



Your independent community newspaper

# WALTHAM FOREST ECHO

Free  
May 2025, N° 122

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AFTER MORE THAN a decade of planning, Soho Theatre Walthamstow is finally set to open its doors to the public on Friday, 2nd May, with a star-studded line-up of comedic and other acts coming to E17 over the next few weeks – find out more on Page 3 ►

## Foodbank facing eviction appeals for help

by Sebastian Mann,  
Local Democracy Reporter

One of the biggest foodbanks in Waltham Forest is appealing for help finding a new premises after being served an eviction notice.

Pl84U Al-Suffa (pronounced 'plate for you') has been ordered to vacate its home at the Epicentre in Leytonstone by 8th June.

The foodbank is open on Mondays, Wednesdays and Sundays and sees around 500 users come through its doors each week. It was launched in March 2020 and moved into the Epicentre that October.

The World Shirdi Sai Baba

Organisation, which took over the building in November, is planning a major refurbishment project and asked its tenants to leave earlier this month so work can take place.

For the past twelve years, it had been in the hands of a liquidator and "deteriorated significantly," leading to "major" infrastructure problems, the charity said.

Saira Begum Mir, who runs Pl84U Al-Suffa, said the foodbank's potential closure meant "thousands of people could lose access to the meals, groceries, and essential support they rely on every week".

She said she was "very concerned" about the foodbank potentially becoming homeless but wanted to

"think positively".

The owners have not specified whether Pl84U Al-Suffa could return to the premises once the repairs have been completed, she added.

A GoFundMe has been launched to help the foodbank find a new base, with a target of £6,000.

Saira said the move would incur "significant costs" including a hefty deposit for a new commercial space and the price of fitting it out with fridges, storage, and seating.

A spokesperson for the landlord said all tenants were told about the upcoming refurbishments last year, before giving them two

months' formal notice.

They said: "It is not an eviction notice. We have already indicated in the past that there will be refurbishment in the future and we have given enough notice for these absolutely important repairs."

The charity has faced "numerous challenges" since taking over the Epicentre five months ago. The lifts have failed four times since November and will cost £25,000 to repair, the World Shirdi Sai Baba Organisation spokesperson said, while the "blocked" toilets will require immediate repairs and the flooring needs "urgent attention" after "years of neglect".

Additionally, the "obsolete"

heating system needs repairing so the Epicentre can open during winter.

"Even now, people are complaining it's cold in there," the spokesperson continued.

"This decision is based on essential health, safety, and security requirements, as well as the urgent need to upgrade core infrastructure, including heating systems, electrical, and hot water services, which are now over 26 years old.

"This project is not cosmetic. It is a vital investment to transform the Epicentre into a modern, green, energy-efficient, and environmentally sustainable facility that will better serve the community for years to come."

Waltham Forest Council says it "wants to do all it can" to help the foodbank keep operating.

Vicky Ashworth, cabinet member for stronger communities, said: "We really appreciate the excellent work that Pl84U Al-Suffa does in our borough providing essential support for some of our most vulnerable residents.

"We are working with them to see how we may be able to assist in their search for a new premises after the landlord of the Epicentre served notice. We want to do all we can to help Pl84U continue its important work which is hugely valued in the community."

Pl84U Al-Suffa is among several busy foodbanks in the borough.

Others include Eat or Heat in Walthamstow, which the council says serves "hundreds of thousands" of meals a year, as well as the Rukhsana Khan Foundation and Highams Park Food Aid.

Saira added: "Our 'guests' [at Pl84U] are often the people you pass on the street, travel with on the bus, or meet at the school gates. Today, many families and individuals need help just to survive week to week."

## NEWS

# Mystery of Walthamstow road traffic victim finally solved after ten years

by James Cracknell

**A** Walthamstow man killed in a road traffic collision has finally been identified – ten years after his death.

Late into the evening of Thursday, 22nd January 2015, a man was crossing Chingford Road just north of the busy junction with Forest Road and Hoe Street when he was tragically struck by a car and killed.

Witnesses were sought and the driver was prosecuted, but the case remained open because the man's identity could not be confirmed – until now.



Volunteers with Locate International, a charity which investigates cold cases of missing and unidentified people, have successfully confirmed the man's identity as Bryan Alwyn Woolis.

The charity's investigation involved tracking down the owner of a canal boat Bryan had been pictured on and visiting The William The Fourth pub in Leyton where he was known to drink, before tracing him back to Sheffield where he grew up and using the local press to raise awareness. Even now, however, it is unclear if Bryan had children or a partner and further information about him is still being sought.

Bryan lived above a shop in Chingford Road but had few possessions, and nothing to identify him. A phone had only a small handful of contacts, and, intriguingly, a few printed photos gave some clues as to his life: they showed the man aboard a canal boat, exploring with curiosity.

A few people said they had encountered him. His name may have been "Brian Wallace", they said, and he had worked cash-in-hand as a builder. He had a



A Locate International volunteer putting up a missing person poster of Bryan in a shop

northern accent and may have had a sister who lived elsewhere in London but, back in 2015, little else was known about him.

Bryan's details remained public on the UK Missing Persons Unit website for years, but brought no leads and the case went cold.

In 2022, Locate International's volunteers began their own investigation. Featured in the *Echo*, they quickly identified the owner of the canal boat on which Bryan was pictured; they did not know each other, he said, but they had met at The William The Fourth near Bakers Arms. Drinkers at the pub recognised the pictures of him, but said he was quiet and had often sat in the corner alone.

In early 2024, however, after a press appeal by Locate International targeting Sheffield, there was a significant breakthrough. The *Sheffield Star* newspaper ran a story on him in January that year which prompted Nik Dodsworth, an inspector with South Yorkshire Police, to investigate further.

"I did some enquiries and found a partial DNA hit which brought up a Bryan Alwyn Woolis, and I immediately noted the similarity of the name to Brian Wallace," said Insp Dodsworth.

"I found an obituary for an Alwyn Woolis who had died in Derbyshire in 2016, and in the



Two pictures of Bryan Woolis on a canal boat were among the early clues to his identity

obituary his late son Bryan was mentioned, as well as Alwyn's daughter and another son."

Insp Dodsworth then identified Alwyn Woolis' daughter. Nine years after the fatal collision in Walthamstow, she was able to make a positive identification: the man who died was her brother, Bryan Woolis.

Since then, Locate International and Insp Dodsworth have been liaising with the Woolis family, and the match has been passed to the Metropolitan Police and East London coroner. Yvonne Naish, who led the team that investigated Bryan's case, said: "I am really pleased that we have been able to let his family know what happened to him and hopefully bring them some peace of mind."

"The whole team spent a lot of time thinking about the case and trying to understand how the police had a name yet no-one could locate his family."

Bryan is believed to have been close to someone named Sylvia, who worked in country and western venues in the Nottingham area, but little more is known about his life.

"My sympathy is with Bryan's family, who had to live with not knowing what happened to him for several years," said Insp Dodsworth. "I am glad that they finally have some closure on this tragic incident and can begin to rebuild."

Bryan is buried in Manor Park Cemetery; a modest gravestone is marked "Brian Wallace 22.01.2015".

Anyone with further information can contact Locate International via its website: Visit [locate.international/bryan-woolis](http://locate.international/bryan-woolis)

## Student flats

by Sebastian Mann, Local Democracy Reporter

**A** former Art Deco cinema in Leyton will be partly demolished to make way for 261 new student flats.

Three new blocks at the former Ritz Cinema, between one and six storeys tall, will be built by developers J Wool Ltd in Leyton High Road. They were approved by Waltham Forest Council's planning committee last month and will comprise 63 studio flats and 198 en-suites. There will also be space for shops on lower floors.

## New homes

by Sebastian Mann, Local Democracy Reporter

**W**altham Forest Council will buy 53 affordable homes on a new development with vulnerable residents set to be given priority.

The homes at the 'Fellowship Square' development around the Waltham Forest Town Hall complex will be bought using revenue raised from Right to Buy sales and will be available for at-risk residents waiting for a home on the housing register or who currently live in temporary accommodation.

The flats are currently under construction by developer Countryside Properties, but are on track to be finished by November this year. In total the Fellowship Square development will see 433 new homes built, with 205 of these designated affordable.

## Befriending

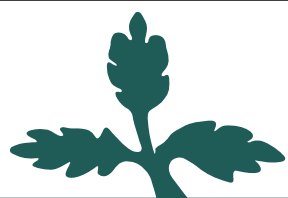
**A** local charity has launched a new community befriending service in Waltham Forest.

Aimed at providing friendship and connection to adults facing loneliness and social isolation, the service led by LifeLine Projects was commissioned by Waltham Forest Council.

Approximately 20% of adults in the borough report regularly feeling lonely and over 60% of residents say they don't have as much social contact as they would like, according to a council strategic needs assessment.

In response, LifeLine Projects has developed a borough-wide befriending service to support those experiencing social isolation.

Find out more: Visit [lifelineprojects.co.uk/projects/families/community-befriending](http://lifelineprojects.co.uk/projects/families/community-befriending)



FELLOWSHIP IS LIFE

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NEWS

New theatre opening its doors



Co-executive director Sam Hansford, comedian Rosie Jones and Soho Theatre CEO Mark Godfrey    Credit David Jensen

Soho Theatre Walthamstow opens on Friday 2nd May

by Marco Marcelline

The long-awaited Soho Theatre Walthamstow is finally set to open its doors this month. The grand opening of the Hoe Street venue is scheduled for Friday, 2nd May, with American actor and comedian Natalie Palamides’s one-woman show WEER opening proceedings

before a packed summer line-up that includes Tim Minchin, Dara O’Briain, Sara Pascoe, Mark Watson, Suzi Ruffell, Kiell Smith-Bynoe, Adam Kay and The Tiger Lillies, among others. The much-anticipated £30million theatre was originally scheduled to open in March 2023, and then February 2024, with developers Wilmott Dixon blaming delays on the challenges

of returning the Grade 2\*-listed building – a former cinema that also doubled as a live music venue and famously hosted The Beatles in 1963 – to “its former glory”. After laying dormant since 2003, the venue has now been fully restored. The newly-named Soho Theatre Walthamstow features a 960-seat auditorium alongside brand new studio spaces, backstage facilities, four bars and a restaurant. To celebrate the opening, 15,000 tickets are being offered for just £15 across the first year of shows – up to May 2026 – to

those who live, work or study in Waltham Forest. The theatre will also host building tours and cross-borough events such as a two-day film festival celebrating Walthamstow’s contribution to the world of cinema, from 1800 to the present day. The festival is curated by The McGuffin Film Society, which was based at the former Granada cinema until its closure 22 years ago. First approved by Waltham Forest Council in 2019, the renovation of the former cinema has cost at least £30m, but the town hall estimates it will add about £52m to the local economy in the next decade and says it forms a key part of the vision for Walthamstow to become a “cultural hotspot” in London. Theatre co-chair Alessandro Babalola said: “As someone who was born and raised in this borough, who loves this place, it is an astounding feeling to be a part of bringing a theatre here. “Soho Theatre Walthamstow is going to be sensational: a world class venue rooted in its community, giving local people the chance to access live performance. “It’s something I’ve wanted since I was a kid when having to travel to surrounding boroughs. That 13 year-old me would now have that opportunity with the best theatre right on my doorstep? You can imagine how happy I feel.”

Check out the full list of events and book tickets: Visit [sohotheatre.com/walthamstow](https://sohotheatre.com/walthamstow)

The interior of the theatre before its restoration    Credit Waltham Forest Council



How the historic theatre building was restored

by Waltham Forest Council

Restoring the former Granada/EMD cinema building to its former glory has been one of the most exciting council-led projects in the borough for many years. We were able to achieve this in several different ways, working with a range of skilled heritage specialists and craftspeople with advice and support from Historic England. The Spanish-Arabic inspired interior has been restored using the arrested decay approach, which is commonly used in the conservation of historic buildings, especially theatres. It makes a virtue of a building’s rich history by showing and celebrating different layers of its decoration. With arrested decay, there’s no aim to replicate a pristine original and ignore everything that came after; it doesn’t try to reverse any superficial deterioration. Instead, it freezes it in time, so the building reveals its own rich history through the layers of different exposed paints and textures. Local artist and specialist decorator Saskia Huning was one of the many people working on the interior restoration of the building. Saskia’s work focused on recreating a section of the 1930s painted dado design, a geometric stencilled tiled pattern that lines the walls of the auditorium. To recreate the stencils, an area of the original painted dado was uncovered and traced off and colours were mixed to match this, considering the aged patinated appearance of the original. Stencils were then cut to allow the design to be recreated. Our focus was on restoring and preserving this unique 1930s building and its historical features, while allowing the spaces to be sensitively adapted for modern theatre use and making it accessible for all.

SOHO THEATRE WALTHAMSTOW: OPENING MONTH LISTINGS

<b>Natalie Palamides: WEER</b> Friday 2nd to Saturday 10th May, 8pm  New Year’s Eve 1999, star-crossed lovers, a quarrel at the stroke of midnight. Natalie Palamides presents an achingly tender 90s rom-drom (romantic dramedy) which asks you to look at every argument from two sides.  Tickets from £25	<b>Mark Watson: Before It Overtakes Us</b> Saturday 17th May, 7.30pm  A recent encounter with a stranger caused Mark to spend some time pondering the uncertain future facing humanity. He explores this, along with equally pressing matters like the worst word he has ever said in public, the current state of the UK sausage industry, and much more.  Tickets from £24	<b>Kiell Smith Bynoe and friends: Kool Story Bro</b> Thursday 22nd May, 8pm  Star of ‘Taskmaster’ and ‘Ghosts’, Kiell Smith-Bynoe is joined by an all-star cast of comedians and a special guest host to turn stories from the audience into completely improvised comedy scenes.  Tickets from £24	<b>John Early: The Album Tour</b> Wed 28th and Thu 29th May, 8pm  John Early brings ‘The Album Tour’ to Soho Theatre Walthamstow for his biggest-ever London shows. His HBO stand up special, ‘Now More Than Ever’, was released to critical acclaim in June 2023 and was nominated for an Emmy Award. John was also nominated for his A24 sketch special ‘Would it Kill You To Laugh’.  Tickets from £32
<b>Ahir Shah: Ends</b> Friday 16th May, 8pm  Following two years touring the show globally, Ahir Shah presents his award-winning stand-up show ‘Ends’. The show spans six decades, three generations and two continents, synthesising past and present in search of hope for the future.  Tickets from £28	<b>Dara O’Briain: Re:Creation</b> Wednesday 21st May, 8pm  Dara O’Briain is back with a brand-new live show. After the huge international success of his last tour, Dara’s new show ‘Re:Creation’ sees one of Ireland’s finest live comedians back doing his favourite thing: standing in a theatre, telling stories.  Tickets from £34	<b>Josh Johnson: The Flowers Tour</b> Friday 23rd and Saturday 24th May, various times  With nearly four million followers on social media, Josh Johnson was recently called “the funniest guy on the internet” by ‘Wired’ and is a star on the rise. He is an Emmy-nominated writer, stand-up comedian and actor from Louisiana. Johnson is currently a correspondent on ‘The Daily Show’.  Tickets from £32	<b>Neon Nights presents Sara Pascoe</b> Friday 30th May, 8pm  Neon Nights is Soho Theatre’s showcase spectacular featuring some of the comedy world’s most exciting names. The first iteration, hosted by Thanyia Moore, is headlined by Sara Pascoe and features Rosie Jones, Larry Dean, Tom Davis and Janine Harouni.  Tickets from £22

## NEWS

# Boost for Blackhorse Beer Mile as new brewery to move in

The arrival of East London Brewing Company later this year follows two closures this spring

by Marco Marcelline

**E**ast London Brewing Company will be relocating to Walthamstow and opening a taproom as part of the 'Blackhorse Beer Mile', Waltham Forest Council has announced.

East London Brewing, established in 2011, currently operates from Leyton's Fairway Business Centre but has decided to move to new premises and join other existing Blackhorse-based breweries such as Signature Brew, Exale and Big Penny in opening a taproom there as well – taking advantage of the additional footfall from drinkers who frequent the beer mile.

The news comes after two former Blackhorse-based breweries – Beerblefish and

Hackney Brewery – both shut their doors in March. Hackney Brewery said its closure was due to the council's refusal to agree to a settlement on Covid-related debt, while Beerblefish did not offer a reason. Those closures followed the council's repossession of Wild Card Brewery's Lockwood Way taproom for rent arrears last October.

But in a press release shared with the *Echo* last month, a council spokesperson said: "We are pleased to announce that [we have] agreed terms to lease premises on the Lockwood Way trading estate to the East London Brewing Company to open a new taproom, expanding the company's operations."

"First opened in 2022, the beer mile has quickly become an important and much-loved mainstay of local nightlife."

The spokesperson added that details of East London Brewing's taproom opening date will be shared "as soon as possible".

Deputy council leader Ahsan Khan said: "Agreeing a new lease with East London Brewing Company shows that we are serious about supporting the beer mile and attracting reliable tenants to take units at



Credit Gonzalo Remy via Unsplash

the Lockwood Way estate. "The money generated from commercial rents goes into the public purse to fund the essential services on which residents rely day in, day out. This is not our money – it is your money, which supports the most vulnerable members of our community."

Asked to comment on the move, Ronnie Finch, director of East London Brewing, said: "We're looking forward to being part of the Blackhorse Road business community."

"We're working with the Waltham Forest [Council] property team to secure a long-term investment plan at Lockwood Way to move our full brewhouse production, with additional dedicated hospitality space, to create an iconic East London destination to the Blackhorse Beer Mile."

Cllr Khan added: "We work hard to support local businesses and give them the support they need to succeed. We are in ongoing positive discussions with several other brewing companies and are investing heavily in the refurbishment of some of the units, supporting the interest we have generated in a number of units at Lockwood Way."

"We anticipate having more good news to share with fans of the beer mile in the near future."

It's not yet been confirmed which empty brewery space the East London Brewing Company will move into, or when.

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**WCAC**

Walthamstow & Chingford Almshouse Charity

## TEMPORARY ALLOTMENT MANAGER WANTED

The Walthamstow and Chingford Almshouse Charity is a small charity serving its local community. The charity's main purpose is to provide high quality sheltered housing for rent to local older people and to provide grants to help local people on very limited income with their essential needs. We also provide grants to other voluntary groups and charities who are able to support our charity's work.

The Charity owns 3 allotments sites in Walthamstow totalling 15 acres, the land is charity investment land. A fourth site of 8 acres is owned by the Corporation of London and managed by the charity, this site operates as a charity in its own right.

We are looking for an enthusiastic individual on a 9 to 12 month basis to continue the management of the 4 allotment sites during the permanent manager's absence. Applicants will need to be able to demonstrate they have experience of horticulture, good social skills, work experience with the public, have good IT and administrative skills, a positive outlook with excellent time management and the ability to work flexibly, some weekend and occasional evening work will be required. There is seasonal variation, but approximately 50% of time is spent out on the sites and 50% within the office.

The post is permanent part-time of 16 hours per week, the salary is £13,232 (£28,945 full time equivalent).

To receive the job pack: visit the [www.jobsgopublic.com](http://www.jobsgopublic.com) website to download the documentation or email [admin@wcac.org.uk](mailto:admin@wcac.org.uk)

**Deadline for completed applications: Friday 2nd May at 5pm**

**Please return completed application form to [admin@wcac.org.uk](mailto:admin@wcac.org.uk)**

**Or post to:  
WCAC, Monoux Hall, Church End, London E17 9RL**

**Interviews will be held on Wednesday 14th May.**

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# NOW OPEN



## Dalton Lodge Care Home

### Innovative Dementia Care in Walthamstow

**D**alton Lodge Care Home, now open in Walthamstow, is setting a new benchmark for exceptional dementia care. Specialising in support for individuals with advanced dementia, Dalton Lodge employs a multi-faceted approach that combines innovative techniques, advanced technology, and compassionate care to deliver an unparalleled quality of life for residents.

Operated by B&M Care, a family-run business with 50 years of experience, Dalton Lodge offers a personalised, dignified approach that redefines excellence in dementia care.

#### Homes Designed Specifically for Dementia

A key feature of enhanced dementia care at Dalton Lodge is the creation of purpose-built spaces designed for those with advanced dementia. These environments are smaller and more intimate, creating a homely atmosphere that helps residents feel safe and at ease. The design of our spaces is intentional, using soothing colours, avoiding harsh patterns, and incorporating natural elements like plants to provide a tranquil setting.

Our bespoke wayfinding signage, unique to B&M Care, has been developed by our expert team and designed by an illustrator to be both beautiful and highly functional, ensuring they are easily seen and

understood by people with dementia. Visual cues, such as familiar pictures and nostalgic objects, are thoughtfully placed to help residents navigate the home with confidence and comfort. Our aim is to reduce confusion, allowing residents to feel more in control of their environment.

#### Advanced Technology for Enhanced Care

For individuals with advanced dementia, communication challenges can make identifying discomfort or pain difficult. To address this, Dalton Lodge utilises PainChek® software, a pioneering tool that combines artificial intelligence with other pain indicators to assess discomfort. This innovative technology ensures residents' comfort and wellbeing by enabling



accurate and timely pain management.

Dalton Lodge incorporates a range of technologies to enhance sensory engagement and ensure residents' safety, such as silent call bell systems replacing loud alarms to maintain a calm environment.

#### Specialist Training

Every team member at Dalton Lodge has completed a minimum of Level 2 Dementia Training, an accredited, in-depth course developed by B&M Care. Team members also participate in the Virtual Dementia Tour, an immersive training experience that simulates the challenges faced by those living with dementia.

#### Person-Centred Care Through Dementia Care Mapping

At Dalton Lodge, care is tailored to each individual's unique needs through an evidence-based approach called Dementia Care Mapping (DCM). This method involves observing residents' quality of life and interactions, with a focus on psychological wellbeing.

Feedback from these observations helps the care team continuously refine their approach, ensuring residents' needs are met with dignity and respect. Regular reviews and action plans support ongoing improvement.



#### A Legacy of Trust

Dalton Lodge Care Home represents the future of dementia care. By integrating advanced practices, cutting-edge technology, and highly trained staff, it offers tailored solutions for individuals living with advanced dementia. Supported by the extensive experience of B&M Care, Dalton Lodge provides a trusted environment where residents can thrive.

Whether you are seeking care for a loved one or exploring options, Dalton Lodge is here to provide high-quality, compassionate care designed to meet your family's needs. Contact our friendly team today to learn more about how we can support you.



020 8016 2357



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daltonlodge@bmcare.co.uk

## NEWS

# Council vows to improve special needs education after critical report

Ofsted said children with special needs face “inconsistent outcomes” in Waltham Forest

by **Sebastian Mann**,  
Local Democracy Reporter

**S**pecial needs children in Waltham Forest are often out of school due to delays and face long wait times for help, according to a new report. Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) face “inconsistent outcomes,” according to Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

Waltham Forest Council, which oversees education in the borough, has vowed to improve following publication of the report last month.

The council and NHS North East London, which work together in partnership, were inspected by Ofsted in mid-February.

Inspectors found a string of issues with education, health and care (EHC) plans, which are legal documents outlining the needs of a child or young person, up to the age of 25, and any extra support they require.

EHC plans are produced “too late” for certain children, with some even receiving them after they have been permanently excluded from school or when they stopped attending due to mental health challenges.

“This means some children and young people are not accessing the right support across education, health and social care,” the report states.

They are also not consistently updated, despite significant changes or when a child moves to a different key stage. As a result, they “do not routinely reflect need or the circumstances of the child or young person”.

Additionally, the annual reviews of EHC plans “lack rigour and are not robust”. There is currently no multi-agency approach to moderate them, but this has been identified as a “priority”.

In other instances, children had to wait six months or more for a wheelchair, while others received equipment that was faulty or unsuitable for their needs.

“These issues impact on all aspects of children’s and young people’s daily lives and limit their opportunities and outcomes,” the inspectors wrote.

Claire Bithell, a local parent and member of Waltham Forest SEND Crisis, said the council’s “many failures” had made



Parents and children protest outside Waltham Forest Town Hall in February Credit Sebastian Mann/LDRS

“our children’s lives harder now and will harm their futures”.

She told the Local Democracy Reporting Service: “The headline of the report is that staff turnover and changing leadership has caused a negative impact on the experiences of children and young people with SEND and their families.

“This strikes a chord with the families in our campaign group – and we are pleased that Ofsted/CQC has recognised the risk these failures pose to our children.”

Kizzy Gardiner, the council’s cabinet member for children and young people, said: “We are on an improvement journey – we take these recommendations fully on board and are determined to implement them effectively.

“We will create and consult on an area improvement plan addressing, amongst other things, the quality of EHC plans, transition to adulthood pathways, and improving communication across the SEND system.”

Waltham Forest SEND Crisis was formed in February 2018 to protest against what it called serious problems with support for SEND children in the borough. It is made up of around 400 parents and carers.

The group held a protest outside the town hall in February, telling councillors their children – who “simply deserve an education” – had “slipped through the cracks” for years.

Despite the acknowledgements in the Ofsted report, Waltham Forest SEND Crisis feels “not all of our views” were represented – and it had been “much too forgiving” of the council in some areas.

Claire said the group “expected these promises to be kept,” but said “they appear to have been a spur of the moment reaction” to the inspection.

The report was not entirely critical of the partnership, with inspectors saying it was effective at identifying needs early. Many children and young people also

attend inclusive schools, where “appropriate arrangements are put in place to enable them to achieve well academically”.

Additionally, the transitions to adulthood services were “positive” and there are “clear processes” to ensure young people live in quality-assured residential educational and care placements.

Cllr Gardiner continued: “We are pleased that the Ofsted report was positive about how we work with young people and families to co-produce the changes they want to see, such as involving young advisors in developing our mental health support services and in recruiting staff.

“We were also pleased that the inspection team highlighted the shared ambition of the Local Area SEND Partnership to improve services for SEND children.”

The council is currently consulting on its SEND strategy for 2025 through 2028, which outlines how children and young people will receive the right support. The consultation closes on Wednesday, 14th May.

Zina Etheridge, chief executive of NHS North East London, said she was “pleased to be working with the council to help implement the priorities outlined in the improvement programme” and that the report “shows the strength and effectiveness of our partnership”.

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# NEWS

## Barts pays out £20m compensation for misdiagnoses

by **Sebastian Mann,**  
Local Democracy Reporter

**A**n East London NHS trust paid out almost £20million over five years relating to legal claims from patients after ‘unnecessary operations’ and misdiagnoses.

A total of 115 claims regarding misdiagnoses were lodged against Barts Health NHS Trust between 2019 and 2024. Of those, 99 were settled – at a total cost of £19,914,268.

The most common issue reported by patients was unnecessary pain, which was the subject of 14 cases and cost the trust £357,899 in compensation. That was followed by additional operations, which led to ten claims.

Barts Health oversees four major hospitals across East London, including Whipps Cross Hospital in Waltham Forest, Newham Hospital, the Royal London in Whitechapel and St Bartholomew’s in the City.

It is one of the largest trusts in the capital and said in a brief statement it was “continuously making improvements” to its services.

The figures were obtained by Medical Negligence Assist through a Freedom of Information request submitted earlier this year.

Gareth Lloyd, medical negligence solicitor for JF Law said: “Misdiagnoses can have a huge impact on people’s lives.”

He continued: “Misdiagnosis is an all-embracing clinical negligence case type and covers a wide range of clinical situations from the simple diagnosis of a fracture

Credit Muhammad Syafi al Adam via Unsplash



*“Misdiagnoses can have a huge impact on people’s lives”*

to potentially fatal cancer diagnoses.

“These cases can be a matter of life and death, and whether someone lives

or dies will be determined by the success of the diagnosis.”

The most expensive year for Barts

was 2022/23, which saw the trust pay £7,321,816 over 26 claims.

That was also the second highest number of claims made in one year, behind the 27 submitted the year prior.

In 2023/24, the number dropped to a low of 18.

A spokesperson for the trust told the Local Democracy Reporting Service: “We deliver care to around 2.4million people across east London and are one of the biggest NHS Trusts in London.

“We are committed to delivering high-quality care to all our patients and are continuously making improvements to services.”

Separate figures compiled by NHS Resolution show that diagnostic errors make up around 20% of all clinical negligence claims in the UK.

The data shows that 8,067 misdiagnosis claims have been lodged against NHS trusts since 2019. Of those, 5,677 had been settled – a success rate of around 70%.

The arms-length advisory body highlighted two consistent failings across England: diagnostic errors, particularly incorrect early diagnoses of soft-tissue injuries, and failures in imaging, such as not carrying out CT or MRI scans.

A 2023 study by the British Medical Journal found that one in 18 patients in primary and secondary care had been affected by misdiagnoses.

It also revealed that misdiagnosed cancers, strokes, and heart attacks were among the most serious cases and often led to life-altering consequences or death.

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LETTERS

Got an opinion on something in Waltham Forest? We accept letters of up to 150 words from people and organisations in the borough. Email [wfecho@socialspider.com](mailto:wfecho@socialspider.com) before the next deadline on **Monday 19th May**.

Cancel the crematorium

Dear WFE

WALTHAM FOREST COUNCIL is seeking to destroy the natural character of a 100-year-old peaceful cemetery in Chingford with a ludicrous untested plan for an unnecessary and flawed crematorium. It is public planning madness.

I have lived in the surrounding area for 20 years and I do regular nature trails with my four grandchildren in the unspoilt Chingford Mount Cemetery.

Cicero said that the “health of the people should be supreme law” and to ignore fears of toxic air, potential burning smells, as well as heavy traffic congestion, would be frankly insane.

There now has to be a formal public inquiry so that local resident fears of toxic pollution stemming from burning smells via a chimney in the middle of a revered burial-only cemetery can be made.

Chingford Mount is densely populated and the closest five roads and streets to the cemetery, as well as Churchill Estate and residents in Old

Chingford Road will suffer the full impact of increased traffic pollution that this crematorium will cause.

There is already a sufficient 50 acre cemetery and cremation service near Waltham Abbey that the borough can use to meet cremation demand.

Patrick Smith, Chingford

Leyton estate history

Dear WFE

I READ WITH INTEREST YOUR contaminated land story which mentioned the Oliver Close Estate [Issue #121].

On the old estate, the Terence Messenger Tower was named after my father after whom I was also named. My dad was the last mayor of Leyton from April 1964 to March 1965 just before the area was merged with Walthamstow and Chingford.

Our family home was in Radlix Road, a stone’s throw from the Oliver Close Estate, where I used to play with friends who lived in the adjacent Stanley Horstead Tower.

My dad served on the council for over 30 years and his granddaughter

Rosalind Dore continues the family tradition as a Labour councillor and cabinet member.

The council built a series of tower blocks across the area in the 1960s; 13, I think, from memory. The first to go up was Slade Tower on the Leyton Grange Estate. It was named after the first mayor of Leyton, James Slade. The last to go up was Terence Messenger Tower.

Councillors at the time were very excited with the revolutionary technology with which, they believed, they could solve housing shortages.

Social problems became evident later and the decision was made by the council to pull them down in the late 1990s – with there being rumours that this was partly at the instigation of then Prince Charles, who’d made a visit to the borough.

The tower blocks were a well-meaning social experiment which went wrong and my dad was quite sad about that. He joked that if they were going to blow up his tower, he would like to push the button.

I don’t know what he’d think about all the tower blocks going up next door at Coronation Square now; I hope the same problems don’t repeat.

Terry Messenger, Leyton

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## COMMENT

# Fighting 'Russia linked' hate on our streets

Leyton and Wanstead MP Calvin Bailey says hostile state actors like Russia are fermenting social divides in our community

Calvin Bailey MP  
Credit parliament.uk



The vandalism of mosques and religious centres in Waltham Forest earlier this year has left our community shocked and saddened. Places of worship, including Leyton Jamia Masjid, were defaced with hateful graffiti. As the MP for Leyton and Wanstead, I have made it my business to visit following the attacks and during Ramadan to express solidarity and reaffirm our collective commitment to standing against hate.

While our community remains united, as we showed during last summer's racist riots, these incidents highlight the need for greater awareness and vigilance. The Metropolitan Police are investigating links between these acts of vandalism in London and a Russia-linked Telegram channel that is offering cryptocurrency payments to encourage violent attacks on our Muslim communities. This disturbing development shows that these hate crimes may be part of a broader strategy aimed at causing division and distrust in our society.

This kind of attack on our social fabric fits within what experts call "hybrid warfare," where hostile

states like Russia and Iran use underhanded tactics to destabilise democracies like the UK. These tactics include sabotage, cyberattacks, and spreading disinformation. Similar methods have been seen across Europe, such as

*"While far-right elements clearly exist within the UK, we must also understand how these groups – even their arguments and images – are being amplified and supported by malign actors"*

Russian antisemitic graffiti campaigns in Paris last year which represent a similar attempt to spark religious and political division. We have also seen arson attacks in Lithuania and Poland, where perpetrators were offered rewards for targeting stores in their capitals in an attempt to create anti-Ukrainian feeling.

The House of Commons' Defence Select Committee, of which I am a member, is currently examining the growing threat of hybrid warfare. Russian activities like these are carefully designed to stay below the threshold of open conflict whilst attempting to undermine democratic societies

and make Russia's aggression appear more defensible.

This tactic is not new; it has a long history. For instance, in the 1960s, the KGB orchestrated 'Operation Zarathustra', a campaign designed to alienate West Germany from its allies by portraying it as a hub of Nazi antisemitism. The operation involved acts of antisemitic graffiti and synagogue vandalism, emboldening far-right elements within West Germany and sparking international outrage against the country.

As your local MP, I believe it is crucial to raise awareness about these threats. Hate has no place in our community or country, but we must recognise that we too are vulnerable to manipulation and exploitation of our political and social divides by hostile states. This vulnerability is part of the reason I am supportive of the government's plans to raise spending on defence. This includes the vital work of our security services against disinformation, cyberattacks and sabotage, just as much as the aircraft and soldiers needed to keep us and our allies safe from conventional attacks.

While far-right elements clearly exist within the UK, we must also understand how these groups – even their arguments and images – are being amplified and supported by malign actors, including Russia, to undermine our society and our prized social cohesion. By amplifying divisions and stoking fear, these hostile states aim to destabilise communities and weaken the bonds of trust that hold us together. It is vital that we confront extremism at home while remaining vigilant against those who seek to manipulate it for their own gain. Together, we can stand firm for a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and democratic country.

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### LICENSING ACT 2003

#### Application for the Grant of a Premises Licence

Notice of application for the grant of a Premises Licence under section 17 of the Licensing Act 2003

Notice is hereby given that **Marcella Rolesu** has applied to the London Borough of Waltham Forest for the grant of a Premises Licence at **Randerson's Cafe, 5 Crown Buildings, Chingford E4 7EX**. The nature of the application is as follows:

- To permit the sale of alcohol / regulated entertainment / late night refreshments from 10am to 12am daily, starting May 16th 2025

The Licensing register listing full details of the application is kept by the Licensing Service, Waltham Forest 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, Waltham Forest Town Hall, Fellowship Square, Forest Road, London E17 4JF. or via email: [Licensing@walthamforest.gov.uk](mailto:Licensing@walthamforest.gov.uk).

Representations must be received no later than **May 13th 2025**.

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.

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## NEWS

# Reprieve for Leyton ‘dive bar’ as councillors agree to noise limits

by Sebastian Mann,  
Local Democracy Reporter

A popular alternative bar will need to limit the volume of live music following complaints from residents – but will be allowed to stay open.

Blondies, a self-styled ‘dive bar’ in Leyton, was challenged by its neighbours over monthly live shows, which they said were “unacceptably loud”.

Co-founders Sharmaine and Verity Cox, who launched their first venue in Hackney in 2015, said they were working to soundproof the former warehouse and took complaints “very seriously”.

Blondies hosts a range of events, “from run clubs and kids’ parties to community days, markets, and occasional live music,” they say. It is a popular venue for heavy metal and punk bands.

At a Waltham Forest Council licensing hearing last month, residents from nearby Bevan Court said the sound of the drums and bass would “rattle their tables and window sills”.

They said they wanted Blondies to stay in its Church Road home and agreed it was a “pillar of the community” but said they had “endured enough”.

Ursula Casserly, who applied for a review of the licence, said: “This building is not fit for live or loud music. It never was.”

“We’re not here to block progress, we’re just asking for protection.”

Others said it was harming their quality of life as they “could not relax” on a Friday evening.

Their complaints were backed up by the council’s licensing team, who said they had recorded a volume of 84 decibels during a late-night visit.

After a brief deliberation, councillors ordered the venue to install a noise limiter, which controls the volume of all amplified music – recorded or live.

A noise limiter prevents music being played louder than a volume set by the council’s air quality team. It will need to be kept in a locked, tamper-proof box and will be in use for the duration of



Sisters Sharmaine, Verity and Rochelle Cox run Blondies Brewery in Church Road Credit Blondies

Blondies’ time in the premises.

However, the limits will not be permanent. Blondies can request reviews in the future once the soundproofing works have been completed.

They will also need to display contact details of Verity, the licence holder, for anyone wishing to complain about noise.

Blondies said they were happy with the limiter being installed and they supported a “constructive” outcome that worked for both the venue and its neighbours.

Labour committee member Councillor Richard Sweden said the council “did not want to close down a socially beneficial business,” but more “concrete” regulations were needed.

Soundproofing work is slated to begin next week, Verity said, while the next live show has been tentatively scheduled for May.

The soundproofing will be paid for through a fundraiser with a target of £100,000. The first £20,000 raised will go towards noise mitigation, while the remaining cash will cover loss of earnings and other changes to the building, Sharmaine added.

Representatives from the Greater London Authority, speaking on behalf of deputy London

mayor Howard Dawber, who oversees businesses, supported Blondies in the hearing.

The City Hall official acknowledged concerns from residents but said he had “utmost confidence” Blondies would make changes to the venue to prevent further nuisance.

He said that live music venues can improve health and wellbeing of local communities and were important for “nurturing talent”.

The Cox sisters had previously warned that being completely stripped of their licence to play live music could lead to the closures of both their Leyton venue and the original Hackney bar, which opened in 2015.

Live music venues across London have struggled in recent years, with many being forced to close following noise complaints from their neighbours.

They previously told the Local Democracy Reporting Service: “This issue goes beyond just us [...] Those businesses too far from foot traffic suffer from low sales, while those closer to residential areas face noise complaints. It’s a lose-lose situation. If this continues, London’s independent venues, creative spaces, and world-renowned music scene will disappear.”

Children enjoying the new playground at Lloyd Park Credit Waltham Forest Council



## Walthamstow park’s playground revamp launched

A ninja trail, zip-wire and accessible equipment have all been installed at Walthamstow’s Lloyd Park as part of its revamped play area.

The popular space has undergone an extensive refurbishment thanks to £250,000 of funding secured and delivered by Waltham Forest Council, with input from the local community.

Last month, deputy leader Clyde Loakes joined guests, partners, councillors and local families enjoying the spring sunshine to officially open the new play area.

Central to the refurbishment was expanding how many different types of play the area offers. This includes a revamped sand pit, new toddler area, lots of swings, ninja trail, zip-wire, climbing area and roundabout.

The play area is designed to be “as inclusive as possible” and includes a communication panel to help engage those who may find speech challenging.

Cllr Loakes said: “I’m delighted to officially open this fantastic, newly-refurbished play area to local children and families. Lloyd Park is an incredibly

busy destination which attracts more than two million visits a year and the playground here is a large part of its popularity.

“That’s why securing £250,000 of funding to complete this refurbishment has been a key priority in our mission-led approach to investing in communities.

“Outdoor play is vital for children’s health, wellbeing and development, helping them develop confidence and skills.

“We have excellent features and equipment of the highest quality, which can be enjoyed by our younger residents long into the future. It has also been designed to be accessible and inclusive and truly reflective of the wide range of abilities and needs of local families.

“We worked with the local community to help design this refurbishment, so I also want to say thank you to everyone who took the time to give us their ideas and thoughts.”

The Lloyd Park playground refurbishment was delivered with £250,000 community infrastructure levy funding, which is money provided by developers for local improvements.



The revamped play area at Lloyd Park Credit Waltham Forest Council

## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

# Finding a route into the film industry

Ahead of this year's Walthamstow International Film Festival, co-founder Liza Fletcher introduces the event while three young 'emerging talents' explain how they got into the industry

**W**althamstow International Film Festival is taking place once again at the end of June.

Since the beginning, when we launched in 2010, we have enjoyed bringing films from around the world – and films from around the corner – to audiences in Walthamstow.

If you would like to submit your short film (under five minutes) for consideration this year, you can do so via Film Freeway before the deadline of Saturday, 24th May. We accept animation, documentary, drama and experimental films for family-friendly audiences, with no excessive violence or sexual content. Foreign language films are welcome but must have English subtitles.

Walthamstow International Film Festival is powered by volunteers and young talent and offers an entry-level platform to young creatives in the borough. Our young advisors for 2025 are in place to tell us the barriers they face in breaking into the creative industries and help us form relevant creative projects.

All hailing from Waltham Forest, these young people are aged from 18 to 25 years and help us plan events, programmes and engagement that other young people need. Below, Lauren Smith, Monday Adjetej and Ryan Simpson explain their background and their involvement in this year's film festival.

## Lauren Smith

After finishing my A-Levels at Holy Family Catholic School in Walthamstow in 2018, I went on to do an apprenticeship and gained a qualification in broadcast operations. I now work as a multi-skilled technical operator at the BBC.

Creating content or ideas that people can watch and feel is fascinating because everyone interprets film differently. Nothing beats telling stories that started on a scrap of paper and sharing them with the world.

My experience in the industry has had its highs and lows. I've had amazing opportunities and have been able to work on some incredible jobs – but it wasn't easy getting to this point.

Working on the film festival, doing freelance work and apprenticeships have aided me in getting to where I am today and building my confidence to face the scary but wonderful place the industry can be. Being rejected doesn't mean you



Lauren Smith

aren't good enough; getting into the industry is tough but never impossible. I've learned that it's important to keep in touch with everyone you meet because

you never know what others may have to offer you in the future.

Everyone can be creative but it's about going beyond that and gaining as many experiences as possible, even if it's personal projects with your mates! It shows determination and one day when you're doing interviews someone will see that enthusiasm you show and give you that chance you need to grow and achieve.

## Monday Adjetej



Monday Adjetej

I'm a German-born, Ghanaian-Dutch man who grew up in London. I am an artist at heart, with a background in video production as a camera operator, editor and creative content producer.

Curious by nature, I find joy in documenting the layered possibilities of how and why things happen, through the emotive mediums of film and music. With my unique background, learning to understand and communicate with others in a way that allows them to feel comfortable is important to me.

Film can traverse the various borders and barriers between people and I've found film, art, music and sport are my ways to communicate and understand the world around me. What I've learned from being on set is that I enjoy working towards a shared objective that is greater than myself.

My interest in filmmaking has taken me to many different places; from shooting Sunday league games in local parks, all the way to capturing Arsenal match days at Emirates Stadium.

I've also shot live music festivals and filmed in Manchester, Liverpool, France, Spain, Switzerland, and in Africa.

What I'd say to others who want to break into the film industry is to ask questions, build a supportive network around you, and find your most comfortable way to share ideas – while documenting everything along the way!

## Ryan Simpson

I've been fortunate enough to break into the film and TV industries since graduating in 2018. From my experience, the film and television industry is a dynamic and creative space, and while it can be challenging, it's definitely an attainable goal for aspiring professionals.

I've found that success in this field relies on a blend of practical skills, strategic networking, and a flexible approach to career development. For me, building a strong foundation was crucial. This involved a combination of education and hands-on experience.

While formal film and television degrees or vocational qualifications in moving image production are valuable, I also found that early practical experience, through freelance video work and personal projects, allowed

me to build a portfolio and refine my essential skills.

I gained my first professional credits with major broadcasters and independent production companies simply by approaching them and showcasing my enthusiasm and abilities.

This experience highlighted the importance of actively pursuing and capitalising on available opportunities. Volunteering and collaborating

with established directors also provided invaluable on-set experience and industry insights.

Relocating to major production hubs, like London, proved beneficial for me. These hubs offer

increased exposure and access to a wider range of opportunities. I took on diverse roles, including camera trainee, lighting technician and production assistant, which gave me a comprehensive understanding of the production process.



Ryan Simpson

I've learned that career progression within the film and television industry is often dynamic, with roles and opportunities evolving rapidly. Adaptability is key. In essence, breaking into the film and television industry requires more than just talent. It demands a proactive approach, a commitment to continuous learning, and the ability to forge meaningful professional connections.

Submit your short film for consideration at Walthamstow International Film Festival via Film Freeway before 24th May 2025:

Visit [filmfreeway.com/walthamstowinternationalfilmfestival](http://filmfreeway.com/walthamstowinternationalfilmfestival)

*“Breaking into the industry requires more than just talent”*

*“I've had amazing opportunities – but it wasn't easy”*

ARTS & CULTURE



Some of the cast members Credit Penny Dampier



Guy Pugh as Uncle Max and Penny Dampier as the Baroness Credit Carmel Harrison



Young participants dressed as schnitzel with noodles Credit Penny Dampier

Review: *The Sound of Music* by Walthamstow Community Production

At Woodside Primary Academy, talented children and adults put on a spectacular immersive production of the classic musical

by Marco Marcelline

The curtains rise on a cloistered abbey in Austria, where Maria, a free-spirited postulant, struggles to conform to convent life. Her world quickly opens up as she

is sent to be the governess for the seven unruly children of the widowed Captain von Trapp – and so begins a turbulent but ultimately heartwarming tale. The immersive nature of the production brings each of the story’s distinct settings to life across

different parts of the school – a classroom becomes a convent, the assembly hall a grand concert stage, and the staff room stands in for the Von Trapp’s family mansion. As we move from one space to another between scenes, the action never pauses for us. At one moment, we pass a pair of nuns mid-prayer; later, we head toward a classroom transformed into an Austrian countryside scene. The promenade staging brings the audi-

ence directly into Maria’s world – we’re not just watching her journey, we’re taking it with her. With more than ten performances over two days, the production involved over 100 local schoolchildren and adults, and crew members, all from Waltham Forest. Two rotating casts of leads made this ambitious show possible. The Walthamstow Community Production was led once again by husband and wife team

Max and Ruth Peters, who were inspired by their own experiences of community theatre as kids. Speaking about *The Sound of Music*, Max said: “This show, like all our productions, is really a labour of love. It’s amazing to see people of all ages working together to create something joyful and meaningful. Drama and music shouldn’t just be for those who can afford it – that’s why it’s so important to us that being part of this show is totally free.”

Queer to stay

Pixie’s is the only dedicated LGBTQ+ bar in the borough – and it’s thriving



by Pixie Le May

Nestled inside an unassuming passageway off Wood Street is Pixie’s, the borough’s only dedicated LGBTQ+ bar. The passageway, called the Georgian Village, contains over ten independent businesses, including Pixie’s. I am an events planner and pub manager. The bar was born artist Paul Stone and I stumbled on an empty Georgian Village unit next to Luke’s Cider Bar some years ago. We immediately jumped at the opportunity to rent the space, believing the location was perfect for a small 1980s themed queer bar. Paul said: “As a child of the 1980s myself I love the brightness

and exuberance of the music and trends of that time. We’ve decorated the bar in classic ‘80s fashion with plenty of neon lights and posters which any material girls and lost boys will love!” As two of the founding members of Waltham Forest Pride, we were also especially keen to reintroduce an LGBTQ venue to the community, given that the borough’s few queer venues had sadly disappeared over the years. Despite huge progress being made for LGBTQ rights in recent decades, a venue for the queer community and their allies remains vital. We’ve been particularly pleased that as well as providing a safe space for our LGBTQ friends, people beyond our community also enjoy socialising and making friends in a non-judgemental and welcoming environment. We aim to be a safe space for everyone in Walthamstow. For such a small bar, Pixie’s offers a lively roster of entertainment including drag shows, singers, quiz nights and music bingo. We have additionally led fundraising efforts for various charities

including ELOP, Positive East, Eat or Heat and Mildmay, with the bar continuing to hold events to support and promote them. We hope to build on our early success as a welcoming venue for the local community with an ever-expanding range of events, while working in conjunction with other venues all over Waltham Forest to provide inclusive entertainment for all.



Credit Cynthia Vanzella

Pixie’s is located at Unit 2, The Georgian Village, 100 Wood Street, E17 3HX, and opens from 4pm Thursday to Sunday

The tiny bar has a beer garden that is loved by its many regulars Credit Pixie Le May



CHINGFORD MOUNT

# Crematorium green-lit for second time



by Sebastian Mann,  
Local Democracy Reporter

A controversial new crematorium has been green-lit for a second time. The £11million facility, in the centre of Chingford Mount Cemetery, was unanimously supported by councillors at a planning meeting last month. Ian McArdle, a crematorium operator, had contested the council’s data after it was first approved in January, arguing it was “not needed”. Waltham Forest Council identified around 85,400 residents

who lived beyond a 30-minute drive from a crematorium, equating to around 1,625 cremations annually. However, in a written submission to the council, Ian said just 47 deaths in Waltham Forest were currently not served in that time-frame, and said the council was conflating population with need, adding that 22% of deaths belong to religions that ban cremation. This discrepancy forced councillors to reconsider the plans, but the outcome remained the same. A council officer told the planning committee the borough’s ageing population meant there was a

“growing need for dignified end of life services”. He added that, without a crematorium in the borough, residents faced extended travel times that led to extra “logistical challenges and emotional strain in difficult times”. Committee chair Andrew Dixon said that despite the differences in figures, there was still a “strong case” for the crematorium to be built. Concerns were also raised by residents over harmful emissions from the crematorium, despite the council specifying it will only produce heat. One resident said she was worried about its proximity to public parks and a primary school, adding: “Do we really want to burn our dead where children play?” Councillor John Moss, a Conservative representing Larkwood ward, said he’d received hundreds of emails from residents and warned it could increase footfall in Chingford Mount, which he called the “least accessible” town centre in the borough. Around 80% of the cemetery’s burial ground has been filled, and it is projected to run out of space by 2033. Construction of the new crematorium is slated to begin this year and it is expected to open in 2026.

LEYTON

# Council shuts café after manager’s tirade

by Sebastian Mann,  
Local Democracy Reporter

Waltham Forest Council temporarily shut a Leyton café last month after its previous manager aggressively confronted and “frightened” immigration officers. The immigration officers were so frightened by Union’s Café duty manager Adriatik Zeqja’s behaviour they were forced to abandon their visit, the Met Police reported. They had been checking for any illegal workers in the premises on 8th January, based on intelligence they had received. A police report said a male told the officers to “get

the hell out of my shop”. The team had to call in police officers, who arrived in plain clothes, but Zeqja “did not calm down,” an immigration officer said. Both immigration and police officers soon left the café, reportedly fearing further escalation. The encounter prompted a licence review from the council’s licensing committee, which forced it to close for a month. At a hearing on Tuesday, 1st April, councillors ordered the café to close until 1st May and for staff to undergo further training on their responsibilities. A representative from the council’s licensing department said it would give them time to ensure it had been implemented.

Zeqja apologised to the committee and vowed a similar incident would “never happen again,” but challenged several elements of the Home Office’s story. He denied “throwing chairs or tables” and said he did not prevent the team from doing their job, as they were able to take a worker’s details. He also denied racially abusing the officers. The former manager said he also did not believe it was “appropriate” for officers to be asking customers for identification and a historic break-in had left him on edge. Zeqja is no longer involved in the business and will transfer the premises licence to his brother.

HIGHAMS PARK

# Wait goes on for park pavilion rebuild

by Sebastian Mann,  
Local Democracy Reporter

A sports club has expressed fears over its ability to retain players as it awaits a long-promised rebuild of its clubhouse. The Rolls Park Pavilion, used by West Essex Sports Club, has been closed since September 2020, after issues with heave and subsidence were identified. The ground is still used for football and cricket matches, but there is no communal area for players and families. The club is run entirely by volunteers, who rent the facility from Waltham Forest Council. The council secured an insurance settlement of almost £1.2million in late 2023 – two years after the insurers

confirmed it would be demolished and rebuilt. That figure far exceeded the insured amount of £502,393, the council says. A preliminary timetable indicated the rebuild would take six months, from June until December 2024, but the council has since proposed a much smaller clubhouse after identifying a Thames Water main. The new clubhouse is around a third of the size previously agreed, causing concern from the club. Management committee chair Tony McNally said: “The really sad thing is that a community club has now seen something like six years of players without a home or proper changing facilities or toilets. “We’ve started to lose players, because they’re going places where there are better facilities.”



Rolls Park Pavilion Credit West Essex Sports Club

BLACKHORSE

# Beer venue opening new games hall

A 5,000 square-foot games hall will open at Big Penny Social this month. With game options including darts, pool, and shuffleboard, guests at Flukes will also be able to enjoy a fully stocked cocktail bar and karaoke from Thursday, 8th May. Flukes will be accessible through a newly-commissioned entrance designed by Sean Turner, with visitors able to choose from six interactive darts oches, two interactive shuffleboards, four

pro-standard American pool tables, and three karaoke rooms offering over 11,000 tracks. Big Penny’s managing director, Frans Kobus, said: “Flukes is a new twist on an old games hall you’d find in social clubs, where technology on darts and shuffleboards gives everyone a chance to win and fun is at the heart of everything. “We’ve put a lot of work into making sure Flukes is designed and has an ambience that is unlike any other competitive socialising venue.”

## COMMUNITY

# Making the case for reparations

Claire Weiss, from the Leytonstone Historical Society, reports from the launch event for two ground-breaking books by local authors on slavery

Luke Daniels



Speaking to a vibrant audience at a public meeting and book launch at Walthamstow's William Morris Hall in March, Peter Ashan, local author of *Freedom Walk*, said: "Growing up in Waltham Forest with people of Asian, African and Afro-Caribbean heritage at school I realised that none of this history was reflected in our history books, and I have spent much of my life dedicated to uncovering local histories of East London's Black communities."

He emphasised that discovering and publicising unknown and forgotten histories was an educational key to tackling racism and the current rise of fascism around the world.

Luke Daniels, president of Caribbean Labour Solidarity, drew attention to the links between modern racism and Britain's historical involvement in the enslavement of Africans, explaining that slavery did not end because the owning classes suddenly found their moral compass.

Rather the enslaved, by their continuous rebellions in the Americas, made it expensive to maintain the system, and this, combined with the anti-slavery movement in Britain, finally put paid to the system.

In making the case for reparations for slavery, he argued that the

descendants of enslaved Africans still suffered from discrimination as a legacy of the enslavement of their ancestors and that an apology from the state, in addition to financial reparations, played an important role in overcoming racism.

Chaired by Geoff Nicholls, the meeting saw the launch of two books, *Enslaved Worker Rebellions and Revolution in the Americas to 1804* by Mary Turner and *Slave-trade Abolition and Leytonstone House: the Sansons, the Buxtons and Black History* edited by me and co-authored by Peter Ashan and Geoff Nicholls.

Mary's work shows the multiple ways in which the enslaved

resisted their enslavement across the Americas.

Meanwhile, as a local author, I tell the history of Leytonstone House, a locally-rare Grade 2-listed Georgian mansion, which was lived in by Philip Sansom a member of the 1787 Abolition Committee, and the forgotten story of a visit 80 years later by formerly enslaved Sarah Forbes Bonetta Davies to the Buxton family then living there.

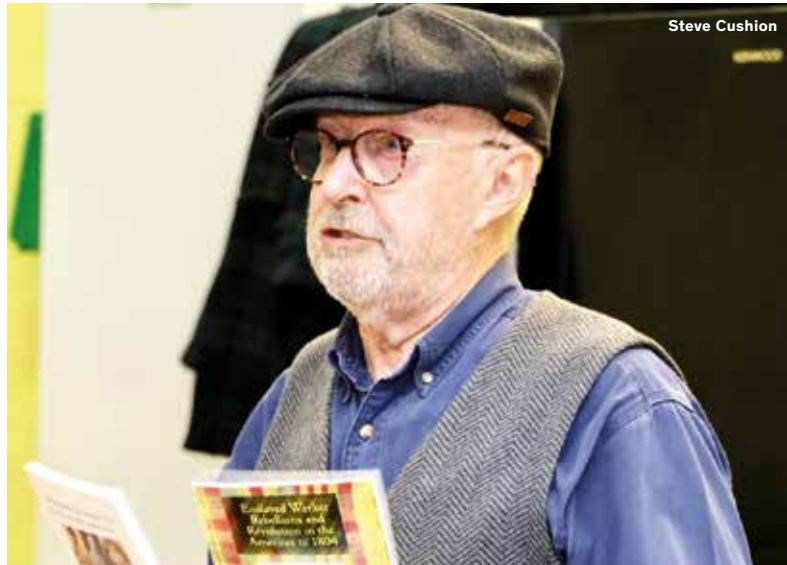
Steve Cushion of CLS stated: "Caribbean Labour Solidarity is pleased to have had the opportunity to host a meeting in the borough that has defeated Tommy Robinson three times."

"The books launched at the meeting explain how the aboli-



Peter Ashan

tion of slavery was a result of the resistance of enslaved Africans in the Caribbean allied with a mass movement of solidarity in Britain. Both writers stressed the importance of such Black and White unity in the struggle against racism and fascism today."



Steve Cushion



Credit Tom Hermans via Unsplash

## The joy of free book swaps

David O'Driscoll was left perplexed when he saw TfL had removed its free book library from Blackhorse Road Station

I want to acknowledge the sad demise of what has been in my view, the best bookshop in Waltham Forest.

I've discovered exciting new writing, such as a collection of short stories by a writer from the Dominion Republic, Junot Diaz. I also picked up *Nina Simone's Gum*, by Warren Ellis, the musician, producer, and music partner to Nick Cave. This award-winning book was, I discovered, a signed copy and, what's more, was signed by Nick Cave! My favourite book however, was an autobiography of the northern playwright David Storey, and his incredible account of a working-class upbringing. He left school to play rugby league for Wakefield, then wrote one of the best sports writing books and some of the most critically acclaimed plays in the 1960s, including the classic, *This Sporting Life*.

All of these books were free; I paid not a penny for them because I picked them up at Blackhorse Road tube book swap. As an avid reader, I also always felt it was my duty to shift some of my collection there, too. That in turn gave me much pleasure.

But sadly, very abruptly in March, it closed.

According to TfL, the book stations have been removed due to fire safety concerns in response to guidance from the London Fire Brigade.

A TfL spokesperson told me: "We'd like to apologise to any of

our customers that this impacts and we are reviewing our processes for these internally and will work with the fire service to see if book swaps can be re-introduced at some stations across the network in the future."

It just seems very odd that there are fire safety concerns about the presence of maybe 20 or so books in one of two metal cabinets.

How could this be the legitimate reason for why such a well-used public book-sharing service is ended, with such sweeping action taken across all tube stations in the capital?

Perhaps the London Fire Brigade did not notice the stacks of free *Metro* newspapers that still remain in the station? Even a former chief fire officer has described the decision as overkill.

Frankly it all seems rather dubious to me, even if I understand that the main task of TfL is to get us from A to B safely. But it's important to stress that these free books were adding something of enormous value to the wider community.

The benefits of reading are now well researched and are such an important aspect of our imagination, creativity and learning. We know that one in two adults do not read regularly, and that if an adult reads for at least 30 minutes a week it adds to their greater life satisfaction, and for that reason some GPs have been prescribing books for people's mental health.

## NEWS

# Council apology over failure to house vulnerable homeless man

Waltham Forest Town Hall



The local authority was also ordered by the Housing Ombudsman to pay over £1,000 in compensation

by Sebastian Mann,  
Local Democracy Reporter

**W**altham Forest Council has apologised after an at-risk resident was left homeless for months due to delays in dealing with his application for housing.

His case was reviewed by the Housing Ombudsman, an independent body that audits local authorities, in February.

The man, referred to as Mr X by the ombudsman, was left homeless for around two and a half months, between March and June 2023.

He first approached the council in March

2023 after “sofa surfing” at friends’ and relatives’ houses for two years.

Mr X told the council he had been diagnosed with severe depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), gout, carpal tunnel syndrome, and dyslexia. He was also attending psychotherapy sessions weekly.

Local authorities are required by law to provide residents at risk of becoming homeless with accommodation if they are assessed as having a ‘priority need’. This has led to increasing shortages of temporary housing and councils relying more heavily on expensive hotels or hostels, which has put many in financial hardship.

Medical advisors at Waltham Forest Council determined Mr X was not vulnerable, however, even after he had been admitted to a mental hospital. The council accepted that it owed him housing, but said he was not in priority need.

When he was discharged in mid-July, Mr X was provided with temporary accommodation by the NHS home treatment team (HTT). The HTT provides acute treatment for adults whose mental

health is so severe they would otherwise be admitted to hospital.

Mr X told the council later that month it was wrong to not deem him as a priority, and that he had attempted suicide twice during the process.

Though he provided the council with yet more medical evidence in August, the council confirmed in October he was not in priority need.

The council sent this letter to Mr X by email, and the chain included an internal message from a housing officer saying “well done” for declining his request.

After a brief stay in a hotel, Mr X complained to the council the process had been unclear, council staff acted unprofessionally, and the email chain showing officers congratulating each other on rejecting his application was deeply upsetting.

The town hall apologised and appointed a separate medical advisor. After a review of Mr X’s GP records, he was

recategorised as in priority need. The council said it had not been previously aware he was taking mood stabilising drugs nor that he had a history of suicide attempts or mania.

Despite the delays, Mr X was warned the current wait time for a house in Waltham Forest was eight years – therefore, he had not been disadvantaged. He was, however, offered £250 in compensation.

In its report, the ombudsman found the council had both been at fault and caused Mr X a “significant injustice”.

“Based on the information available and, given the low threshold to be applied, I consider the council should have provided Mr X with interim accommodation when he presented as homeless in March 2023,” the ombudsman wrote in February.

“The council’s failure to do so meant Mr X was street homeless for longer than he otherwise would have been. Mr X says this led to a suicide attempt and his admission to a mental health hospital. This is a significant injustice.”

The ombudsman also found there had been significant delays in the council’s handling of Mr X’s complaints. “He is unhappy the stage two response to his complaint is out of date and indicates the author made no effort to properly consider his circumstances,” the investigator wrote.

The council was ordered to apologise to Mr X for its failures and pay him a total of £1,170 compensation.

Ahsan Khan, the deputy leader and cabinet member for housing and regeneration, said: “We’re sorry that we didn’t fully meet this resident’s needs in this case.

“We accept the ombudsman’s findings, have apologised to and compensated the individual affected, and we’ve acted on all recommendations to improve our service.

“At a time of acute housing need in London, we are determined to ensure that anyone who approaches us for help

receives accurate advice and the support they’re entitled to.”

In February last year, the authority was slapped with £18,800 in fines over three cases of severe maladministration. The cases involved the council failing to address individual issues with damp, mould and antisocial behaviour in its social housing.

Then-housing secretary Michael Gove called the findings “unacceptable” and said the council’s handling of the complaints fell “well below the standard residents should expect”.

*“The council’s failure meant Mr X was street homeless for longer than he otherwise would have been”*

## SPORT



## AFC Leyton's league title hailed as 'miracle'

Chair Nicola Gallagher on the incredible achievement of the borough's biggest all-women's football club

**A**FC Leyton won promotion – and the league title – with one game left to play last month. The borough's biggest women's-only football club finished top of Division 1 North in the Greater London Women's Football League and will now be promoted to the Premier Division – which gives us the chance to play in the Women's FA Cup next season.

After starting pre-season with only five of the original team from last season, the squad had to be completely rebuilt over the summer. First-team manager Simon Gallagher and head coach Randeep ('Randy') Samra built a squad using both youth and experience from the local area. Although they lost their second league game of the campaign 7-0, the team rallied and went the rest of the league season undefeated – including an eight-game winning streak – to seal promotion with one game to play.

Randy said: "It was a well-deserved outcome for a newly-assembled team that demonstrated their ability, desire and resilience. It's not only what the team achieved but the manner in which they have accomplished winning the league that deserves recognition."

Established in 2015, AFC Leyton was created with the belief that participation

in football is transformative for girls and young women. Unlike nearly all other girls and women's teams, we are not attached to a male football club. This means that every penny the club receives is reinvested into the girls training, matches and other experiences.

Simon added: "What this group of players has achieved, being together for such a short space of time, is nothing short of a miracle. We managed to build around the small base of players we had left and recruited players that have had a lot of experience in the game and wanted to be part of the club's progression going forward."

"The future of this team and AFC Leyton as a club is looking very bright."

The club operates for girls aged four to 17, and for women aged 18 and over. We have a committed set of talented coaches,

all of whom share the same values; to develop girls and young women as good citizens and team players as well as successful footballers.

We are one of the country's largest clubs with hundreds of female members – there is no

club quite like AFC Leyton. It has been an amazing season for us and the first team have worked very hard to be in the position they are in. Everyone here at the club is very proud of them.

## O's on verge of play-offs

Resurgent Leyton Orient look set for a thrilling climax to their League One season, writes Luca Jarman

**L**eyton Orient started their 2024/25 campaign in fear of relegation, then looked headed for mid-table mediocrity, but now sit challenging for the play-off places. The O's sat in sixth place at time of going to press, with two games remaining – a far cry from how they expected the season to pan out.

Orient had a dreadful start, losing their first four games and only picking up four wins before December. Expectations were low and their encouraging eleventh-placed finish in their first year back in League One, in 2023/24, seemed like a flash in the pan. But a glorious run of form in the winter months brought an unbeaten streak that reached twelve games. This put the O's right in the promotion mix, with a chance to continue their rise back up the leagues.

Weeks after that, they were plagued by a downturn in performances with five losses on the bounce across February and March. Orient still looked far from relegation, with absolutely no danger of going down, but did not look primed to challenge for the play-off places.

However, wins at Blackpool and at home to Stevenage (even though largely undeserved!) got them back to winning ways.

It's something they've continued to build on, getting a treble of consecutive victories over Mansfield, Crawley, and an emphatic win against Barnsley where they scored three in six minutes to come back from two goals down.

What's even more encouraging is that the O's have looked really good in recent weeks. They've been positive and exciting to watch, clearly with a fire in their bellies to challenge for promotion. Charlie Kelman, on loan from QPR, leads the line and has surpassed the 20-goal mark in the league. He's particularly tenacious, energetic, and chases every ball, with clinical finishing to provide the goods.

After the Barnsley win, O's manager Richie Wellens said: "If we're at it, I fancy us to beat any team in this league [...] What I'm pleased about is the character and resilience we've shown."

Whether Leyton Orient achieve promotion or not, if back in the summer you had offered Wellens this campaign, he would have taken it. While of course managers always want to push their team as far as they can go, a year where they've built on their debut season and shown not just flashes, but sustained periods of brilliance, will surely do just fine for him and his team, ready to challenge again next season.

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# Back your local indie news publisher



In June last year, Public Interest News Foundation launched the UK’s first awareness-raising and crowdfunding campaign for independent news publishers, using the slogan ‘no news is bad news’. Indie News Week 2024 helped raise the profile of indie news providers, while the Indie News Fund supported the sector financially by doubling the funds raised by participating news providers during the month of June.

We at Social Spider Com-

munity News, publisher of *Waltham Forest Echo* and four other London media outlets, were one of 40 independent news providers that signed up for the campaign – spanning the full length of the country, from Shetland to Eastbourne. The initiative injected £128,000 into the sector in total, with Social Spider specifically raising £7,500 in donations from readers. This sum was then match-funded, meaning we were boosted by £15,000 in total.

The campaign came at a crucial

time for us as we struggled financially last year, so we’d like to thank all of our supporters and patrons who helped us reach our target. Since the start of this year, our financial situation has been improving, and we hope to have some good news to share later this summer.

Indie News Week 2025 will not be supported with a match-funded crowdfunding campaign this time around, but there will be events held up and down the country by local news providers to raise awareness of what they do and encourage people to support independent media outlets in their area.

In Waltham Forest, we’ll be hosting an event for *Echo* readers with editor Marco Marcelline in June – make sure to look out for details in the next issue.

We hope to see you soon for Indie News Week and, if you’re not already signed up, do please consider supporting us with a regular donation to help us grow as a publication.

## Become a patron

We’re looking for people or organisations who can contribute £500 or more to securing the Echo’s long-term sustainability and help us to negotiate the unpredictable landscape for local news. We have moved from 16 to 20 pages and support from patrons will help us sustain this.



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