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WALTHAM FOREST ECHO

Free
Sept 2026, N° 138

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The great Lime bike debate

The Greens have launched a public consultation on bringing dockless hire bikes to the borough, sparking heated conversations. Read more on page 3 ►

Credit: Dominic Marley for Lime UK

No opening date in sight for long-promised Walthamstow music venue

by Marco Marcelline

A long-promised music venue on the site of Blackhorse Lane's former Standard pub still has no opening date in sight, as its developer searches for a music operator willing to take on the cost of fitting out and running the 500-capacity space.

The basement venue forms part of The Altham, the new nine-storey development at the corner of Blackhorse Lane and Forest Road.

The wider development opened to residents three months ago, but the purpose-built music space remains empty and requires an operator to carry out the final fit-out before it can open to the public.

Developer Morro told the *Echo* it was in "active discussions with a number of interested parties", including potential operators who are being invited into the finished space to assess it for staging and sound equipment.

A spokesperson for Morro said: "We remain fully committed to delivering a new music venue at The

Altham. We have already made a significant investment in creating a purpose-built venue, including specialist acoustic construction designed to allow live music and new homes to successfully coexist.

"The space has now been completed to a warm shell and we are excited about what it can become."

A 'warm shell' space is a partially

finished commercial property that includes basic infrastructure and interior finishes including plumbing and electrics, but an operator may still need to install or complete stage infrastructure, professional sound and lighting systems, bars and install furniture.

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NEWS

Chingford Mount crematorium defended amid criticism

by Sebastian Mann,
Local Democracy Reporter

Waltham Forest Council has defended its new crematorium in Chingford after critics said it is “inappropriate and unnecessary”.

A leading crematorium expert, Dr Brian Parsons, has challenged the credentials of the £11million facility in Chingford Mount Cemetery.

The facility was given planning permission in April last year, after

proposals were agreed by the council’s cabinet in 2023, despite concern from some local campaigners.

A town hall spokesperson said residents of Waltham Forest “should be able to pay final respects to their loved ones here in their home borough”.

“The choice of location was evidence-led and carefully considered, having been informed by both an independent need assessment and an alternative site assessment,” the spokesperson added.

However, Dr Parsons argues that existing crematoria in North and East London such as Enfield, City of London, Manor Park and Forest Park are all operating below capacity.

A report published by the expert calculates that these facilities handled around 7,000 cremations in 2024 despite having capacity for around 16,000, based on data from the Cremation Society of Great Britain.

Dr Parsons also joined residents in questioning whether the cemetery was a suitable location for a crematorium.

In response to concerns that it could lead to parking stress, the council spokesperson said: “We have undertaken extensive modelling and planning underpinned by real-world data to make sure there is minimal impact on local traffic.

“The average number of vehicles attending per service is around 21. Old Church Road currently sees approximately 10,000 vehicle movements per day – the new crematorium will add 168 to this on average. Ample parking provision already exists at the cemetery for the use of mourners.”

The crematorium is set to be up and running later this year.



A mock-up of how the Crematorium will look once finished Credit Waltham Forest Council

Students receive A-Level and GCSE results

Students across Waltham Forest received their A-Level, T-Level, BTEC and GCSE results in August, with schools reporting strong performances.

39% of GCSE pupils in the borough achieved grade six or above in English and maths, compared with a national figure of 36%.

Walthamstow Academy posted exceptionally strong results with a quarter of its students achieving grade

seven or higher in English and maths.

And Eden Girls’ School boasted a flurry of multiple grade-nine results, including one pupil achieving eleven grade nines.

At A-Level, Highams Park School reported 226 A–B grades, with students progressing to courses including medicine and pharmacology.

Walthamstow Academy said 88% of its A-Level entries were graded A*–C, with over half of its leavers

heading to Russell Group universities. High achievers included students going on to medicine, international relations, psychology and economics.

Meanwhile, Holy Family Catholic School & Sixth Form said it had very strong vocational results, with 96% of students achieving distinction* to merit, while several of its A-Level students secured places at University College London and Queen Mary University of London.



Students at Walthamstow Academy receive their results Credit Walthamstow Academy

Credit Bob Jenkins via Pexels



Town hall to pay for Met officers

by Sebastian Mann,
Local Democracy Reporter

Certain Metropolitan Police officers will be funded by Waltham Forest Council in the future due to budget cuts.

The force is no longer able to fund coroners’ officers across London as it grapples with a £159million black hole in its finances.

Coroners’ officers are administrative and investigative staff who work under a coroner. They deal with unexpected, violent, or unnatural deaths, act as the main point of contact for grieving families, and function as a go-between for the police, doctors, and mortuaries.

Starting from 2028/29 Waltham Forest will be required to start contributing towards the annual £675,388 cost of the Coroners Service.

There are eleven officers operating across Barking and Dagenham, Havering, Newham, Redbridge, and Waltham Forest.

The council says it negotiated with the Met for 18 months before reaching an agreement.

“We have negotiated a tapering agreement with the Metropolitan Police that has secured funding beyond the level initially offered,” a council spokesperson said.

“This means that [the Met] will fund half the costs of the coroner service in 2028/29, and a quarter in 2029/30, before the five boroughs share the full costs of the service from 2030/31 onwards.”

From 2030/31, Waltham Forest will pay around 19.6% of the overall costs for the service, with this calculation being based on the 2021 census data.



FELLOWSHIP IS LIFE

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NEWS

Greens launch consultation on bringing dockless e-bikes to Waltham Forest

The previous Labour administration did not allow Lime, Forest and other bike-rental companies to operate in the borough, but now residents are being given a say on the issue

Carmen Christensen, a fan of Lime bikes, made a petition calling for them in Waltham Forest



Last year, Leytonstone resident Carmen Christensen was moved to create a petition calling on the council to back dockless hire bikes after constantly hearing from her friends about how “frustrating” it was that there were no Limes in the area.

The petition ended up getting the support of over 1,400 residents, a result which Carmen says shows how “popular” the bikes are.

Reacting to the consultation announcement she said: “Personally I’m overjoyed they’re bringing in dockless bikes, and I’ve been really happy to see that they are rolling the scheme out responsibly – particularly in regards to the parking bays.

“I like that they’re asking residents about what they need and where they would prefer the parking bays to be. I think getting the community involved in these decisions has really raised the council in my estimation.”

However, other residents have expressed concern about dockless e-bikes blocking pavements, crowding areas, and “slow action” from operators when problems are reported.

Walthamstow resident Keith Foster said dockless e-bikes were already blocking pavements and creating street clutter despite currently not being allowed to operate in the borough.

Sharing photos of Lime bikes dumped next to the Forest Road entrance of Walthamstow Wetlands, he told the *Echo*: “[Clutter] is clearly happening despite the system not even having started and Lime are not doing anything about it now.

“Lime are not doing enough about bike clutter”

“They have a collect and repair facility in nearby Tottenham Hale and they don’t bother with clutter right outside the tube station there.”

Lime says riders that don’t park according to rules receive a warning, with repeat offenders facing fines of up to £20 and a potential ban.

Some boroughs, such as Westminster, Kensington and Chelsea, Camden, City of London and Hackney, enforce mandatory bay parking, meaning riders cannot simply dump their bikes on a pavement without facing a warning or penalty.

Waltham Forest has said its preferred approach is to

have mandatory parking bays similar to the above boroughs.

Emma Best, leader of Waltham Forest Conservatives, told the *Echo* that her party had “concerns over enforcement and management of dumped bikes, especially in less densely populated areas of Chingford”.

Urging the Greens to manage the scheme in a “positive way” for residents, she warned: “The reality of many of these schemes across London is that, while well-intentioned, they have made pavements inaccessible, especially for those with disabilities.

“Furthermore, they have caused anti-social behaviour with bikes being ridden without payment, stolen or dumped in rivers, roads and parks.

“There are big questions around how it can be managed in a way that is positive for residents. We remain ready to challenge [the council] to make sure we get the best outcome for our community.”

Alice Pleasant, Lime UK and Ireland’s senior public affairs manager, told the *Echo* that the company was “excited” to hear Waltham Forest was running a consultation.

She said: “With Lime already available in the neighbouring boroughs of Hackney and Haringey, bringing them to Waltham Forest would improve connectivity and make everyday journeys like commutes easier and more sustainable across borough boundaries. This should be a key consideration when building and launching a service.”

The *Echo* understands that Lime has been having ongoing conversations with the town hall about operating in Waltham Forest for several months, with the company having held a demonstration earlier this year showcasing how Lime would work in the borough.

No decisions have yet been made on operators, the number of e-bikes, or when the scheme would begin, the council says.



Lime bikes outside Walthamstow Wetlands’ entrance in Forest Road
Credit Keith Foster

by Marco Marcelline & Sebastian Mann,
Local Democracy Reporter

Waltham Forest Council is looking to allow dockless e-bikes in Waltham Forest.

Paul Perkins, the new Green leader of the council, announced a public consultation on the issue in a video posted to Instagram and Facebook in mid-August.

He said: “This is already the best borough to cycle in, but we want to give you even more green and easy options.”

Dockless e-bikes – electric bikes that can be hired through an app – are a popular way for Londoners to get around, with an average of 150,000 trips made across the capital every day.

Dockless cycles do not need to be returned to a dedicated station, but riders are often required to leave them in marked bays.

The previous Labour administration prevented Lime, Forest and other bike-rental companies from operating in the borough, before back-peddalling on the issue in its local election manifesto earlier this year.

There are almost 60 kilometres of cycle lanes in Waltham Forest and more than 1,000 bike hangars, according to council figures.

The town hall is currently considering a scheme with designated parking bays on the road and limits on the number of dockless e-bikes, which would be rolled out in phases.

“Clear rules” would also be in place for operators and walking routes would be “strongly protected”.

“How we introduce the scheme is up to you,” Cllr Perkins said.

“Whether you like e-bikes, regular cycles, or you don’t cycle at all, we want you to help us introduce e-bikes safely and responsibly.”

The borough-wide survey focuses on where residents would like to see dockless e-bike parking bays, places they would like to travel using them, and locations that need “careful consideration” or where people would not like to see parking bays.

Dockless e-bikes have proven fairly divisive in the borough, though support is particularly strong among young people and active commuters.

Take part in the consultation survey here: talk.walthamforest.gov.uk/dockless-e-bikes-engagement

NEWS



Cycling theatre troupe HandleBards are currently on their longest tour ever, and Walthamstow is on the route. Catch their brilliantly bonkers take on Shakespeare's 'As You Like It' at Blackhorse Workshop in Sutherland Road Path on Friday, 11th September at 7pm. Visit: handlebards.com/tickets Credit: Danford Showan

Man stabbed Walthamstow flatmate in heart over money dispute

Eugeniu Neamtu, 59, fatally stabbed Gheorghe Trica in February following an argument 'over £5'

A man who stabbed his Walthamstow flatmate in the heart during an argument over money has been convicted of his murder.

Romanian national Eugeniu Neamtu, 59, was sentenced a minimum of 27 years at the Old Bailey on Friday, 21st August of the murder of 63-year-old Gheorghe Trica in February.

At 8.51pm on Friday, 20th February, Met officers and the London Ambulance Service responded to reports of a stabbing at an address in Westbury Road.

Officers arrived to find Gheorghe unresponsive with a stab wound. Neamtu was arrested that evening and charged with murder on Sunday, 22nd February.

Detective Inspector Jonathan Potter, who led the investigation, said: "Gheorghe's death was a

tragic and unnecessary loss of life, and our thoughts remain with his family and friends.

"Eugeniu Neamtu is a dangerous offender who demonstrated a willingness to use extreme violence during a petty dispute. The jury heard overwhelming evidence of his actions.

"This conviction ensures a dangerous individual has been removed from our communities. We hope this verdict offers a sense of justice for Gheorghe Trica's loved ones."

Enquiries established that on 20th February Neamtu and Gheorghe had been arguing over money inside the flat they both lived in. During the dispute, Neamtu armed himself with a knife and stabbed Gheorghe.

A significant strand of the investigation centred on a series of emergency calls made from Neamtu's mobile phone in the minutes after the stabbing.



Detectives recovered a steak knife outside the flat Neamtu lived in Credit: Met Police

In a call translated by a Romanian-speaking interpreter, Neamtu told the 999 operator: "There was an incident here and a person is injured. There was an altercation, a man was cut, and I am the perpetrator."

When officers arrived, residents immediately identified Neamtu as responsible. Witnesses said they saw him standing on the communal balcony immediately after the stabbing before making a throwing motion over the railing. A police dog later

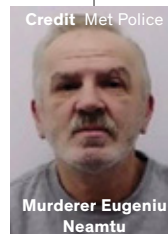
recovered a steak knife from the garden beneath the balcony.

Neamtu admitted during a police interview that he had picked up the knife from the kitchen.

After his arrest, Neamtu largely answered "no comment" but provided prepared statements claiming he acted in self-defence. Detectives found no evidence supporting those claims, while a medical examination found only minor superficial injuries on his body.

Pathology evidence showed Gheorghe sustained a single stab wound to the chest which penetrated the heart and caused catastrophic internal bleeding.

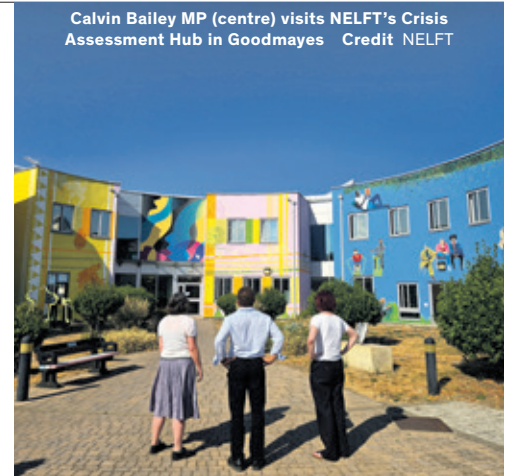
During the trial, the jury also heard evidence relating to a previous conviction in Romania for a serious knife attack in 2006 during another dispute over money. Neamtu served a 15-year sentence before travelling to the UK.



Murderer Eugeniu Neamtu Credit: Met Police



Gheorghe Trica was stabbed in the heart Credit: Met Police



New community mental health hub to open in 2028

The North East London Foundation Trust (NELFT) has unveiled plans for a 24/7 mental health hub in Leytonstone

by Sebastian Mann, Local Democracy Reporter

A 24/7 community mental health support centre will be open in Leytonstone in 2028, the NHS has announced.

The North East London Foundation Trust (NELFT) has unveiled plans for three 'community mental health hubs' in Waltham Forest, Barking and Dagenham, and Redbridge.

They will provide residents with timely access to mental health support and function as a safe alternative to busy emergency departments, the trust says.

NELFT is proposing to open a hub at the South Forest Centre site in Leytonstone, which is currently used for therapy services.

Brid Johnson, NELFT's chief operating officer, said: "Our new, 24/7 community mental health hubs will provide people with a real alternative to hospital admission with timely and effective support closer to home.

"Over the past 18 months, we have opened several community mental health services and have already seen the positive difference they are making to people's recovery, well-being and experience of care.

"These new hubs will build on that success, helping more people access the right support at the right time in their local community."

The Waltham Forest and Barking and Dagenham hubs are set to open in 2028, while the third in Redbridge will be up and running by 2030.

NELFT is also working with Barts Health to develop a dedicated mental health crisis assessment service at Whipps Cross Hospital, which the NHS says will create a more appropriate environment for people experiencing a mental health crisis.

It will also help more people access specialist support without attending A&E, where the NHS struggles with the volume of patients.

Calvin Bailey, the Labour MP for Leyton and Wanstead, said more investment in mental health services across East London was "so welcome" but the "highest standards of safety and accountability" needed to be maintained as they expanded.

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NEWS

‘We’re worried it may stay an empty-shell for the foreseeable future’



The Altham opened to residents in the spring but its basement music venue remains empty

Continued from page 1

The venue is intended to revive the musical legacy of The Standard, also known as The Royal Standard, which closed in 2011.

Planning documents submitted for the redevelopment say the new scheme was intended to “re-kindle the site’s role as an important music and cultural destination”.

But with no operator secured yet, residents have grown increasingly concerned about how long it will take until it opens, on top of expressing concerns about the venue’s commercial viability.

A concerned Walthamstow local who asked not to be named told the *Echo* the delay to securing an operator for the venue was explained by the difficult economic situation facing music venues.

He said: “The reality is very few independent live music venues will have the deep pockets needed to invest into this space, especially when the terms of the lease in new developments typically have a no-break clause and rent is six figures plus business rates and management fees on top of that.”

He added: “And because the onus is on the building owner to find a live music operator, with no punitive measures from the council for delays or there being any incentives to hurry up, I won’t be surprised if the venue sits

as an empty concrete shell for the foreseeable future.”

Planning documents show that there are no strict requirements on the owner to propose rent-free periods or make any financial contributions towards the venue’s fit-out.

Music Venue Trust reported that UK grassroots venues were operating on average profit margins of only 2.5% in 2025, while 53% made no profit at all.

Meanwhile, in 2023, grassroots venues collectively spent £248million putting on live music but generated only £131m from ticket sales, according to figures highlighted by the London Assembly.

The original planning submission for the development in 2022 estimated an annual market rent for the venue of £175,580, though this is likely to have since decreased.

A Morro spokesperson said: “Having now completed the building we are entering a new phase in marketing the venue.

“Potential operators can now see and properly understand the space and its potential, and we can invite them to test it with stage and audio equipment, with technical support from the industry specialists and acoustic consultants who have helped us design and deliver it.

“The timescale for opening will ultimately be led by the operator we appoint and their fit-

“Our focus is on finding the right operator to make the venue a success”

out programme,” the spokesperson continued. “Our focus is on finding the right operator to make the venue a long-term success, and we will do everything we can to support them in opening as soon as possible and bringing live music and events back to the site of The Standard.”

The residential side of the development has already been open for months, with the spokesperson adding that take-up of rooms at The Altham had been “very strong” since residents began moving in during the spring.

Waltham Forest Council said it shares residents’ desire to see music return to the former Standard site but stressed that responsibility for finding an operator lies with developer Morro.

Councillor Eva Tabbasam, cabinet member for housing and regeneration, said: “We want to see The Standard music venue in Blackhorse Lane open just as much as residents do, and as soon as possible.

“We understand residents’ concerns and would like to reassure them that we are in close discussions with Morro, the building owner, which is responsible for securing a suitable venue operator. Morro is taking the time to get this right to give the venue the best chance of success once it opens.”

She said Morro was speaking to “several potential operators, including experienced music venue providers”, with the council supporting the process.

“There is no confirmed opening date, as this will depend on securing an operator and completing the necessary fit-out works,” she added.

Morro said it had leased out one of its Blackhorse Lane units to a “local social enterprise” which is due to move in “shortly”.

But for residents who have waited years for music to return to this corner of Blackhorse Lane, the most important tenant is still to be announced.

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NEWS

Heatwaves cause construction setback for Highams Park's Regal cinema

Recurrent heatwaves this summer have caused construction delays that may mean the site opens in spring 2028 rather than autumn 2027 as previously hoped

How the Regal Cinema is expected to look once completed Credit Mammoth Capital



by Marco Marcelline

The developer behind the Regal Cinema project in Highams Park has said recurrent heatwaves this summer have caused construction setbacks that may mean the site opens in spring 2028 rather than autumn 2027 as previously hoped.

The Regal, in Hale End Road, is currently being rebuilt into 33 flats, a café bar and a restored Art-Deco cinema frontage. Construction began in early 2026 and had been on track to finish in autumn 2027, according to Waltham Forest Council. Two 80–90 seat screens are planned, with opening hours from 8am to midnight.

Speaking to the *Echo* following several months of inactivity on the site, Bal Chima, director of Mammoth Capital, explained that due to the run of extreme heat, the company

decided to take a “planned pause” on construction.

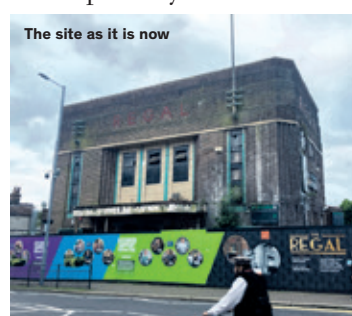
He said: “You cannot pour structural concrete above 32C without compromising its strength – we won’t bake weaknesses into foundations meant to last another century. The same heat is punishing for the people on site, and stop-start working in those conditions is inefficient and unfair to them.”

“We’ve built slack into the delivery of this project in the case of extenuating circumstances such as this, so even if we complete in spring 2028 that’s still within the boundary of what we’ve allowed for in terms of slack.”

Bal added that Mammoth Capital was forced to rework its foundation design after uncovering three or four different types of old foundations from the building’s past as a cinema, bingo hall, snooker hall and nightclub.

Announcing the find, the developer also told Highams Park Planning Group: “The new foundation design has to respond to what’s actually in the ground, not what the old drawings suggested. On a project of this scale, the work happening at the drawing board right now is what makes sure everything that follows is done once, properly, to the highest standard.”

The building opened in 1911 as the Highams Park Electric Theatre and was renamed The Regal Cinema in 1935 when it was partially rebuilt with an



The site as it is now

Art-Deco style facade, a new entrance foyer, and a cafe.

The Regal Cinema closed on 27th April 1971, and has since been used as a bingo hall, snooker venue, bar and nightclub before it was left vacant in 2015.

The original Art-Deco façade has caused complications for Mammoth; cracks were noted ahead of works starting, leading the company to spray a new 8-inch (200mm) reinforced concrete wall directly against the back of the original brick wall.

The move permanently bonded the two walls into “one, single unified structure,” Bal explained, which means the old façade brickwork no longer carries the load alone.

“Doing this is what allowed us to safely demolish the remainder of the building behind it, with additional temporary propping added as an extra safeguard. The result is a wall that is stronger, safer and more durable than she has ever been,” he said.

The *Echo* understands Mammoth Capital has received three to four “serious offers” from independent cinema chains located in London, with the tender process expected to be completed by the end of the year.

In April, the independent film-house Castle Cinema confirmed it had submitted a bid to run the new two-screen cinema, stating: “Our vision is to bring the same community spirit, curated film programme, and welcoming bar space that we pride ourselves on in Hackney.”

“The selection process is ongoing, and whilst we are incredibly hopeful we know these things take time.”

A portion of the 33 flats, which are a mixture of one-bed and two-bedroom leasehold apartments, have already been put on the market with the cheapest abode starting at £350,000 and the most expensive being around £750,000 for a penthouse.

Plans for new flats near Blackhorse Road Station unveiled

by Sebastian Mann, Local Democracy Reporter

A developer is seeking permission to convert a Walthamstow building used for storage space into flats.

A commercial building in Sutherland Road, near Blackhorse Road Station, could be converted into 22 homes according to new plans submitted to Waltham Forest Council.

The ground floor would be refurbished and retained as shops, while the first floor would be converted into housing. Four additional storeys would be added onto the building, with the top two floors set back.

Each flat would be self-contained, with its own private balcony or terrace.

The plans detail five studio apartments, nine one-beds, five two-beds, and a trio of three-beds.

The applicants describe the scheme as one that balances the area’s “urban context” against the council’s ambitions to increase housing in the borough, as per its Local Plan.

It will “enhance” the borough’s architecture and “supports the vision of a vibrant, inclusive, and resilient Waltham Forest”.

In 2015, Waltham Forest earmarked the Blackhorse Lane area for 2,500 new homes to be built by this year.

The scheme has been developed over a series of meetings with the council’s planning department, beginning last May.

A public consultation was held between 10th December and 12th January. The forms were downloaded a total of 50 times, but the scheme received no comments or objections from locals.

The building is currently used by a wholesale fashion retailer for storage, but they intend to move to a better-quality, purpose-built warehouse in the Blackhorse Lane area, the application states.

The scheme has been delegated, which means it may not require approval from the council’s elected planning committee.

A mockup showing the proposed development Credit Paul Dickinson & Associates



The site as it is now Credit Google Streetview



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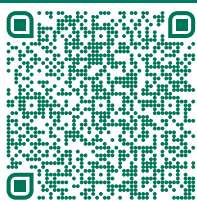
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Enrolment Dates

Tue 01 September	10am - 6:30pm
Wed 02 September	10am - 6:30pm
Thur 03 September	10am - 6:30pm
Fri 04 September	10am - 4pm
Sat 05 September	10am - 1pm



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NEWS



Hyacinth Malcolm, who is fully blind
Credit Kumail Jaffer/LDRS



Gary Wiggins from the Waltham
Forest Blind Association
Credit Kumail Jaffer/LDRS

Disability campaigners call for ban on floating bus stops

by Kumail Jaffer, Local Democracy Reporter

Waltham Forest campaigners are amongst disability groups warning of 'legitimate risk' the stops pose to blind and disabled people

Plans for future 'floating bus stops' in London must be scrapped to avoid any future tragedies involving cyclists colliding with vulnerable people, campaigners have said — with particular concern focused on designs already in place in Waltham Forest.

The bus stops, first introduced in 2013, involve a cycle lane running between a bus stop and the pavement, which allows cyclists to continue riding while passengers board or alight, while pedestrians have to cross the cycle path in order to catch a bus.

In Waltham Forest, floating bus stops have become a flashpoint between cycling advocates and blind and partially sighted residents, who say the designs are creating daily risks on some of the borough's busiest routes.

Last year ministers announced a pause on the rollout of one type of floating bus stop called shared use bus border (SUBB) where the cycle lane runs across the front of the bus stop.

However, it did not prevent future construction of bus stop bypasses (BSBs), where the bike lane runs behind the bus stop. Both these types make up around 1.5% of the capital's 19,000 bus stops.

More than a year on, campaign groups representing blind and partially sighted people

have called on the government to crack down further on this type of cycle infrastructure, claiming it presents a significant danger to vulnerable Londoners trying to use the bus.

Figures from TfL suggest that between 2020 and 2022, there were six casualties at floating bus stops — 0.8% of the 623 pedestrian casualties involving cyclists during the three-year period.

In Waltham Forest, campaigners say those numbers do not reflect the daily reality at some of the borough's busiest floating bus stops.

The LDRS joined Gary Wiggins from the Waltham Forest Blind Association to observe a busy floating bus stop next to Blackhorse Road Station in Walthamstow. Over the course of two hours, several close calls with pedestrians were observed, cyclists were seen travelling down the wrong track and multiple e-bikes and e-scooters didn't skip a beat as they sped by.

Gary, who is partially sighted, said: "The bus stops are very dangerous for visually impaired people.

"I got off the bus just up the road at Walthamstow and one of these cyclists bumped into me, knocked me over and I got abuse from the person who was riding the bike — they blamed me. Well, I can't see. So, that's not my problem, is it?

"When you get off the bus, there's a warning to passengers to be careful of the cycle lane.

"Well, to me, people just want to get off the bus. They want to get to where they want to get to. They just want to get out, get off the bus, and go.

"It's not right that we've been put in this situation. It's not right. I don't use the buses anymore, hardly ever at all now. If I go out anywhere, I use taxis. And that's more money, more cost and all the rest of it. But I'd rather be safe than sorry to be quite honest."

Hyacinth Malcolm, who is fully blind, added: "Sadiq Khan and TfL keep saying that every journey matters — but it only matters if I can take the bus. The bus is my life and it's the only way I can travel.

"I have to take a taxi everywhere because I'm not sure if there will be a cycle lane when I step off the bus or not."

Mayor of London Sir Sadiq Khan has been challenged on the issue on numerous occasions by the London Assembly, but has been staunch in his defence of floating bus stops.

Pro-cycling groups and City Hall see floating bus stops as a means to help the capital become more cyclist-friendly and inclusive. The mayor wants to see 80% of all journeys in the city being done on foot, bicycle or public transport by 2041 — something that can only happen with expanded cycling infrastructure.

Simon Munk of the London Cycling Campaign said: "Some campaigners claim floating bus stops are dangerous — the evidence clearly says they are no more dangerous than other stretches of road, pavement and cycle route. Some also claim floating bus stops are so difficult to deal with that a significant

proportion of visually impaired people avoid using such stops.

"While evidence on this is limited, it appears to show the opposite. If you want more cycling and a wider range of people cycling, floating bus stops are a necessity."

A City Hall spokesperson said: "The mayor and his team are committed to enabling safe and sustainable travel across the capital for everyone. That's why we welcome recent statutory guidance on the provision and design of floating bus stops and the ambition to help ensure future installations are as accessible as possible for everyone, while protecting cyclists from motor traffic.

"Bus stop bypasses provide a safer route for everyone by physically separating buses and overtaking vehicles from people on bikes. We continue to engage with Londoners to understand their experiences and explore potential transport network enhancements as we build a greener, safer, better London for all."

A TfL spokesperson added: "Bus stop bypasses are an important part of delivering more inclusive cycling infrastructure and improving road safety, however, we recognise they can present challenges, particularly for blind and partially sighted people. People cycling must follow the rules of the road and stop at zebra crossings and we are working on measures to increase awareness of bus stop bypasses among cyclists.

"We welcome recent statutory guidance on the provision and design of floating bus stops and the ambition to help ensure that future installations are as accessible as possible for all users, while protecting cyclists from motor traffic. We continue to work with the Department for Transport, Active Travel England, disabled people and accessibility groups to understand experiences and explore how we can further enhance design."



A floating bus stop outside Blackhorse Road Station
Credit Kumail Jaffer/LDRS

Advertisement

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COMMENT

‘Public consultations must mean something’

Conservative councillor Mitchell Goldie slams the previous Labour-run council’s handling of a consultation on 15 minutes free parking, and hopes the Greens will do better

Waltham Forest Council asked residents 18 months ago what they thought about scrapping the 15 minutes free parking on our high streets. 89% of respondents said no, do not remove it, but the council pressed ahead anyway.

It was only recently, when I asked a question at full council, that residents learned what that exercise had actually cost. The answer was close to £150,000 of taxpayers’ money, all of it spent finding out what people thought before being ignored completely.

That is not a proper consultation; it is a very expensive way of telling residents their opinion does not matter.

6,000 people signed a petition against the changes and the council’s own climate scrutiny committee heard from dozens of Chingford residents in person. None of it changed the outcome, because the decision had already been made and the consultation existed to tick a box rather than shape a policy.

We warned at the time that real damage would be done. Local independent business owners came to full council in person and told councillors directly that removing the free parking would hurt their businesses.

They were not vague warnings, they came from people who knew their customers and knew what a few minutes of free parking meant for their footfall. Those warnings were ignored too, just like the consultation.

The 15 minutes of free parking did something simple but valuable. It allowed local residents to stop



Councillor Mitchell Goldie

and pop in, and it let people driving through our high streets pull over for a few minutes to grab a coffee, buy a chocolate bar, or drop something off at the dry cleaners.

It was never about long stays, it was about the small, everyday visits that keep a high street ticking over. Take that away, and those small visits simply stop happening.

The results have been exactly what residents and traders warned they would be.

Shopkeepers along our high streets tell me they have lost regular customers who used to pop in for a few minutes without needing to log onto an app, put in banking details, and make sure the right location is selected.

Instead, residents tell me they now drive out to the large retail parks in Enfield, Waltham Abbey and Loughton, where they can park for free, rather than use their own local high street.

Payments are also online only now, with no paper vouchers,

which has made things harder still for some of our elderly residents. Altogether, this is worse for our high streets, and worse for local jobs.

Episodes like this have done real damage to public trust. Residents were asked their opinion, told it would be considered, and then watched it be discarded regardless.

Business owners stood up in public and were ignored too. When that happens, people stop believing consultations mean anything, and they stop believing politicians when they say they are listening. That loss of trust does not repair itself, it has to be rebuilt deliberately and visibly.

Since May, Waltham Forest has had a new administration, and I want to give credit where it is due.

The Green council has shown a genuine willingness to listen so far, and I was glad to see the new leader, councillor Paul Perkins, out visiting shops in Chingford recently to hear directly from traders about the pressures they are facing. That kind of engagement was exactly what was missing under the last administration, and it is a welcome change in tone.

The new administration now has a genuine opportunity, one that Labour squandered, to show residents that being listened to actually means something again. That starts with commissioning a full, honest review on the decision making, implementation and the impact of these parking changes, and reinstating the 15 minutes free parking.

Then, critically, it means acting on what residents say.

Traders in Station Road, Chingford, say their businesses have been badly hit by the end of free 15 minute parking



COMMUNITY

The fight for more bleed kits in the borough

A new locally formed campaign group called ‘Bleed Kits Now’ is raising awareness of how bleed kits can save lives – here they share how you can help them

We are ‘Bleed Kits Now’ and our aim is to raise awareness of the importance of bleed kits that can potentially save the life of anyone losing blood after a stabbing or even an accident, in those crucial minutes whilst waiting for an ambulance to arrive.

Our founder James Russell was previously involved with a nationwide group called ‘Binning Knives Saves Lives’ which made headline news with its campaign to take knives off the streets.

Bleed kits come with various contents, but to give you an idea, a basic bleed kit contains a vented chest seal, gauze, tourniquet, various dressings, shears and other contents to help stop bleeding.

Some venues around the borough already have them; these include the King Ford Wetherspoons Pub and the Nationwide Building Society at Chingford Mount.

Our aim is to raise funds for the kits and donate them to The Daniel Baird Foundation (a nationwide registration charity) who can then install them in local establishments like pubs, clubs, cafes, community centres, libraries

and more within Waltham Forest.

Once the bleed kits are donated they are registered with the emergency services so in the event one is needed the emergency services can direct the caller to the nearest kit.

We have had a lot of enthusiasm from local residents, and Valley ward councillor Afzal Akram who is advising us on ward funding.

And we also would like to thank local resident Gail Penfold for her guidance.

It is vital to get the bleed kits out there where they are needed and we are working hard to drum up as much support for our fundraiser as possible.

We are non-profit and 100% of money raised goes towards our cause.

Our fundraising event will take place on Saturday 5th December in the evening at the Royal British Legion in Hall Lane, Chingford, E4 8HW.

The event will be ticketed with live entertainment from local performers, raffle prizes donated by local businesses, and food donated by kind locals. Please join us!

If you have questions or want more information about bleed kits please email Andy and James at bleedkitsnow@gmail.com



ARTS & CULTURE



Sean Clare on stage Credit Elissa Sinclair

The Leyton Orient footballer launching a music career

Right-back Sean Clare is pursuing an Afrobeats career at the same time as playing for the O's

by Marco Marcelline

A Leyton Orient player has said his side hustle as an Afrobeats singer shows that footballers can be “more than the box they are put in”.

Sean Clare, who in July released his second single *Follow* on streaming platforms, is now gearing up for the release of his debut EP – recorded during post-match studio sessions.

The 29-year-old writes and records under the stage name of SRUMA (taken from the Akan word nsruma, literally translated as

“child of the heavens”) to reflect his Ghanaian heritage.

The Hackney-born defender is in his third season with Orient and has 360 professional appearances under his belt for clubs ranging from Sheffield Wednesday to Heart of Midlothian, Charlton Athletic, and the O's.

But now he is attempting to take on the world of Afrobeats – all while still playing for Leyton Orient.

Clare made his live performance debut on Sunday, 17th May, performing songs from his ever-expanding discography to a crowd of over 250 people at Colours Hoxton.

The headline gig, which featured support from rapper friends DN9NE and TASHLDN, raised £2,000 towards a charity set up in memory of his close friend and fellow footballer James Barker who sadly died recently of a brain tumour.

Speaking to the *Echo*, Clare says his Afrobeats career demonstrates that people can be “more than one thing, while staying focused and committed in them all”.

“Trying to debunk the narrative of putting people in one box is one of my main aims, by using music to help unite and bring communities from all backgrounds together,” he said.

“You don’t have to be just one thing”

The right-back first started writing songs in his early twenties while playing for the Scottish Premiership team Heart of Midlothian, which is based in Edinburgh.

Stating that writing music was a form of recreational release at the time, he explained: “Many of my teammates were older than me and, after training, they would head back to their families, or out to the golf course.

“I didn’t really fancy golf and, because music has been such an important part of my family upbringing, it seemed natural to explore this side of my creativity.”

Clare was initially reluctant to publicly showcase his Afrobeats music due to the “toxicity” of social media.

He said: “I played my songs only to my family and close friends because social media surrounding football can be extremely toxic, and some of the worst keyboard warriors – either through envy or ignorance – seem incapable of accepting that players are human beings and have lives beyond the stadium.”

But that fear was eventually proven to be unfounded as the vast majority of fans have been supportive of his side venture, he said, before adding: “Football is, and always has been my love, but I can’t be a footballer 24/7.”

You can listen to SRUMA (Sean Clare) on Spotify



On the pitch playing for Leyton Orient Credit David Bonkale

Farm, fresh and fierce Credit Daniel Cortés Serra



Portraits of pride

In August, the landmark exhibition *Queer Lives of Waltham Forest* depicted the past and present lives of LGBTQ+ people in the borough

by Alastair Ball

Local exhibition *Queer Lives of Waltham Forest* brought contemporary photography into conversation with the borough’s rich LGBTQ+ history.

Through images of friendship, family, identity and belonging, alongside artefacts, the exhibition created a vivid collective portrait of queer life, past and present.

I spoke with exhibition organisers Waltham Forest Pride about the show and their intentions behind it.

What inspired *Queer Lives of Waltham Forest*, and why did you want to create this exhibition?

Queer Lives of Waltham Forest came from a desire to showcase, celebrate and document the queer lives that make up our borough. We didn’t want to focus only on major events, but on the everyday queer experiences that go undocumented. The friendships, relationships, chosen families, places, memories and moments of joy that make up queer life are just as important to our history.

The aim was to create something that reflects the diversity of LGBTQ+ life in Waltham Forest and give local people the opportunity to see themselves represented.

The exhibition also sits at the heart of what Waltham Forest Pride Collective is trying to build: spaces where our community can come together, share our stories, celebrate one another and reflect on where we have come from and where we are going.

Why was it important to include historical objects alongside contemporary photography?

Our aim was to create an exhibition that connects queer life in Waltham Forest today with the history that came before it. It can be easy to assume that queer visibility is something relatively recent, but LGBTQ+ people have always been part of this borough. More than that, local queer people have played an important role in shaping LGBTQ+ life and liberation across Britain.

Alongside contemporary photography, the exhibition brought together archival material from the UK Gay Sports Festival (2000), the first major national gay multi-sport event of its kind to be held in the UK.

The exhibition also featured original “Pits and Perverts” T-shirts, generously loaned to Waltham Forest Pride Collective by local resident Jane Connor, an original member of Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners. These objects offered a tangible connection to a pivotal moment in British LGBTQ+ history.

What do you hope visitors, both LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+, take away from the exhibition?

We hope LGBTQ+ visitors leave with a sense of recognition, pride and belonging, that they see something of themselves, their experiences or their community reflected in the photographs exhibited.

For non-queer visitors, we hope the exhibition offers a more complete picture of queer life and challenges the narrow ways in which queer people are so often represented.

Queer life can be joyful, complex, ordinary, liberating, creative and revolutionary – and it is all of these things at once. We want visitors to see something to celebrate and be proud of, but also something to be inspired by.

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AROUND THE BOROUGH

CHINGFORD

HMO proposal submitted to council



The property in Lower Hall Lane
Credit Google Streetview

by **Sebastian Mann**, Local Democracy Reporter

Plans to convert a Chingford family home into a house in multiple occupation (HMO) have been lodged with Waltham Forest Council.

Proposals to repurpose the two-storey home, in Lower Hall Lane, into a HMO for six tenants were put forward by Shqiponja Plaku in August.

HMOs are properties where individual residents rent rooms with shared amenities such as kitchens and toilets.

The applicant has described the prospective home – the middle of three terraced houses – as “comfortable” owing to a loft conversion on the third floor.

One person will live in a single bedroom on the ground floor, where there will also be a communal toilet,

kitchen and living room.

The first floor consists of one single bedroom and a two-person bedroom, as well as a communal toilet, and the loft floor houses a two-person bedroom with an en-suite bathroom.

“Given the acute need for residential accommodations within the borough, the applicant believes this use of the property is appropriate and should be granted permission,” a planning statement reads.

HMOs can prove controversial with existing neighbours, who sometimes raise concerns about potential overcrowding on the street and antisocial behaviour.

In a bid to mitigate any problems, the applicant has submitted a HMO management plan that outlines how tenants would handle “property maintenance, noise levels, and neighbourly conduct”.

Residents will be asked to follow set rules, which include “treating fellow occupants, neighbouring residents and visitors with courtesy and respect” and “avoiding excessive noise, anti-social behaviour or any activity that may cause nuisance or disturbance to other occupants or neighbouring properties”.

LEYTON

Cricket pavilion refurb begins

by **Marco Marcelline**

Waltham Forest Council has begun works to refurbish West Pavilion at Leyton Sports Ground.

The West Pavilion is a small section of the historic Cricket Pavilion building that was formerly used as the umpire’s office.

In a newsletter update shared with residents in August, the council said the improvements are being funded by a “small allocation” of UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) money.

The rest of the project is still not fully funded, though the council has secured planning permission and listed building consent for the refurbishment works, which were developed and consulted on with the local community in 2023.

Once complete this space will temporarily be used as a rest area for sports ground users during half-time breaks, while also “having the potential to provide flexible

meeting space for council services”, the town hall said.

As previously reported in the *Echo*, the town hall has been looking to rejuvenate the pavilion since 2018, and initially planned to turn it into a food hall by 2021. Plans included a restaurant, café and training kitchen serving locally sourced food, as well as a food market selling

local produce.

However, its 2019 bid for £1.5million in funding was turned down by the Heritage Lottery Fund, and plans for the “Real Food Hub” had been scrapped by early 2021.

A second bid, for a share of the Greater London Authority’s £12.85m civic partnership programme, was also unsuccessful.



Leyton Sports Ground's cricket pavilion
Credit Wikicommons

WALTHAMSTOW

Residents evacuated after roof slides off home

The roof of a Walthamstow home partially collapsed on Monday, 10th August, causing twelve people to be evacuated from surrounding properties.

Firefighters were called to the incident in Church Hill at around 9pm, with one fire engine from Walthamstow Fire Station attending the scene.

They evacuated residents from surrounding homes, before the Metropolitan Police arrived and helped to cordon off Church Hill to traffic.

No injuries have been reported, the Met said, with the incident understood to be a structural issue with the building.

A cordon remained in place the following morning (11th August), with the W12 and 212 buses diverted.

No injuries were reported and residents were allowed to return



Credit Stella Creasy via X

to their homes later that day.

A Met spokesperson said: “On Monday, 10th August at 9.43pm police were called to reports that the roof of a residential building had collapsed at Church Hill, Walthamstow.

“Officers attended alongside the London Fire Brigade to assist with closing the road and traffic management.”

LEYTONSTONE

Whipps Cross handed zero food hygiene rating

by **Marco Marcelline**

Whipps Cross Hospital has been handed a food hygiene rating of zero after inspectors found serious failings across every category of assessment.

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) awarded the hospital’s food kitchen the lowest score, meaning “urgent improvement” is necessary in all areas of food handling, cleanliness and safety management.

The failed inspection, carried out on Thursday 28th May, means the hospital trust will be served with legal notices detailing specific issues and a deadline for fixing them or face a hefty fine.

First, the kitchen was found to have poor hygienic food handling, with concerns raised about how food was prepared, cooked, reheated, cooled and stored.

The second area flagged as needing urgent improvement

was the cleanliness and condition of the facilities and building. This includes the layout of the kitchen and service areas, the adequacy of ventilation, the availability of proper hand-washing facilities and the presence of effective pest control measures.

Crucially, the café also failed on management of food safety, with inspectors left not knowing that there are checks in place to ensure that food sold or served is safe to eat, nor did they have confidence that staff knew about food safety, nor that standards will be maintained in the future.

A spokesman for Barts Health NHS Trust said: “The restaurant and café are operated by our catering partner Elior.

“We expect the very highest standards from all organisations providing services on our hospital sites and are working closely with Elior to ensure improvements are made.”

LISTINGS

CLIMATE People's Emergency Briefing Friday, 4th September, 7pm Foster Hall, Wellesley Road, Walthamstow, E17 8QY There will be another screening of the 'People's Emergency Briefing' film in Walthamstow on Friday 4th September at 7pm in Fosters Hall on Wellesley Road. The film draws on last November's National Emergency Briefing, which brought together leading UK experts in climate science, food security, health, economics, national security and nature. It sets out, calmly and without hyperbole, how the crisis is already affecting everyday life in Britain and what the evidence actually says about the risks ahead and the responses available to us. The 50-minute film is followed by a 45-minute structured discussion about what all of this means for our own community. CERAMICS Autumn Ceramics Market Saturday, 19th September, 11am–5pm Turning Earth, Argall Avenue, Leyton E10 7QE This September we're joining the London Design Festival and Open House London with a day of handmade ceramics at our Leyton studio. Our Autumn Ceramics Market returns on Saturday 19th September, 11am–5pm, with 60 different makers offering their handmade pieces. You can expect to find some crafted and unique treasures, alongside live music, street food and drinks. There will be wheel-throwing demonstrations throughout the day, and you can try your hand at tile painting at the have-a-go station. The event is free entry. Your four-legged friends are welcome too, but please keep them on a lead. No booking needed, just drop in.	JUMBLE SALE North Chingford Jumble Sale Sunday 20th September, 10am–3pm The Queen Elizabeth, 95 Forest Side, Chingford E4 6BA Grab a bargain, find something unexpected, and support a great community event while you're at it! If you have treasures to sell (Or have just had a summer holiday clearout!) and would like to be added to the map for bargain hunters to find your house, registration is £5: If you live slightly further afield and are worried you might not receive a high footfall on the day, The Queen Elizabeth on Forest Side have kindly offered the use of their car park for stalls. Be quick though because space is limited! Visit tickettailor.com/events/lovechingford/2369888 WALK Epping Forest Adventure Walk Thursday, 3rd September, 10am–4pm Epping Forest Visitor Centre, Chingford, 6 Ranger's Road E4 7QH Ten miles of ancient woodland, open forest, hidden characters and Tudor history – with refreshments along the way! Join me for a full-day Adventure Walk exploring the wonderful variety of Epping Forest, from the woodland around Chingford to the open landscapes of High Beach and back again on a circular route. This is a proper Adventure Walk: 10 miles, varied terrain, beautiful scenery and lots to discover along the way. We'll start at the Epping Forest Visitor Centre at Chingford. There's the opportunity before we set off to use the toilets and grab a coffee or other refreshments if you wish. Tickets from £17, search 'Epping Forest Adventure Walk' on Eventbrite	GIG Grapes of Wrath Friday 25th September, 7pm Walthamstow Trades Hall, 61–63, Tower Hamlets Road E17 4RQ Grapes of Wrath Presents returns to Trades Hall after summer break with a night of hardcore and anti-fascist songs. We have Brick (transfeminist hardcore from Brighton), Hemiptera (Brighton melodic crust with strings), Letsavit (London oi with breakdowns) and Strazio (fast hardcore from London). Get your tickets now! Book tickets (from £5.50): wegottickets.com/t/22407 RECORD FAIR Affordable Record Fair Saturday 26th September, 12pm–5pm Blackhorse Wines Tap Room in Uplands Business Park, Blackhorse Lane E17 5QN The Affordable Record Fair returns on Saturday 26th September at the Blackhorse Wines Tap Room in Uplands Business Park. Running from 12 to 5pm with £2 admission to raise funds for the Love Wins #solar4Kenya charity, this event offers records starting at just £1 and nothing over £15, and a fun and unintimidating space for young people and newbies wanting to start a collection and something for the seasoned vinyl nerd. All pitches are free on a first come first served basis and great wine on tap (and some beers), food, DJs, the Unlucky Dip, books and vintage gear. The DJ lineup features Prince Fatty, Linda Boyle & Pierce Smith, Claire (nottrampnolady), Rupert, Dj Debbie, Oli Bruneti, and Lady Lee. Running from midday, it's a properly good way to spend a Saturday – and every record you buy helps bring solar power to Kenya. £2 admission	WORKSHOP Creative Writing Workshop Saturday 26th September, 2pm to 3.30pm Good Shepherd Studios, 15A Davies Lane, Leytonstone E11 3DR A chance to nurture your creativity in a calm, supportive environment, through readings and writing exercises. In this creative writing workshop with poet and author Anna Brook, we'll explore how art can inspire and enrich our writing. We'll combine readings and images with short, guided exercises, carving out time to nurture creativity. Suitable for adults at all levels, whether you're new to creative writing, or you're looking to reinvigorate your practice. All you'll need is a pen/pencil and notepad (or the notes app on your phone!) Tickets start from £5, search 'Creative Writing Workshop with Anna Brock' on Eventbrite PHOTOGRAPHY Neighbourhood Photography Walks Saturday 12th September, 10am–11.30am Leytonstone Library foyer, 6 Church Lane, Leytonstone E11 1HG See your neighbourhood through a different lens. Join guided walks to explore your neighbourhood, meet local people and capture the area. Join one of Waltham Forest Giving's free photography walks this September, led by Mindful Mavericks, a community organisation that helps reduce social isolation, improve digital skills, and strengthen local connections. These relaxed guided walks are an opportunity to explore your neighbourhood, meet local people and capture the places, communities and relationships that make Waltham Forest special. Reserve a free spot on Eventbrite, search: 'Waltham Forest Neighbourhood Photography Walks'	HISTORY Guided tour of the Engine House and Coppermill Tower Sunday 20th September, 10.30am–12pm or 2pm–3.30pm Engine House Visitor Centre, Walthamstow Wetlands, 2 Forest Road N17 9NH When and why was the Engine House built? Who was the architect who designed this magnificent Victorian building? What was the purpose of each room in the Engine House? How has the Coppermill Tower's use changed over the years since it was first referenced in 1066? As part of Open City's Open House Festival 2025, come and find the answers to these questions and much more about our visitor centre and Grade II listed Coppermill Tower building, on a guided walk led by one of our knowledgeable and friendly guides. This tour will begin in the Engine House, followed by a walk through the south side of the reserve to Coppermill Tower, and back to the visitor centre. Book your spot here: programme.openhouse.org.uk/listings/3711
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Submit your listings

For next month's listings, email the details of your event to wfecho@socialspider.com by Monday 14th September.

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SPORT

Walthamstow FC huddle before a match in August
Credit: Bill Badger/Walthamstow FC



A promising start to the new season

The 2025/26 season proved a rough ride for Walthamstow FC amid constant manager changes but things are looking up for the club now, writes David O'Driscoll

A new season of football is upon us. For Walthamstow, this means another challenging crack at getting out of the Isthmian League Division One North. In the build-up to the new campaign, there were some strange managerial decisions.

After parting ways with last season's management, the club flirted with ex-Watford striker Gifton Noel-Williams, only to move on from him in the blink of an eye.

To be fair, though, Walthamstow FC have ultimately opted for a safe pair of hands in Max Mitchell.

Mitchell was in charge of the club before and during the Covid-affected seasons, when he oversaw a 64% win percentage – the highest

in the club's modern history.

Since then, Mitchell has been at several non-league clubs, doing the business at most of them. The *Echo* will interview him in our next issue.

So far, so good. An away draw on the opening day was followed by a 2-1 home victory over a decent Grays Athletic team.

This was achieved with what is more or less a brand-new team, though last year's player of the season, Jordan Peart, is thankfully still here.

It has to be said that Walthamstow's defence is looking strong this season.

The club has brought back Ali Njie, a top centre-back for this level, to partner with Jack Empson. Empson was surprisingly let go by FC Marlow and I regard him as one of the most sought-after and talented players in

non-league football.

In the win over Grays, the best player on the pitch was Walthamstow's new left-back and captain, Luke Warner-Eley. All of this bodes well for the season ahead.

While the Walthamstow FC managerial merry-go-round was less than impressive, matters off the pitch have been excellent.

In an era of eye-popping football ticket prices elsewhere, the club is running generous season ticket offers, particularly for NHS key workers. There is also a new venture in the podcasting space, with the official Walthamstow FC podcast featuring post-match interviews with the management.

The club is also keen to make inroads into the women's game and establish more youth teams.

The *Echo* will be keeping a close eye on the club's ambitious plans to build a new home at Low Hall in Walthamstow, a project that has strong backing from local MP Stella Creasy.

Finally, we must mention Callum Ibe. Walthamstow's longest-serving player suffered a severe knee injury in pre-season and sadly requires serious surgery.

Because the procedure falls beyond the immediate scope of the NHS, a crowdfunding campaign was organised by Max Mitchell and the Walthamstow supporters' community to fund it.

It is a sobering reminder that these players are semi-professional and do not have the safety nets of major sporting organisations.

We hope to see you back on the pitch soon, Callum.

Orient remove 'safe standing' rows pending safety checks

by Marco Marcelline

Leyton Orient temporarily removed the newly installed 'Safe Standing' section at the BetWright Stadium in August after further safety checks were deemed necessary ahead of the new season.

Safe standing is a stadium design that allows spectators to watch sports while standing up safely. It uses special rail seats or independent barriers at each row which stop people from falling or swaying forward.

The rail seating was fitted in the E10 stand during the close season as part of the club's ongoing efforts to modernise the ground and improve the matchday experience.

It has already undergone two examinations since installation, but specialists have advised that additional assessments are required before

supporters can use the area.

As a result, the structure has been taken out to ensure the "highest safety standards are met for the opening fixtures", a press release issued by the club stated.

Orient chief executive Mark Devlin said the decision, though "frustrating", was "unavoidable".

He said: "We're disappointed that our Safe Standing won't be in place for the beginning of the season but the safety of every supporter that enters our stadium is of paramount importance," he said.

Devlin added: "We are working with leaders on Safe Standing and completely trust their judgement around the safety of our installation. It has been removed for now, which will ensure fan safety, and will allow us to assess how we approach Safe Standing moving forwards."

Leyton Orient's stadium



Walthamstow FC launches girls section

Walthamstow FC has launched a girls' section for the 2026/27 season.

Three teams will become part of the club, playing at U18, U16 and U14 in the Essex Girls League.

Walthamstow FC said the move marked "another huge step in the development of the club, as we continue to grow and represent the community".

The club's vice chairman Andrzej Perkins said: "I'm

delighted to welcome the players, parents and management to the Walthamstow FC family.

"These will not just be teams playing under the Walthamstow name, as is the case with many youth teams in our area. They will be a true part of the club, and will contribute to any success we have in the future.

"They will form a pathway to the women's first team, and we're excited to continue to expand our youth set-up."

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