropolitan Lodge 1507

A Freemasons lodge in Chingford has fundraised and donated £4,000 to a West Essex hospice.

St Clare Hospice provides specialist palliative care to people affected by life-limiting illness in West Essex and the borders of East Hertfordshire.

Former lodge chair Paul Keska

and his wife Debbie presented St Clare Hospice with a cheque for the donation on 28th October after a fundraising appeal over this year. Metropolitan Lodge 1507 is a Chingford-based freemasons association founded in 1874.

Paul said: "I chose St Clare Hospice because they were so supportive in looking after the wife of my

friend and colleague in her last days. It was a difficult and emotional time for everyone involved but I can't thank St Clare Hospice enough for the support they provided and I hope this donation helps in some small way for them to continue their outstanding work."

The £4,000 was raised by members throughout last year via a series of fundraising events such as dinners, quizzes and dances. The lodge has previously raised £10,000 to Guide Dogs for the Blind, £1,095 to Stroke Association, and £1,095 to Diabetes UK.

Freemasonry is one of the oldest secular social and charitable organisations in the world and has roots in medieval stonemasons. Lodges are only open to men over 18 of all backgrounds and any religion, and its stated aim is to empower members to build character and make a positive contribution in society. Freemason lodges in the UK donated a combined £51.1million to various causes in 2020.

WHIPPS CROSS

Date set for inquest into Whipps Cross toddler death

A two-day inquest in March will look at the sequences of events that led to the death of a three-year-old boy with down's syndrome.

Isaac Onyeka, who also had sickle cell trait, died following a brief illness on May 31st while he was receiving emergency treatment at Whipps Cross Hospital.

At a pre-inquest review hearing on 14th September, Nadia Persaud, the area coroner for East London, said that an inquest will look into the "direct sequences of events" that led to his death, and investigate whether any aspects of the care provided contributed to Isaac's passing.

The court heard how Isaac had been frequently seen by hospitals for various conditions; in November



2019 he was treated for bronchiolitis, and in July 2021 he was seen for an upper respiratory tract infection, while in May 2022, he attended hospital with a cough and fever.

The inquest will look at whether information about those hospital attendances was shared with Forest Practice by the acute trust [Barts Health] and whether it was taken into account by the doctor who saw Isaac shortly before his

death in May this year.

A full inquest into his death will take place at the East London Coroners Court in Walthamstow on 4th and 5th March 2024.

At a second pre-inquest review hearing on 6th November at the Walthamstow Coroners Court, Persaud said a full inquest will look into the handling of a 111 call on 30th May 2023, the care provided by the GP on the 31st of May 2023, as well as the emergency care provided on 31st May by the London Ambulance Service and Barts Health.

Isaac's GP, the Forest Practice in Loughton, Essex, is currently carrying out a formal serious untoward incident investigation into his death.

WALTHAMSTOW

High Street bicycle shed destroyed by fire

An e-bike shed next to a shop on Walthamstow High Street was destroyed after two e-bikes caught fire.

Four fire engines and 25 firefighters were called to the fire just after 11pm on 4th November. According to the London Fire Brigade (LFB), four people left the building next to the shed before fire response crews arrived. No injuries were reported.

The LFB believes the fire to have been accidental and says it was caused by the failure of two lithium-ion batteries.

A spokesperson for the London Fire Brigade said: "The Brigade was called at 11.02pm and the fire was under control by 12.32am. Crews from Walthamstow, Tottenham and Woodford fire stations

attended the scene."

The spokesperson added: "The owners of these bikes did the right thing by storing these e-bikes outside the home which helped to limit the damage."

"We want people who own an e-bike or e-scooter to travel safely and charge safe. Please follow our safety advice: always buy your battery from a reputable and trusted seller, charge your battery in a safe location that doesn't block your exit route in an emergency."

"We recommend storing your e-bike in an outdoor shed which can help protect you, your family and your home from harm. Never charge e-bikes and e-scooters when the household is asleep so that everyone can react quickly should there be a fire."

LEYTON

Man charged following Lea Bridge double stabbing

A man has been charged in connection with a stabbing incident in Leyton on 11th November that left two teenage boys in hospital.

Solomon Brown, 27, of Elm Gardens, Chelmsford was charged with possession of points and blades and appeared in custody at Thames Magistrates' Court on 13th November. He was remanded in custody ahead of a further hearing at the same court on 4th December.

The Metropolitan Police added that a 19-year-old man who was arrested on suspicion of grievous-bodily-harm has been released under investigation.

Police were called to a



restaurant on Lea Bridge Road in Leyton at approximately 8.50pm on 11th November to reports of a "group fighting". On arrival, they found two boys with stab injuries who were taken to hospital by the London Ambulance Service.

Their conditions were deemed to be non life-threatening.

SPORT

Don't give up on Stow FC just yet

Despite some setbacks, there are reasons to be cheerful about the 'best-dressed team in non-league football', says David O'Driscoll

It is said that the league table does not lie, and Walthamstow FC are currently in a healthy seventh spot, just outside the playoff positions. The general feeling from talking to fans is that Stow has been far from convincing.

What's more, they are conceding loads of last-minute goals. In the recent away trip to Lowestoft Town (who are currently top of the league), they lost to a last-minute goal. At two home games, against promotion rivals Felixstowe and the bottom-of-the-table Grays Athletic, Stow conceded last-minute equalisers despite being dominant for much of the game.

These last minute goals have led Stow to a controversial solution by re-signing Jason Beck. A very competent defender, brilliant in the air, but with a volatile side, Beck has a very long string of match suspensions. So it is a risk.

As ever with non-league football, Beck has been one of many arrivals, and it feels like they're trying to get the old gang back with the recruitment of several players who played for Walthamstow previously. Adalberto Pinto, a former



Stow FC right-winger Adalberto Pinto (left) fighting for possession during 28th October's match against Heybridge Swifts Credit Bill Badger

captain who brings a lot of energy to the centre of the pitch, has returned, as has the forward, Ollie Sotoyinbo.

The player I was pleased to see back at the club is Bilal Sayoud. He had been playing at a high level for Hemel Hempstead but has been enticed to return to his old stomping ground. He's a left-footed midfielder who can drift out of games, but

when he's on it he's a very creative player.

For most fans the stand-out performer has been Damaray Anyadike. Stow season ticket-holder Alex Perry commented, "I've been really impressed by Anyadike. A young local traditional right winger in the mould of [ex-Manchester United flying winger] Andrei Kanchelskis, [Anyadike] is lightning quick, learning the game and

getting more consistent with his output. He's now doing damage to opponents in every single game. It's a wonder no bigger club has snapped him up yet. Stow fans need to enjoy him while they can."

Despite his form, there is a sense that this team is still struggling to gel, maybe in part due to all the coming-and-goings. This was a point regular Stow watcher Ben James felt. "Though Walthamstow is on the fringes of the playoffs, it still feels like there is more to come from this team. Our away form has been good, our home form is patchy, and we've thrown away a couple of wins in the last minutes of games."

He added: "If we can start turning those draws into wins, Stow should be knocking on the door of the automatic promotion spot."

While the general view is that the best dressed team in non-league football have been far from convincing, it must be remembered that this time last year, Stow was in the bottom half of the league. They went on to have a storming second half of the season and just missed on reaching the playoff final. So, there are still reasons to be cheerful.

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