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# WALTHAM FOREST ECHO

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The Green Party secured a stunning win in the election last month Credit Jonathan Perugia

# Greens secure historic win as Labour vote plummets

by Marco Marcelline

The Green Party has won control of Waltham Forest Council in a stunning upset that reduced Labour to being the main opposition party with just 15 seats, down from the 47 they won in 2022.

The Greens, who said they

were "ecstatic" with the result, went from zero to 31 seats, while the Conservatives won 14 seats, up from 13 in 2022.

In a town hall first, the Greens have agreed a rotating leadership model that will see Forest ward councillor Paul Perkins lead the council until May 2027. He will then trade places with the current deputy leader and Cann

Hall councillor Eva Tabbasam.

Following the result, Cllr Perkins said: "Residents have chosen hope over complacency, and a fresh start. We now have a responsibility to rebuild trust, stabilise the council and show what a genuinely community-led Green administration can achieve."

The Labour Party saw their traditionally strong level of

support evaporate in Walthamstow, Leytonstone and Leyton.

In a social media post, the party later attributed their loss to voters "wanting to send a message" to a national government that "had not delivered" on Labour's progressive values.

Former council leader Grace

Continued on page 3

## Walthamstow's solar power plan

*Dubbed the Walthamstow Power Station project, a vision to put solar panels on every Walthamstow home has gained a wave of public support*

by Marco Marcelline

More than 130 local streets have expressed interest in a solar power project that campaigners hope could eventually see panels installed on every Walthamstow home that wants it.

Dubbed the Walthamstow Power Station project, it was started by eco activists Dan Edelstyn and Hillary Powell, who slept on their roof for 23 days in November 2022 to fund the costs of installing solar panels on every house in their street.

The artists eventually raised a total of £113,000 which was then used to subsidise the costs of installing panels on 35 homes in Lynmouth Road.

Now the project is being expanded with the help of Walthamstow MP Stella Creasy, and it comes amid rising oil prices tied to geopolitical instability and war in the Middle East.

Solar panels don't come cheap; the average upfront outlay for a standard 3-4kW solar panel system in the UK ranges from £5,000 to £8,000, Continued on page 6



Energy Secretary Ed Milliband and Walthamstow MP Stella Creasy alongside activist-artists Dan Edelstyn and Hillary Powell and councillors Credit Nicola Tree Photography



# ELECTION SPECIAL

## ‘Enormous appetite for change’: How election results day unfolded

Continued from page 1



Cathall candidate Rachel Barrat was the first of 31 new Green councillors at Waltham Forest Town Hall Credit Penny Dampier

*Dispatches from the election count on Friday, 8th May, the day Waltham Forest turned Green*

by Marco Marcelline

The election count at Walthamstow Assembly Hall on Friday, 8th May began with restrained excitement from the Green Party, whose cheers grew only louder as it became clear that they were tearing into previous Labour strongholds.

Their first win came with the earliest declaration, as the Greens’ Rachel Barrat unseated Labour cabinet member Naheed Asghar in Cathall and claimed her party’s first-ever council seat

Walthamstow MP Stella Creasy attended the count to show support to her Labour colleagues, many of whom lost their seats Credit Penny Dampier



in Waltham Forest.

With 872 votes on a turnout of 31.63% – one of the lower turnouts in the borough reported – Cllr Barrat said she was “surprised” but “very excited” to get started as a councillor.

As the afternoon wore on, the results started coming thick and fast for the Greens, with the party winning their first full slate of candidates in Lea Bridge – and wiping out Labour.

Liz Biggs, Solène Fabios and Rosie Rowlands won with 2,433, 2,236, and 2,304 votes respectively – while Labour’s Shabana Dhedhi trailed behind with 1,087 votes.

This victory set off a chain of further full-slate wins in St James, High Street, Cann Hall, Grove Green and Leyton, and the party eventually secured the magic number of 31 seats with the announcement of Higham Hill ward, where they unseated two Labour councillors.

Green Party scalps included the Labour cabinet member for community safety Khevyn Limbajee, cabinet member for finance Paul Douglas and adult

and social care cabinet member Louise Mitchell.

Former council leader Grace Williams and deputy leaders Ahsan Khan and Clyde Loakes managed to keep their seats amid tight battles in William Morris, Hoe Street and Leytonstone wards.

Speaking after the final results were announced, Rob Gardner, elected to represent Leyton ward and Green Party co-chair, said: “These amazing results demonstrate the enormous appetite for change felt by people in Waltham Forest after years of

Labour domination. Our message of hope and positivity has clearly made a huge impact, and to go from no councillors to overall control is phenomenal.”

Chanté Johnson, newly elected to represent Markhouse ward, said: “Again and again on the doorstep, we heard that people want change. They want a council that is open and transparent about the challenges ahead, and involves residents in the decisions that affect their lives.

“Everyone has worked so hard during the campaign, including the hundreds of volunteers who knocked on doors, spoke to neighbours and built a huge swell of support.”



The Greens celebrating their win outside Walthamstow Assembly Hall

As the Green confetti settles on Waltham Forest Town Hall, attention will now turn to how its new and inexperienced leaders will handle the considerable task of running a cash-strapped council facing burgeoning social care, housing, and infrastructure demands.

The *Echo* will follow that task closely in the months ahead.

Keep up to date with the latest council news at [walthamforestecho.co.uk](http://walthamforestecho.co.uk)



Waltham Forest Conservatives were all smiles after a solid result across Chingford Credit Penny Dampier



Forest ward councillor Paul Perkins will serve as council leader until May 2027



Cann Hall councillor Eva Tabbasam will lead the council from May 2027 to May 2028

Williams retained her William Morris ward seat but stepped down as local Labour lead, with former children and young people cabinet lead Kizzy Gardiner succeeding her.

Meanwhile, the Conservative Party saw off a more muted than expected challenge from Reform UK, picking up all three seats held by ex-Tory defectors on top of snatching a seat from Labour’s Elizabeth Baptiste in Valley ward.

The party’s leader Emma Best told the *Echo* she was proud of the “strong campaign” the party had run in the north of the borough, and pointed out the exceptionally high turnout that was witnessed in Chingford Green (51.42%).

Reform’s Chingford Green candidate Matt Davis blamed his party’s performance on the “lack of time” they had to organise a campaign. “We had just six months, and the Tories had been campaigning for a year plus. It was always going to be tough to win,” he said.

Faiza Shaheen, who ran against Sir Iain Duncan Smith in the 2019 and 2024 general elections had backed the Chingford and Woodford Green Independents, who failed to pick up seats in Larkswood and Valley wards.

Meanwhile, attempts by the Liberal Democrats to secure a seat in the borough’s south failed – with their best performance in Grove Green more than 1,000 votes short of the winning candidates.

The turnout for the election was a record 42.08%.

## NEWS



Here come the Greens: Lea Bridge councillors Rosalind Rowlands, Liz Biggs, Solène Fabios, and Markhouse councillor Chanté Johnson outside the election count on Friday 8th May. Reflecting on the result, Cllr Biggs said: "We've shown what can be achieved when you have the community behind you. We will continue to work hard for Waltham Forest. The real work begins now!" Credit Penny Dampier

## 'Wire theft' leaves hundreds of Walthamstow homes without power

Around 400 households around Maynard Road were affected by the incident on 14th May

by Nicole Bowen

**H**undreds of homes in Walthamstow were left without power in May after suspected electrical wire theft caused major disruption in the E17 area.

Around 400 households near Barclay Road and Maynard Road were initially affected after the incident was reported at about 5.30pm on Thursday, 14th May.

Waltham Forest Council said the outage was "caused by electrical wire theft" and confirmed it was working with UK Power Networks (UKPN) and the Metropolitan Police on the issue.

Engineers restored power supplies to all properties bar three homes where access hadn't been granted to do safety checks.

UKPN said the outage was caused by vandalism to the electricity network, which triggered

a "neutral fault" after a cable was damaged.

The company warned this can cause "voltage fluctuations", meaning engineers must carry out safety checks at affected homes before power can safely be restored.

In a statement, the council said it was "providing a range of support to those in the area and protecting the most vulnerable residents affected by the power cut".

Council teams and partners

carried out overnight door-knocking to support affected residents, with torches, power banks, food and drink distributed to homes in the area.

UKPN support services were operating in the area, including a food van outside Shernhall Street at the junction with Maynard Road while further customer support vehicles were stationed on Barclay Road and Shernhall Street.

The company added: "We understand how difficult this

is for our customers and have customer service staff on site to visit homes, provide updates and support."

A Metropolitan Police spokesperson told the *Echo*: "At around 5.30pm on Thursday, 14th May police were called to reports of a theft at a power sub-station in Waltham Forest.

"Officers attended alongside the London Fire Brigade and UKPN where it was observed that copper wire had been removed and stolen.

"No arrests have been made however enquiries are ongoing to trace those responsible.

"We are in contact with UKPN and local agencies who are supporting residents and businesses affected to ensure the area is safe while our enquiries continue."

Anyone with information is asked to contact police on 101, quoting CAD 7314/14MAY or Crimestoppers, anonymously, on 0800 555 111



Maynard Road in Walthamstow Credit Google Streetview

## New Green administration probe finances

by Sebastian Mann, Local Democracy Reporter

**G**reen Party councillors are conducting a "thorough review" of Waltham Forest Council's troubled finances after winning control of the town hall.

A spokesperson for Waltham Forest Greens has said that "council finances are a huge concern" and "understanding the full extent of the situation is our priority".

"As we didn't have any councillors on the previous council, we're only now able to access the records and will be conducting a thorough review," they said.

"We also want to work constructively with officers and re-elected councillors from other parties who will have plenty of experience and local knowledge to share about this."

The Greens have called the housing shortage "one of the biggest challenges both nationally and locally," with residents "suffering from a lack of affordable properties and insecure renting".

In February, Labour councillors voted to borrow £19million from the central government to balance a £17m black hole in the budget.

Labour councillor Grace Williams, then leader of the council, said it was a long-term move that would prevent further borrowing in the future.

She had long warned that "difficult decisions" were needed in order for Waltham Forest to avoid financial doom.

The borrowing was criticised at the time by the local Tories, who said Labour had been flaunting the "taxpayer's credit card".

The Conservatives are no longer the main opposition at the council, however, as they won 14 seats to Labour's 15.

The Waltham Forest Greens' spokesperson said the pressures mean "we need to be strategic and more transparent about spending and development decisions," which is why residents "will have a greater say in plans that affect their neighbourhoods".

"We can only solve all the challenges faced by residents through openness, longer-term thinking and decisions rooted in community participation," they said.

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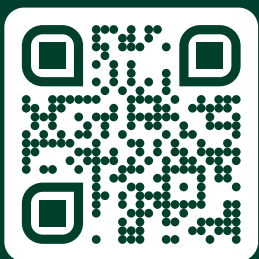


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## NEWS

Credit Jose Antonio Gallego Vazquez via Unsplash



# Revealed: Less than 1% of Waltham Forest bike thieves charged by police

*Just 27 people were charged with bicycle theft in the past five years, despite nearly 3,000 offences being reported*

by Nathan Clarke

Less than 1% of reported bike thefts in Waltham Forest between 2020 and 2025 have led to a charge, as residents complain about “disinterested police” and “poor investigations”.

Just 27 people in Waltham Forest have been charged with bike theft offences since 2020, despite nearly 2,931 bikes being reported stolen in that period.

A Freedom of Information request submitted by the *Echo* has revealed the borough’s bike theft hotspots, with Walthamstow wards High Street and St James being the worst-hit with 347 and 258 thefts reported between 2020 and 2025.

In contrast, Chingford Green and Endlebury wards have seen just 23 and 13 reported bike thefts over the same period.

Last year, bike thefts in St James ward reached a five-year high with 71 bikes reported stolen last year, more than twice as high as the previous year.

High Street remained a main tar-

get for bike thieves in 2025, with 40 offences last year, followed by Chapel End (39) and William Morris (27).

In all, 450 bike thefts were reported to police in the borough in 2025, a marginal decrease on the year before (482).

423 of those offences in 2025 saw the investigation close with no suspect identified and the crime investigated “as far as reasonably possible”. Only nine bicycle theft suspects were identified last year, with four formally charged.

Wood Street resident Sam Baynham had his bike recently stolen from the bike shed in his apartment complex, where several other bicycles were also taken.

He told the *Echo* that he contacted police and the management company of the building as soon as he noticed the theft – but that no suspect was ever identified.

“The police were quite responsive initially saying they would send someone out to have a look, but within an hour the case was closed because there were no leads,” he said. “I couldn’t believe it.”

Sam offered to assist the police by checking CCTV – which he says offered a clear view of the bike shed – and through speaking with neighbours who had also lost bikes, but felt the police were “uninterested” in pursuing the thieves.

“It felt like I was doing the investigation for them,” he said.

Responding to data uncovered by

the *Echo*, he said the findings were “unsurprising but incredibly frustrating”.

“I’ve had two bikes stolen in my life, and both times nothing has been done by the police,” Sam added. “It’s no wonder it’s so prolific because nothing gets done about it.”

“I get the police are busy and underfunded, but a bit more compassion wouldn’t have gone amiss – they just felt disinterested. It’s astonishing to think how many people are out there stealing bikes and getting away with it.”

According to the London Cycling Campaign, an estimated 40,000 bicycles are stolen in London every year – with only 2% ever recovered. The group has warned that a “significant proportion of people who have their bikes stolen simply stop cycling”.

Superintendent Sarah Jackson, the Met’s neighbourhood policing lead for Waltham Forest, said: “We recognise the significant impact bike theft has on victims – from the financial loss to the inconvenience it causes.

“By carrying out targeted patrols in theft hotspots and using intelligence to identify repeat offenders, we continue to drive down neighbourhood crime.

“In Waltham Forest, theft has fallen by 19.3% this year to date and residential burglary is down 10.6%.

“We urge cyclists to protect their bikes, including security markings and registering them, and to report theft right away so officers can act quickly and improve the chances of recovery.”

## ‘This is about cutting people’s bills’

Continued from page 1

including VAT and installation. For larger systems or those paired with battery storage, total installation costs can range from £8,000 to over £14,000.

At a public meeting about the project organised by Creasy on Wednesday, 30th April and attended by Energy Secretary Ed Miliband, residents explored how they could make Walthamstow go solar.

Speaking to the *Echo* following the event at Willowfield School, Creasy said: “At the moment, this project is about getting people and neighbours organised locally to figure out and create a number of options for how they can lower bills through solar energy.

“I want this to be as accessible as possible and I’m not interested in a scheme that isn’t for everyone in the community. Every person in Walthamstow should and can have access to clean, cheap energy.”

Creasy says that through ongoing conversations with energy providers and solar panel installers she’s “hopeful to pool together all sources of funding and cut outlay costs” for residents.

One of these potential funding pools is the government-run Great British Energy’s £1billion Local Power Plan, which aims to ensure that communities directly benefit from the energy they help to produce.

Speaking about the fund, Millband said: “I don’t decide who gets money from this fund but this is an incredibly exciting project, and I really wish you the best of luck with it – and count me as a massive supporter.”

According to Edelstyn and Powell, if the UK government was to install solar panels on every house in the country, the cost would be made back within a ten-year period.

During the 2024 General Election campaign when Edelstyn stood against Creasy as an independent candidate and won 288 votes, the Walthamstow MP offered to help expand the power station project and she organised a screening of their documentary *POWER STATION* in the Houses of Parliament last year.

Dan and Hilary are however keen to stress that their project receiving backing from Labour figures such as Creasy and Miliband does not mean they are politically aligned with the party.

They said: “We endorsed Green candidates locally, and we found it a struggle to get the [Labour-run] council on board with our plans for a community-owned power station in the borough.

“So we’re conscious and wary of our plans having been co-opted by Labour, especially as they face a lot of pressure from the Greens.”

Ultimately though, they say they’re heartened by the support for the scheme the project is receiving from people across Walthamstow, and by the sheer numbers in the room.

Hilary said: “There was excitement and questions in the room about microgrids, equitable energy sharing and cooperative ownership and the next steps needed. There are still massive challenges [though] around actually accessing the government finances and legislation changes needed to make this happen at scale.”

Find out more about the *POWER STATION* project here: [power.film](http://power.film)

The next screening of ‘*POWER STATION*’ in Waltham Forest is Friday 5th June, 7.30pm at Forest Cinema Walthamstow – book tickets: [forestcinema.co.uk](http://forestcinema.co.uk)

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## NEWS

# Trepidation, uncertainty, and rage: Dispatches from the picket line at Henry Maynard Primary School



Teachers strike outside Henry Maynard School on Monday 18th May  
Credit: Tim Cole

Scores of teachers were on strike at several schools across Waltham Forest last month as the National Education Union alleges jobs are at risk

by Charlene Rodrigues

Scores of teachers, joined by parents and their children, stood outside Henry Maynard Primary School in Shernhall Street, Walthamstow, last month, chanting: “No ifs, no buts, no education cuts”.

With the backing of the National Education Union (NEU), Henry Maynard teachers were striking for at least three weeks to protest alleged “redundancies and budget cuts” that they say could threaten up to 20 jobs at the school. Three other schools – South Grove, South Chingford and Belmont Park – also joined in the strike action.

NEU members say that these staffing cuts will severely impact the quality of education and support for students.

For nearly ten parents the *Echo* spoke to, the three weeks of strike action were a mix of “disruption, uncertainty, trepidation, coupled with joy” as they juggled childcare,

homeschooling and work. Overwhelmingly, they were undeterred in their support for the teachers.

Victoria Tackley, a mother of three with children aged seven to 13, has seen over the last decade how budget cuts have put a severe strain on schools’ teaching, especially for children who require special educational needs (Send), which is extra support for learning.

At Henry Maynard Primary School, support is available within a mainstream, inclusive model as it does not operate as a specialist unit.

For Victoria’s eldest daughter, who has now moved on to secondary school, the “inclusive, compassionate, and caring” learning environment was “life-changing”.

“My eldest is dyslexic and doing incredibly well now, and I think that was the basis of her primary education which was fantastic. She was never made to feel that she couldn’t do things, and they really inspired confidence in her

and other children which is wonderful,” Victoria told the *Echo*.

Children with similar needs, she fears, might be denied that support if the cuts go ahead.

On top of her work as a full-time nurse, Victoria and her husband – also a nurse – will be juggling shifts, mealtimes, and co-ordinating childminding and family support. She however recognises that many parents, single parents and those without family nearby or abroad, do not have the same level of support.

Andrew Child, a parent of one pupil in the upper school, is divided on the strike action.

He said: “I’m appalled by how the school leadership are handling this and how little information they are providing. Parents are being treated a little bit like children, even though we are legitimate stakeholders in this consultation process.”

He added that a lot of parents are “freaking out” and said: “I’m

getting lockdown triggers. I’m being reminded about how awful it was during that time trying to juggle jobs and homeschooling.”

Jess Crawford, a parent of two, including one six-year-old at the school, said the quality of the teaching drew her to Henry Maynard Primary School.

“The school has been really brilliant in terms of trying to make provision for the most vulnerable families and will be open for a small number of children who have been identified in need of additional support and free school meals,” Jess added.

The reasons for the funding shortage are ultimately connected to falling pupil numbers and the government formula used to allocate money.

A spokesperson for Waltham Forest Council said: “School funding is based on the number of children enrolled. There has been a significant decline in pupil numbers across London – not just in Waltham Forest.

“Henry Maynard Primary School is currently operating with a shortfall of approximately 137 students. This creates a budget deficit of around £500,000 from government grants. This funding model is set by the central government, and not the council.

“Henry Maynard Primary School – like any public sector body – has a duty to balance its books and ensure it can continue

to operate efficiently. The council does not anticipate a need for compulsory redundancies, and we are therefore concerned about strike action that is currently disrupting students’ learning at a key time for their development.”

The news of the restructuring plans come a few weeks after Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson wrote a letter to the school praising it for its work with disadvantaged pupils.

In the letter, seen by the *Echo*, Phillipson said: “This success reflects the dedication of your staff and hard work of your pupils.”

Jess, a former community governor at Henry Maynard, said it’s a “profound contradiction” that a school that has been “celebrated at the very top of government cannot secure the funding it needs to retain the staff who earned that recognition in the first place”.

Despite the disruption, Jess and her husband, who both work full time, remain positive.

For Jess, it is comforting to see how families and friends came together to take turns and look after each other’s children. In the interim, football and arts clubs opened up at subsidised fees.

“The outpouring of support for the school from the school community has been really incredible,” she added.

Henry Maynard Primary School declined to comment.



National Education Union general secretary Daniel Kebede at the picket line  
Credit: Tim Cole

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## NEWS

# ‘Multiple failures’ led to man taking his life at Whipps Cross Hospital A&E



John Cushion, 62, ended his life while waiting for a mental health bed at Whipps Cross Hospital in July 2024

by Sebastian Mann,  
Local Democracy Reporter

*Warning: This article includes references to suicide*

**M**ultiple failures by the NHS led to a man taking his own life in hospital, an inquest has found.

62-year-old John Cushion, who lived in Redbridge, died waiting for a mental health bed at Whipps Cross Hospital in July 2024.

Staff at the hospital failed to check on John for 50 minutes before he was found unresponsive in his cubicle, despite it being noted that he was alone with the lights off and the curtains drawn.

They also failed to remove items from John that he could use to harm himself, nor did they ensure he was put on one-to-one observations – despite telling mental health nurses he was feeling “100% suicidal”.

These were all found to have constituted “gross failures” by the NHS at an inquest held at East London Coroner’s Court, in Walthamstow, last month.

Area coroner Nadia Persaud said there was a “clear and direct causal connection” between these failures and John’s death.

Speaking after the inquest, John’s widow Francesca said she was “very grateful” to the coroner for the care taken when investigating his death.

His wife of nearly 30 years added: “I

hope that lessons have been and will continue to be learned to ensure no other family has to go through what I and my daughters have over the last two years.”

The Leytonstone hospital’s A&E department is run by Barts Health NHS Trust. The North East London Foundation Trust (NELFT) oversees the psychiatric liaison service there and was responsible for the community mental health teams involved with John.

NELFT has extended its “heartfelt condolences” to his family, while Barts said it had “implemented a comprehensive improvement programme”.

John’s mental health had begun to worsen on 3rd July 2024 and he attempted to take his own life 15 days later. Francesca called 999 and he was taken to hospital for a physical health check and mental health assessment.

They arrived at Whipps Cross’ A&E department at around 2pm on Thursday, 18th July but were forced to wait in a corridor until the evening, when he was assessed by a nurse.

A doctor concluded he needed a mental health assessment, but it did not take place until the following day due to a failure in communication between staff.

The following day, he told mental health staff he was “100% suicidal” and nurses were told he needed to be placed under constant, one-to-one observation in A&E.

A second mental health assessment later concluded he should be admitted to a specialist psychiatric hospital and prevented from leaving the department for his own safety.

He was assigned a cubicle while waiting for a bed to become free, where he was found unresponsive on the evening of Friday, 19th July.

Francesca had characterised John during the inquest as being devoted to her and their two children, and said he was looking forward to retirement after many years of hard work.

Sophie Wells, a human rights solicitor with Leigh Day who represented the family, said: “Even in the context of the pressures on A&E departments and the mental health system, the scale of the failings in John’s care which the inquest uncovered, both in number and gravity, is shocking.

“I am pleased for John’s family that they now have a clearer understanding of what went so wrong for John, and that the coroner has recognised that a number of the failings met the very high threshold of neglect.”

Following the inquest, a spokesperson for NELFT said: “We are deeply saddened by the tragic death of John and extend our heartfelt condolences to his family and loved ones.

“We continue to work closely with all partners to ensure that services are effective and to strengthen crisis pathways,

risk assessment, escalation processes and support for people experiencing mental health crises.”

The Barts spokesperson said in full: “We extend our deepest condolences to Mr Cushion’s family and apologise for the failings in his care.

“We remain committed to providing the highest standard of care for all patients and have implemented a comprehensive improvement programme, working closely with NELFT and North East London ICB, to strengthen care and safety for patients presenting with mental health needs.”

Since the incident, Barts said it had introduced clearer procedures, stronger safeguards, and enhanced risk assessment processes to improve care for patients with mental health needs.

It also delivered mental health training for emergency department staff and established a new enhanced care team led by an experienced matron.

During the inquest, the coroner also raised concerns about the “honesty and integrity” of some of the evidence she heard.

She found that she did not consider the account of one member of staff from Barts to be “truthful and accurate” and told the trust to investigate her concerns further and report back to the court and John’s family.

*Anyone feeling emotionally distressed or suicidal can call Samaritans for help on 116 123 or email jo@samaritans.org*

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## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

## Art trail returns



Yanire Sylva Delgado in her home studio



Artist Villain Van Gogh



Mykey John in his studio



Laura Villares House in her studio

A new – yet familiar – art trail will be taking place across Walthamstow this month.

Walthamstow Art Trail is the new name for the much-loved E17 Art Trail which ran for 20 years between 2004 and 2024, having previously been organised by community arts group Artillery.

Now supported by Wood Street Walls and led by volunteers, the free community art showcase takes place between Friday 5th and Sunday 14th June.

Once again, it means Wal-

thamstow will be transformed into a “vibrant living gallery” with an “artist-led, community-powered celebration of local creative talent”.

Bringing together artists, performers, craftspeople and residents, Walthamstow Art Trail will showcase a diverse programme of exhibitions, open studios, workshops and live events across homes, studios, public spaces and independent venues throughout Walthamstow.

The trail is hosted across 165 venues, with over 200 artists showcasing their work. Visi-

tors can follow a curated map around the neighbourhood, engaging directly with artists at their studios, and taking part in hands-on activities designed for all ages and backgrounds.

Walthamstow Art Trail builds on the 20-year legacy of the brilliant E17 Art Trail founded by Artillery, with the mantle now having been passed to a new dedicated team of local volunteers; art curator Margarita Makhanova, producer Katty Grassi and marketing coordinator Alessa Grace Lewis.

The organisers said: “There’s

a real buzz that comes from working together to make a community event happen. Meeting artists who are passionate about their work and excited to share it with others is a privilege, and seeing that enthusiasm first-hand is incredibly uplifting.”

As well as Wood Street Walls, Walthamstow Art Trail is supported by Another Kind Studio, Artillery, 40ft Brewery, Soho Theatre Walthamstow, The Stow Brothers and Walthamstow FC.

For more information:  
Visit [walthamstowarttrail.co.uk](http://walthamstowarttrail.co.uk)

Self Portrait by Paul Dash  
Credit RawCanvas

## ‘Rare’ chance to see major artist’s work

Waltham Forest residents will have a rare opportunity to experience the work of renowned artist Paul Dash this month with a free exhibition at RawCanvas Gallery, within Good Shepherd Studios in Leytonstone.

Dash, whose work has been shown at major cultural institutions including Tate Britain, the Royal Academy of Arts, and Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, will be exhibiting *Rhythm, Carnival and Community* at the space until Sunday, 28th June.

Associated with the Caribbean Artists Movement, Dash’s art draws on carnival, street life and diasporic culture. His images are rhythmic, vivid and full of movement – capturing the energy of music and collective celebration, while reflecting deeper histories of identity and cultural continuity.

In 2024, Dash, who has lived in Bushwood for more than three decades, debuted his work *Revellers Celebrate at Dusk* at the Venice Biennale.

The artist also has a mural based on his painting *Bacchanal* outside Good Shepherds Building in Davies Lane, where he has a working studio.

Dash said: “It feels very special to share this work in a space that’s part of everyday community life. It allows people to encounter it in a more direct and open way.”

RawCanvas’ director Aaron Williams said: “Having an artist of Paul’s calibre exhibiting here is significant. It’s about making important work accessible and bringing people together around it.”

The exhibition is free to attend and a selection of limited edition prints will be available to purchase.

‘Rhythm, Carnival and Community’ will be on show at Back to Ours café, 15a Davies Lane E11 3DR until Sunday 28th June.

Opening hours: Monday to Friday, 7.30am–4pm | Saturday, 8am–4pm | Sunday, 8am–3pm

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**INDIE**

news

**Week****15–21 JUNE  
2026****No news is BAD NEWS  
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# GET TO KNOW THE FACES BEHIND YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER

**Indie News Week is the celebration of independent news. In 2026, we would like to give our readers the chance to celebrate Indie News Week by learning more about the faces behind their local community newspaper and what goes into covering local stories. Here our staff and some of our valued contributors/volunteers introduce themselves:**



**Marco Marcelline,**  
Editor

I've been proud to edit the Echo since July 2023. Since then we've covered housing evictions, school strikes, controversial council decisions, local Palestine protests, and both general and local elections.

Fair, accurate and comprehensive journalism is what I strive for. The business model of journalism may be shifting, but I believe a newspaper's role is to inform the public with substance and sincerity – not just chase clicks.

In my first issue, I promised to hold power to account while highlighting the magic of this exciting, diverse and culturally-rich borough. Together with our team, I hope we've managed to do that.



**Sebastian Mann,**  
Local  
Democracy  
Reporter

I cover Waltham Forest Council, from planning decisions and licensing disputes to budget black holes and councillor drama. I cut through the noise to keep you informed about what elected officials are doing in your name, with your taxes.

Since February 2024 I've covered a range of stories: the closure of Markhouse Centre; the council's work to divest from companies linked to the arms trade; and a campaign to convert a disused gasworks into a water park. I'm proud of the work my colleagues and I do to scrutinise our leaders and hold power to account.

I previously worked as a reporter in my home county of Lincolnshire.



**Penny Dampier,**  
photographer

I have been involved with the Echo since 2018.

My roles included managing distribution and membership and running the photography page. I now work for sister publication EC1 Echo but still sometimes help with pics for this paper.

Some of my most notable photography jobs include the local election, Harry Kane, and King Charles and Queen Camilla! I still get a buzz when I see one of my photos on the front page.

I've lived in Walthamstow for 18 years, and love the sense of community. I'm also involved in the local art scene, hosting photographic exhibitions as part of E17 Art Trail, as well as acting in various theatre productions.



**Nathan Clarke,**  
contributor

It's a real privilege to write for a paper so deeply rooted in the community I grew up in. In my former role at a large regional paper, I saw how quickly audiences lose trust when reporting becomes sensationalist or disconnected from local concerns.

Independent titles like the Echo keep real journalism alive by focusing on the stories that genuinely matter. My interests span current affairs, local history, sport, culture and the environment. In this edition, I've reported on rising bike thefts in the borough, and told the remarkable story of Waltham Forest FC's most famous – yet largely unknown – former player.



**Sarah Fairbairn,**  
books  
reviewer

I've been living in Waltham Forest since 2014 and over the years it's become really important to me to contribute to the community I live in.

My career is in the arts and I do lots of work with authors, so writing book reviews is a natural fit for my interests, and I'm proud to write for our free local paper.

I also volunteer with Eat or Heat, the foodbank based in Walthamstow, and am a trustee of Leyton Midland Collective, where our aim is to improve access to public spaces and community-building activities in our corner of Waltham Forest.



**David O'Driscoll,**  
sports writer

Growing up, I do not recall my parents ever reading a book, but they did read newspapers. They did this to stay in touch with what was happening in the world, locally, and back home in Ireland. Today, the mass readership of newspapers has sadly long gone, and the majority of news is viewed on social media, with huge potential for misinformation.

This is why I contribute to the Echo; I am fortunate to live in a vibrant community with so many creative people, and I like to support this. I write mostly about sport, often Walthamstow FC, and the local community-based team I am involved in, Coppermill Swifts.



**Waltham Forest Echo has 329 readers who are supporters of the work we do in covering local news and highlighting issues that are important to our community. We are independent, and we write the facts without bias.**

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# AROUND THE BOROUGH

## WALTHAMSTOW

### Soho Theatre Pub opens in Hoe Street



Soho Theatre Pub Credit Local resident via Soho Theatre

by Marco Marcelline

**S**oho Theatre has opened a new neighbourhood pub in Hoe Street.

The venue, which opened on Friday, 15th May, serves drinks from Blackhorse Road-based Signature Brew, alongside food from award-winning

chef James Cochran, bringing “fried chicken on acid”, pub roasts, small plates and more to a “relaxed pub setting”.

The Collab vacated the site earlier this year, and with the support of Waltham Forest Council, Soho Theatre has been able to bring the space back into use as Soho Theatre Pub.

Soho Theatre Walthamstow co-executive directors Mark Godfrey and Sam Hansford said: “Soho Theatre Pub builds on the role Soho Theatre already plays in Walthamstow’s cultural and evening life. With food from James Cochran and drinks from Waltham Forest’s own Signature Brewery, it will be a brilliant new local pub for residents, audiences, artists and visitors alike. We’re excited to open the doors and welcome people in.”

Sam McGregor, Signature Brew and The Collab co-founder said: “In 2019, Signature Brew and Paul Human came together to create The Collab, and over the following seven years some epic times were had over amazing food and beer, with the likes of Suggs, alt-J, Mogwai and Dynamite MC all getting involved. Now we’re pleased to be handing over to our neighbours, Soho Theatre, so the great collaboration vibes can continue!”

## CHINGFORD

### Fresh proposal for previously rejected homes

by Sebastian Mann, Local Democracy Reporter

**P**lans have been submitted to Waltham Forest Council for new homes to be built in Chingford, after similar proposals were refused previously.

Dzheylyan Ilieva applied for permission to build two self-contained houses on land in Gilwell Close earlier this year.

The scheme, drawn up by Trace Construction Group, is for a pair of two-storey, three-bedroom homes.

There will be a single parking space for one car and “secure” cycle storage in the front gardens for residents’ bikes, plus bin storage.

Similar proposals were refused by the council in March last year. The planning team had concerns about the parking arrangements and the “scale, sitting and design” of the new houses.



A mock-up of the homes Credit Trace Construction Group

The homes would have appeared “overly dominant” and had a “subduing effect” on the existing houses, which would have “negatively altered the street-scene and character of the area”.

The developers say they have “comprehensively reviewed and refined” the scheme, reducing

the size of the homes and adding “visual interest” by using “high-quality” brick detailing.

Additionally, the curved corners should “soften the visual impact”.

A decision on the fresh proposals has not yet been made by Waltham Forest Council’s planning department.

## LEYTONSTONE

### Man injured after car rams into shop



The car rammed into a kitchenware shop Credit Suzie Reid

**A** pedestrian was rushed to hospital after being hit by a car that also smashed into a kitchenware shop in High Road Leytonstone.

Emergency services were called at 2.52pm on Tuesday, 5th May to the scene where they found the injured man, in his 60s, and took him to hospital where he received treatment for “life-threatening” injuries.

According to the Metropol-

itan Police, the driver of the car, also a man in his 60s, was arrested on suspicion of causing serious injuries through careless driving and driving without insurance. He was taken to hospital with non-life threatening or life changing injuries before being taken into police custody.

A London Ambulance Service spokesperson said: “We were called at 2.49pm to reports of a road traffic collision in the High Road, Leytonstone.

“We sent resources including ambulance crews, a clinician in a response car, members of our Hazardous Areas Response team and London’s air ambulance.

“We treated three patients and took one to a London major trauma centre. Two people were discharged at the scene.”

*Anyone with information is asked to contact police on 101, quoting CAD 4819/05MAY or Crimestoppers, anonymously, on 0800 555 111*

## HIGHAMS PARK

### Shoplifters caught stealing £2k worth of booze

**T**wo shoplifters carrying £2,000 worth of alcohol and “high value toys” were chased down and arrested by three plain-clothed Met Police safer neighbourhood team officers near Highams Park Tesco.

According to Waltham Forest Council, the three Met officers were conducting a plain-clothes patrol when they spotted two individuals running out of the Larkshall Road Tesco superstore carrying large bags of goods and being chased by store staff.

The police officers then gave chase and “quickly detained” both suspects, who were carrying a bounty of security tagged whiskey bottles.

It is reported that both sus-

pects were already wanted in connection with a series of retail thefts, commercial burglaries, and knife point robberies across several different areas.

The female suspect was wanted for seven offences, while the male was wanted for three, in addition to being recalled to prison.

Both suspects have now been charged and remanded.



A trolley of stolen whiskey bottles that the pair tried to make off with Credit Waltham Forest Council



## SPORT

# The Barça Boy who landed in Walthamstow

*When Samuel Okunowo started playing for Waltham Forest FC in 2009, almost no-one knew they were sharing a dressing room with a former Barcelona defender*

by Nathan Clarke

In 1998, Samuel Okunowo had the world at his feet. At just 19, the Nigerian defender was lining up for Barcelona alongside Xavi, Luis Figo and Rivaldo against Manchester United in the Champions League – living out the dream of millions.

But that match – which featured a young David Beckham and finished in a 3–3 draw – was to be the highpoint in his fleeting career at Europe’s elite level. Eleven years later, Okunowo would swap the famous blue and red of Barcelona for the orange of Waltham Forest FC (now Walthamstow FC), one of his last attempts at resurrecting

his once promising career.

Today, ‘Barcelona Sam’ – as he came to be known by his Waltham Forest teammates – can walk just about anywhere without being recognised. His journey from the Camp Nou to E17 is one of heartbreak and misfortune, but also a story of remarkable success – a man who achieved footballing greatness, albeit briefly.

Born in Ibadan, Nigeria, Okunowo’s remarkable move to Barcelona at just 18-years-old was a feat very few Nigerians before him had achieved. First spotted playing for his school team, the strong, quick right-back quickly began to build a reputation as one of the country’s brightest footballing prospects.

At the final of the 1997 UEFA-

CAF Meridian Cup – which saw Nigeria edge a 3–2 win over a young Spanish side – Okunowo the standout player. Spanish football scouts who were in attendance had seen a star in the making and Okunowo was offered a trial at the club just hours after the full-time whistle.

He made an instant impact. His debut came at the start of the following season against Racing Santander, where he played 76 minutes in a 0–0 draw. He made 21 appearances in all for Barcelona, helping the club to the La Liga title in 1998/9, and playing five times in the Champions League.

But after an impressive first season, his fortunes quickly turned.

Okunowo played a handful of

games during an unsuccessful loan spell at Benfica. Once recalled, a serious knee injury would mark the beginning of the end of his career at just 22 years old.

Unable to prove his fitness, he was sold to Greek side Ionikos in 2001. From there, Okunowo played just 19 more games of football over the next eight years of his injury-ravaged career. In 2009 – following brief stints in Albania, Ukraine and the Maldives – he arrived in Walthamstow.

“From what we can remember he was pretty quiet,” vice chairman of Walthamstow FC Andrzej Perkins says.

Waltham Forest FC – which was rebranded to Walthamstow FC in 2018 – were at the time based at Cricklewood Stadium in Ilford, competing in the Ryman League Division One North.

“We had no idea how he ended up in London, let alone playing for us,” Perkins continues.

“He didn’t mention that he’d played for Barcelona, it was only through some googling that it turned out to be him. Weirdly, he didn’t appear head and shoulders above the rest – he was a pretty rugged player, but had a knack of being in the right place at the right time.

“It’s not uncommon to have former pros play in non-league. I suppose, if anything, it shows that the standard of football in non-league is far higher than you

might expect!”

Okunowo managed 20 appearances in all for Waltham Forest FC before having trials with clubs in Poland and Norway, but no contract was forthcoming at either club. He hung up his boots aged 34, bringing to an end a career of brief highs and enduring lows.

Just as his career was winding down, personal tragedy struck. A fire tore through his home in Ibadan destroying many of his possessions, leaving him with little to show of his globe-trotting football career.

In his time of need, his former Barcelona teammates stepped in to help one of their own. His deep connection to the club was seen again in 2025, when he turned out for a Barcelona legends team for a charity match in Abuja, Nigeria.

Today, his social media feeds remain dotted with photos of him beside some of the game’s greats – glimpses of a career that burned brightly, if briefly.

His time in Europe may have been short, but Okunowo was one of the few players of his era to wear Barcelona’s colours at a time when African representation at Europe’s elite clubs was still limited. And in E17, he holds a different kind of honour – the most decorated player ever to pass, almost unnoticed, through the ranks of Walthamstow FC.

Samuel Okunowo (in orange, left) playing for Waltham Forest FC  
Credit: Walthamstow FC



## Walthamstow FC to debut women’s team

by David O’Driscoll

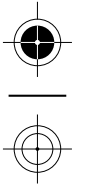
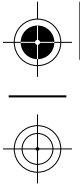
Walthamstow FC has finally established a women’s team, aiming to grow its presence in local football and represent the community more fully.

The women’s team will enter the Greater London Women’s Football League.

The club’s vice-chair Andrzej Perkins, said: “The club wants to continue to grow and expand. We want to represent the Stow

community; from adult men and women, to boys and girls at all ages. We already have an established youth set-up, and will have five men’s teams next season. But the next step is to grow into women’s football. And we cannot wait to get going.”

The women’s team, supported by 40ft Brewery, Misfit Gym, and Stow Smile Studio, are actively seeking players as well as a manager. Female footballers of Walthamstow, your club needs you!



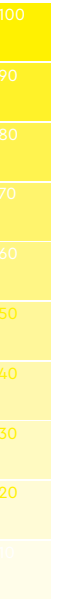
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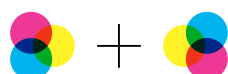
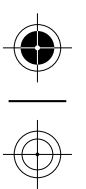
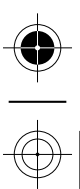
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But because we have no shareholders or wealthy backers we rely on local people and organisations to support our journalism.

The number of supporters making monthly contributions is growing steadily — helping us to break even and look at how we can grow as a publication.

**With continued support from Echo readers we aim to:**  
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This month, 329 supporters contributed 33% of our monthly costs. While the paper remains free to read in print and online, every penny of income is reinvested in our local journalism. Can you support us with £5 per month to help us do more?

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