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TUBE TERROR AT PARSONS GREEN



HOW BAD MIGHT IT HAVE BEEN?

- 22 INJURED AS BOMB FAILS TO DETONATE
- TUBE CROWDED WITH COMMUTERS & KIDS
- MASSIVE MANHUNT NOW UNDER WAY

Trump tweet sparks row amid manhunt

DONALD Trump has condemned the 'loser terrorist' behind this morning's attack at Parsons Green - sparking a diplomatic row.

The US President called for the UK to be proactive after 'another attack' by 'sick and demented people who were in the sights of Scotland Yard'.

However, Prime Minister Theresa May hit back when addressing reporters at Downing Street.

She said: "I never think it's helpful for anybody to speculate on what is an ongoing investigation."

A Met Police official also condemned the President's tweet - denying the suspect was 'in their sights'.

"The comments are unhelpful and pure speculation," they said. "If anyone has got any evidence or information, please contact the anti-terrorism hotline."

In May, the UK police temporarily stopped sharing intelligence about the terror investigation with America over a series of leaks about the Manchester bombing.

The President later apologised and vowed to crackdown on his security services.

It is thought police have now identified the tube train bomber using CCTV but Scotland Yard hasn't named the suspect or released an image, amid fears they could be armed and may have planted other explosive devices.

London vulnerable to more attacks

A TERRORISM expert predicts more attacks following the explosion this morning.

Professor Afzal Ashraf, International Relations expert at Nottingham University's centre of conflict security and terrorism, said this kind of attack will become more prevalent as ISIS is squeezed in the Middle East, with London being particularly vulnerable.

He said: "London is being attacked because it is one of the world's premier cities and it is difficult for many of these people to carry out attacks in the US."

Dr Ashraf pointed to greater restrictions on travel in the US as a reason for the drop in attacks there.

According to Home Office statistics, terrorist related arrests are up 68% on last year.

However, Dr Ashraf predicted an eventual eradication of terrorist threats from Islamic extremists if pressure in the Middle East is sustained.

He said: "You've seen that Mosul, Raqqa and Talafar have been virtually cleared of Daesh."

"Al-Qaeda caused a mass burst of radicalisation after 9/11, but ten years after, as Al-Qaeda could not recreate the successes it had promised, it has failed in scaring the US and the West out of the Middle East."



CONTACT DETAILS

SWLondoner.co.uk, 247 The Broadway
London, SW19 1SD

Editorial offices: 0208 545 1662

e-mail: newsdesk@swlondoner.co.uk

EDITORIAL

Graham Moody, editor

gmoody@swlondoner.co.uk

Borough news editors:

Alex Marrow, Shingi Mararike, Dora Allday,
Jessica Cripps, Eoin Wilson, Rachel Dobbs
and Thea Jacobs



ARMED RESPONSE: Members of the Metropolitan Police Counter Terrorism specialist firearms unit at the scene

Police: Device failed saving many lives

By Tim Baker

POLICE believe countless lives were saved when a crude homemade bucket bomb failed to detonate on a packed Tube train.

A 'fireball' and 'wall of flame' ripped through the London Underground service, with commuters on the District Line at Parsons Green fleeing in terror after a blast shortly after 8am this morning.

There were reports of widespread panic following the explosion, with one eyewitness describing the scene as 'total chaotic panic'.

Armed police were quickly in attendance with police refusing to confirm whether they already had a suspect in the manhunt for the bomber.

Eyewitnesses reported that emergency services treated two

different types of injury at the scene, with some suffering from flash burns and others trampled in the chaos that followed. In total 22 people were injured, though none seriously.

However, it could have been so much worse had the device successfully exploded, especially as the carriage was full of commuters and children on their way to school.

Mark Rowley, assistant commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, confirmed that hundreds of detectives were making 'urgent inquiries' in relation to the incident. He also admitted he was working with colleagues in the security services.

Underground trains have CCTV cameras inside each carriage, but Mr Rowley gave no indication that anyone was under arrest, nor details of anyone being sought.

"In terms of the police re-

sponse, I would emphasise that Londoners in particular can expect to see an enhanced police presence, particularly on the transport system, across the day," he said.

The wounded were taken to three hospitals in London: Imperial, St Thomas' and Chelsea and Westminster, with a walk-in centre in Parsons Green also used to treat minor injuries.

Explosives experts say the Parsons Green bomb could have killed dozens - if it had properly detonated.

Photographs on social media show a large white bucket inside an insulated shopping bag from supermarket Lidl. A string of Christmas lights, thought to be a detonator, hang over the top.

Eyewitnesses reported a 'strong, acrid chemical smell' after the explosion, which occurred on the eastbound Dis-

trict Line service. It is thought the device is similar to those used in the failed 21/7 London bombings in 2005 or attack on the 2013 Boston Marathon, in which three people died and several hundred were injured, with 16 losing limbs.

Some experts also claimed the relatively small Parsons Green station was probably not the target, with more recognisable stops further up the line - such as Notting Hill or Paddington.

The fact the bucket did not shatter after the explosion would appear to point to a serious fault in the making of the device.

"I think it was more a premature detonation, I doubt this was the intended target," said terror expert Will Geddes.

"This could have been much, much worse and it could have killed a significant number of people."

Mayor questions police cuts just after attack

By Rhiannon Long and George Roberts

LONDON Mayor Sadiq Khan praised emergency services this morning while also criticising government police cuts in the wake of the Parsons Green terror attack.

The Metropolitan Police, London Fire Brigade and the London Ambulance Service were on the scene within five minutes and 22 people were taken to hospital for treatment.

"I would like to pay tribute to the commuters on the tube, to TfL staff and the others who acted quickly this morning," said Mr Khan.

"Thankfully there aren't any life-threatening injuries.

"I'll pay tribute to the police who as we speak are following up various lines of enquiry to ensure the people responsible are caught.

"We need to make sure the public are the eyes and ears of the police. The focus has to be catching and apprehending

those responsible.

"The phrase used by counter terrorism experts a few weeks ago was this is not a spike, this is a shift.

"The terrorists have stepped up attempts to kill us, injure us, and affect our way of life."

The incident has resulted in an enhanced police presence on London transport networks.

But the police budget has been cut in recent years and a number of stations have been earmarked for closure.

Since 2010 varying forces

staff posts have decreased by 15,000 (19.5%) and Mr Khan used the attack to urge the government to reduce its policy of cuts to the police force.

"London needs more resources to keep our city safe," he said.

"Since 2010 we've lost hundreds of millions of pounds of the police budget, reduced police stations.

"For a global city like London, we will not be able to keep our citizens safe if the government continues to make the cuts they have been making."

'It was harrowing. Just insane panic'

By SW Londoner staff

EYEWITNESSES have told how they ran for their lives after the terror attack on a packed London Underground train in Parsons Green this morning.

It appears the crude device, which exploded at 8.20am and was inside a white plastic basket and Lidl carrier bag, did not properly detonate – potentially saving scores of lives.

Emergency services reported treating casualties with a range of injuries from flash burns caused in the initial explosion and breaks and sprains in the stampede that followed, with 22 people taken to hospital.

Colleagues Sally Faulding and Su-Chen Warner, who both work at Chelsea Independent College, were on the train and described the panic that set in after the explosion.

Sally said: "I was falling over people myself.

"I was just saying to myself keep upright because either you're going to be crumpled to death or you've got a bad man behind you, because I still didn't know what was going on.

"We couldn't move out of the station and my first instinct was to get out of there, so we were kind of barricaded in and then my colleague from my school, she was further down the carriage and she saw the surge of fire come towards her.

"Then we just had to wait on the platform but people were down, people were injured, people were burnt, peoples' hair was singed, so it clearly had been an explosion.

"We didn't know anything at that stage and then they evacuated us out.

"With everything that's



PEOPLE WERE CRYING AND SCREAMING: Police help an injured woman from the scene and below, emergency services

gone on recently in London I actually thought it was a terrorist attack and possibly someone with a gun.

"That was my fear and I kept on running."

Su-Chen, 50, said: "I suddenly heard a big bang on my left hand side, so I turned my head and I saw a big fireball.

"I realised why people were screaming and crying so I got up immediately and the door was open."

Ryan Barnett, 25, was travelling to work on the District Line to Chiswick when the explosion erupted two carriages away from him.

He said: "I didn't even hear it I just suddenly saw people

running towards me from the back of the train. I legged it and ran straight off the train towards the stairs."

"People were shouting 'Run for your lives' and screaming.

"I saw people fainting from the shock, crying their eyes out and rushing towards the platform exit.

"People were stampeding towards the stairs, which are quite narrow. It was incredibly dangerous.

"The pressure of the squeeze was causing people to faint, along with the shock.

"I saw a woman with severe burns all down her side, crying her eyes out. It was harrowing. Just insane panic."



Primary school praised for bomb response

By Dora Allday

HOLY CROSS Primary School in Parsons Green has been praised by pupils and parents for their handling of this morning's terror attack.

The school is a five-minute walk from the Parsons Green tube station, where a device exploded at 8.20am, injuring at least 22 people.

Danielle Nolan lives ten minutes from the station and has three children at the school, aged three, eight and ten, with her eldest walking to school this morning.

Her daughter said: "My teachers reassured us we were safe and they kept us calm.

"I was really worried — a close friend of mine gets the train from Putney every day.

"Going back to school on Monday will torture us. It will be frantic, but not as bad as today.

"My teachers told us this shouldn't happen again."

Her mother, Miss Nolan, said: "When the attack happened my partner and I were driving my other kids in not knowing anything.

"I got a call from my daughter who was with another mum to tell us they were safe.

"Luckily, their teachers took them up to Fulham Broadway where they handed them over, but it took an hour and a half to get through the cordon.

"They will never forget this."

Eira Bentley, 56, is chairman of the Royal British Legion Club Fulham, which overlooks Parsons Green.

She has two grandchildren aged six and nine at Holy Cross.

She said: "The school were not letting the kids out, but their mother knew they were safe and the police were there at the school.

"My 9-year-old granddaughter knows everything and fully understands what's happened. She was a real mess.

"I'm worried about them getting out safely. What if something else happens?"

"It's just wicked, these people are wicked. Why Parsons Green? It's a tiny little tube station.

"The school are great. After the London Bridge attack they provided counselling, so hopefully they're looking after them now.

"I just am in complete shock. I was in Starbucks this morning and saw the faces of people off the train. It broke my heart.

"What can you do? 'I've been here for 20 years. You can't just move when something like this happen."

Politicians vow terrorism won't defeat London

By Laura Sharman

POLITICIANS have united in their condemnation of today's terrorist attack in Parsons Green.

Twenty-two people were injured when an improvised bomb exploded in a tube carriage at 8.20am, sparking a stampede as commuters rushed to the exit.

Prime Minister Theresa May held a COBRA meeting at Downing Street at 1pm and afterwards said the threat level would not be raised as police did not believe another

attack was imminent.

London Mayor Sadiq Khan attended the meeting and said: "Our city utterly condemns the hideous individuals who attempt to use terror to harm us and destroy our way of life.

"As London has proven again and again, we will never be intimidated or defeated by terrorism."

Chelsea & Fulham MP Greg Hands added: "I've known people who were on the train who I'm trying to get first-hand information from.

"Parsons Green at 8.20am or thereabouts would have

been absolutely packed.

"It would have been heaving with people on the platform as well.

"I am extremely concerned and learning that it is a terrorist, I'm just extremely sad that this has happened in Fulham today."

Wimbledon MP Stephen Hammond said: "Potentially this could have been hugely more serious and we are very pleased that it failed but disgusted that somebody has made an attack on the London Underground."

Justine Greening, MP for Putney, Roehampton and

Southfields and secretary of state for education, said:

"My thoughts are with those injured in the Parsons Green explosion, and with the emergency services responding to this cowardly attack."

Twickenham MP and Liberal Democrat leader Sir Vince Cable added: "Thoughts go out to those affected by the incident in Parsons Green."

Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn said: "Thoughts with those injured in Parsons Green terrorist incident, and thanks to police, ambulance staff and firefighters who are responding.



RESOLVE: Theresa May

Cat killer strikes in Kingston

By Alex Marrow

THE CAT killer is believed to have struck twice in Kingston this month.

The first cat was found in south Chessington on September 5, while the second was discovered in a garden in New Malden a day later.

The cat in Chessington had been decapitated and was found not far from its home.

The injuries sustained by both cats bear the hallmarks of the UK animal killer, according to South Norwood Animal Rescue and Liberty (SNARL).

Formerly known as the Croydon cat killer, the UK animal killer has been linked to five deaths since last Monday.

SNARL's co-founder Tony Jenkins is pushing for this name change to raise awareness of the threat posed to pet owners across the country.

"Saying 'the Croydon cat killer' gives the impression it is only happening in Croydon," said Mr Jenkins.

"People need to know that these attacks are happening all over the UK."

SNARL is waiting on post-mortem analysis of other cat deaths in Manchester and Burnley, as well as three in one day in North London, Milton Keynes and Northampton last Wednesday.

But Mr Jenkins and other members of the investigation team believe the same person is responsible for all attacks.

He said: "The forensic pathologist thinks it is the same killer. We have to consider the possibility of a spree."

As the total number of victims approaches 300, police have released a description of the killer, that says he is a white man in his 40s, with brown hair, between 5'8" and 5'11", average build and possibly with some acne scarring to his face.

Residents are urged to report any suspicious behaviour to the police, but are warned not to approach people they see attempting to enter gardens or trying to coax cats with toys or food.

Mr Jenkins advised cat owners to be vigilant after dark, but admitted that attacks can happen during the day as well.

"Keep your cats inside, particularly at night," said Mr Jenkins.

"If you can afford it, cat proof your garden to keep your cat from getting out."

However, as last week's New Malden case shows, cat proofing your garden will not necessarily deter the killer.

A £10,000 reward has been offered for information leading to the conviction of the UK animal killer.

Contact the Met Police on 0208 649 0216 and ask for the Operation Takahe team with information.



Wimbledon's most dangerous junction

LOOK BOTH WAYS: The crossroads by South Wimbledon tube station has seen 15 accidents in the past four years

By Thea Jacobs

FEARS over a dangerous junction which has the highest number of crashes in Wimbledon have been expressed by residents.

The crossroad outside South Wimbledon Tube is the most dangerous junction in Wimbledon thanks to 15 accidents in the past four years.

The junction of Morden Road with Kingston Road is being actively avoided by mother of two Susie Petrusa.

The 41-year-old said: "We try to take a certain bus to get across the junction because we've noticed that it's not the safest junction."

The most recent accident

at the crossroad saw a man walk away from rolling his car on September 11.

Another pedestrian, Simon Shepherd, 46, of Mitcham said: "It's always dangerous and difficult to cross."

"Even when the lights change to green you're not sure when to cross."

Most of the accidents on the junction have been small cars rolling or crashing into bollards as they attempt one of the corners.

Statics on crashmap.com show all 15 incidents have resulted in injuries, but none were fatal.

A spokesperson for the AA said: "It's not the size of the cars that's an issue but the speed the car is travelling.

"This junction has a number of potential hazards with traffic lights, a box junction, bus lane, cyclists and pedestrian crossings so observation is going to be very important and speed will need to reflect this."

"There is always the possibility of somebody trying to beat the lights, realising at the last moment that they need to turn, stopping as a pedestrian steps out, swapping lanes etc. so drivers should always expect the unexpected."

The second most dangerous spot for drivers in the area is the Junction of Wimbledon Road, Alexandra Road with St George's Road by Wimbledon Station which

has seen 10 crashes in the past four years according to crashmap.com.

The AA added: "If you are taking a corner too quickly in any car, you are more likely to lose control which could result in the car rolling — particularly if, say, conditions are wet or icy or the tyres are worn and grip is reduced."

"With so much potentially going on particularly at busy times, it's crucial to drive appropriately and keep abreast of what is going on around you."

The AA advised drivers to reduce their speed at the junction due to the number of hazards there and to make sure that they leave space

between them and the car in front.

On behalf of Merton Council, councillor Andrew Judge said: "We have had 17 personal injury reports over the past three years and on all 17 reports it appears to have been driver error."

"It is one of the most complex junctions in the borough but as far as I am aware there is nothing intrinsically wrong with the junction."

"We have been in talks with TfL for some time to modernise the junction."

"We're looking at implementing a range of options to help pedestrians and cyclist negotiate the junction."

"We'd also like to improve traffic flow there."

Hoey sticks to her guns on EU Withdrawal Bill

By Jessica Cripps

REBEL Labour MP Kate Hoey defended her decision to oppose the three-line party whip on Tuesday's EU Withdrawal Bill vote.

Ms Hoey was one of seven Labour MPs to vote in favour of the Second Reading of the controversial legislation, despite the risk of serious consequences from her party.

But the Vauxhall MP defended her vote as support for the principle, rather than the details, and called it a necessary step.

She said: "This Bill is the instrument through which we will bring our existing EU-created law into British law so that there will not be gaps when we leave the EU."

"There may be better ways to perform this huge task, but none have been put forward



that could accomplish this in the short time that we have.

"The Government have promised that they will not use these temporary powers — which use the same method by which we took on EU regulations — to make substantive changes to our laws or downgrade any of our rights."

"I will of course be scrutinising their actions to ensure that they do not break their word."

Professor Peter Catterall,

who lectures in History and Policy at the University of Westminster, claimed she had missed the point on this legislation, and labelled it as unnecessary.

He said: "It's not about implementing the will of the people. Most EU law has already been passed by parliament anyway."

"The EU Withdrawal Bill is giving ministers extraordinary powers to change primary legislation without going back to parliament."

"It is a diminution of democracy by a government who did not even win an election — they are not a majority government."

Fellow Lambeth MPs Chuka Umunna (left) and Helen Hayes voted in favour of Jeremy Corbyn's three-line whip to oppose the EU Withdrawal bill, citing concerns about the future of Brexit.



NOT TOWING THE LINE: Vauxhall MP Kate Hoey

Fruit cakes: Bake over for politicians

Pick 'n' mix these politicos with their cakes



By Jess Lester

DONALD TRUMP is the latest politician to find himself made out of cake.

Having displayed Nigel Farage last year, Philippa Egerton has now taken on the leader of the free world and will be showing him off at her studio during Wandsworth Artists' Open House next month.

The 72-year-old has been an artist for more than 30 years, and is one of more than 145 artists, from amateurs to semi-professional veterans, taking part in the Open House across 86 galleries.

Mrs Egerton, who works with all materials from acryl-

ic to Victoria sponge, said: "I've always liked experimenting. I'm most notorious for my cakes which I paint with food colouring like on a canvas."

The most recent process took her many days, having to use layers of marzipan and royal icing to create features before adding the colour.

"I've made plenty of heads, but Trump definitely took me some time," she said.

"Just baking the cake takes up one day. I never know if it will work until it's finished — but he came out very well."

The ex-historian has made the heads of London Mayor Sadiq Khan, MP Michael Gove and The Queen for other events and prides herself on her political inspiration.

She said: "Mocking politi-

cians and royalty goes back a long way, so I'm just having great fun with it.

"We get great reactions when the cake is cute — but some people are horrified.

"I made a cake of Tony Blair for the then Battersea Labour party leader Peter Watts, and he was horrified at the idea of eating his hero.

"It was people's reactions that compelled me to keep making these cakes."

Mrs Egerton will cut the cake on October 15, the final day of the Open House, and hopes it will attract some of the 10,000 visitors expected to attend the event.

"I think it will draw in more people to see the art that I and others are displaying," she said. "They might come to

see the cake but find some art they like whilst they're here.

"I'm thinking I'll make either Theresa May or Jeremy Corbyn next year — it depends what happens politically between now and then."

Since studying as a mature student in her thirties, Mrs Egerton has been displayed in galleries across London including The Brick Lane Gallery earlier this year.

She was one of the first people to be trained in the use of digital printmaking in Wimbledon, and has produced a wide variety of mixed-media works for the exhibition.

"I always feel inspired by the same things — and a lot of my print works are based on landscapes, but I feel inspired by communication between

people and I often explore that.

"Using different materials like cake means you don't have any framework for the art, and I find it's great fun.

"I use a computer to mix my print work with digital and create new stories. I've even started experimenting with animation."

Sarah O'Donnell, 40, head of arts at Wandsworth Council, said: "The event is a great opportunity for artists to get some publicity, and though I wouldn't say they gain fame, it has resulted in new networks of artists forming, where they can experiment and learn about other forms of art."

Open House is free to the public and takes place on 7-8, and 14-15 October.

Railway staff suffer abuse from commuters

By Alex Marrow and Lucy Lyth

A DRUNK surgeon hurled abuse at South Western Railway staff at Wimbledon station, it was claimed this week.

The doctor demeaned employees for working in customer service when he was refused access to the station toilets after they were locked.

This was one of many incidents of abuse reported since South Western Railway took over the South Western franchise on August 20.

Customer service staff claim they suffer verbal and physical abuse for issues outside their control, such as train delays.

The surgeon swore at staff and attempted to intellectually undermine them by claiming his job was superior.

The man continued to harass staff, after they had walked away, trying to provoke them.

In another incident, during last New Year's Eve celebrations, drunk and aggressive partygoers threw glass bottles at customer service staff.

"People leave their brains outside when they're in a rush and their train is cancelled," said one employee.

South Western Railway employees are taught to walk away when passengers become violent or swear at staff.

However, staff do sometimes have to intervene physically, as was the case at Walton-on-Thames station when a man in his mid-thirties dropped his phone on the tracks.

Returning from a night out in Guildford, the drunk had to be pulled away from the platform edge as he attempted to retrieve his phone.

A South Western Railway spokesman said: "Every incident that is reported is fully investigated and escalated to British Transport Police if appropriate."

Customer abuse is now so common some members of staff have become desensitised and many incidents go unreported.

A spokesperson added: "This does not excuse a lack

Anger over Grenfell councillor's house building plans

By Claire Anderson

A COUNCILLOR who managed the Grenfell Tower refurbishment has been given the go-ahead to build up to 450 'affordable' homes in Edinburgh.

Cllr Rock Feilding-Mellen, a Socially Conscious Capital (SCC) director, will build homes and invest money

into schools, community facilities and infrastructure in Longniddry in East Lothian.

The public inquiry into the Grenfell Tower blaze, which destroyed 151 homes and killed at least 80 people in June, started yesterday and Justice 4 Grenfell and Grenfell Action Group criticised Cllr Feilding-Mellen's plans.

Some residents of Longniddry also took to Facebook to comment on the plans after finding his connection to Grenfell.

Nicola Macdonald Ingleby wrote: "Who would have thought the chair of the housing committee that oversaw the Grenfell refurbishment would be given planning permission to build hundreds of houses."

But others responded in defence of the councillor and Andrew White wrote: "The reality is it would have gone ahead at some point in some shape. I wonder if this was controversial or just progress."

The properties are to be built on Wemyss estates owned by Cllr Feilding-Mellen's mother, Lady Amanda Feilding, countess of Wemyss and March.

Pressure group Listen to

Longniddry said on Facebook: "We feel it is important that people realise who is behind the development.

"If our community is to be changed forever, shouldn't we at least know who we are dealing with?"

Councillors voted six to four allowing SCC to build on Longniddry farmland.

The planning committee was minded to grant permis-

sion of Section 75 in Scotland or Section 106 in England and Wales where private agreements are made between local authorities or landowners and developer to allow planning permission.

Cllr Feilding-Mellen and SCC have repeatedly been approached for a comment.

According to SCC's website, construction is expected to start Autumn 2017.

Airbnb hosts face scrutiny

By Katherine Johnston

AIRBNB hosts could be forced to register their properties in a crackdown on tax cheats.

An explosion in Airbnb lettings is driving up rents in Kensington and Chelsea, London's most expensive borough.

In 2015, a ban on short-term lets in the capital was overturned — allowing homeowners to rent out their property for 90 nights a year.

But it is argued landlords are cashing in on Airbnb's popularity and taking properties off the residential market, with many failing to declare taxable earnings.

Thomas Blomberg, from The Kensington Society, said: "Nobody knows how big this new black economy is, but it's probably vast, as there is no oversight or control."

Eight thousand homes in the borough were listed on Airbnb and other providers in March.

To tackle the issue, the council launched an investigation and their first report, shared at a public meeting on Wednesday, said: "It is very difficult to determine when the 90-day limit has been breached."

"The working group felt the introduction of a registration system should be explored."

Under the possible scheme, hosts could have to pay for a licence. The council will publish its final recommendations in October.

Survivors silenced

By Shingi Mararike

GRENFELL survivors will not be offered formal roles in the public inquiry into the disaster, it was announced yesterday.

In the official opening of the inquiry, chairman Sir Martin Moore Bick said that the former residents will be asked to give evidence once only.

In his opening comments, Sir Martin said: "I know that many of the survivors would like to appoint someone from among their own number or perhaps another local resident as one of my assessors."

"Many of them can of course provide valuable evidence and I shall ensure them all their evidence is heard and carefully considered but to appoint as an assessor someone who had had direct involvement in the fire would risk undermining my impartiality in the eyes of others who are also deeply involved in the inquiry."

Sid-Ali Atmani, who lived in the tower on the ninth floor, said: "I wanted more compassion to come out. He seems to be choosing his own people."

Beyond bear-lief: Teddies take the town hall



BEAR NECESSITIES: Bear artist Doreen Bell (above) and store owner Victoria Shortle (right) with their Teddies looking for a new home

By Shingi Mararike

THEY hadn't quite made it down to the woods, but hundreds of bear enthusiasts were at Kensington Town Hall for Britain's biggest Teddy Bear Festival organised by Hugglets.

There were more than 170 stands at the event with more than 10,000 of the soft, fluffy creatures on sale.

These ranged from classic bears to themed offerings produced by bear makers such as 'Whittle Le-Woods Bears' and

'Bearity Bears.'

Robert Gillard, a retired 54-year-old has attended the festival since 2008.

Since then, he's become an avid collector with more than 200 teddies.

Mr Gillard said: "It was my first Hugglets, and I saw Kristoff, my first bear and he talked to me, so I bought him. I remember, he cost me £400."

"Some people buy them and then they sell them in the end. I never sell mine because I love them. I can never part with a bear, even if I'm broke."

Among the most expensive teddies at the festival was a 25

inch high bear made by Bell Bears priced at £375.

Teddies 2017 was the final edition of the festival organised by founders Glen and Irene Jackman, a married couple of former toy designers from Brighton who started the event in the same venue in 1989.

Mr Jackman said: "29 years ago when we first started I remember, saying that's never going to work, who's going to be interested in that?"

"So we were amazed to see 1,500 people or so turn up to the first event and then we never looked back really."



Residents slam 'insensitive' police station cuts

By Sarah Turnridge

A PETITION opposing the closure of the Notting Hill police station front desk has reached more than 1,800 signatures.

The petition was started by a residents' group to highlight the necessity of front desk policing services in the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower disaster.

Kensington Society chairman Amanda Frame, who initiated the petition, said: "It was started very quickly, but now it has become less about the bricks and mortar and more about the nuances of the station and what the closure means for the whole police service."

Notting Hill station also contains the borough's domestic violence unit.

A Metropolitan Police Service spokeswoman said: "The proposed closure of Notting Hill Police station is still in the consultation stage led by

MOPAC.

"No decision has been reached, and as such there are no current plans to change the way in which the Domestic Abuse Teams work or where they will be based within the borough."

The London Mayor's Police and Crime Plan suggests the development of police contact counters, in public places such as supermarkets and cafes, in place of front desks. However, these proposals have raised questions about adequate access to police services after the closure by both Ms Frame and councillor Mary Weale.

Cllr Weale said: "The point of domestic violence is that it's not suitable for reporting in a more informal setting which is, though we don't know because the plans don't tell us, where they are planning on having these community access points."

"Therefore individuals that wanted to report personally

sensitive crimes, including domestic violence, are very much restricted by the removal of this front desk."

She also commented on the symbolic nature of the closure in the aftermath of the Grenfell disaster.

She said: "It is particularly insensitive where the police station is a visible sign of the police commitment to the community, the police's presence in the community, and I think it will be a bad move on their part."

Her comments were echoed by Alex Stewart, a former Metropolitan police officer who worked across frontline services in Camden and Hackney between 2010-2014.

He said: "Community policing, including stations to which the public have access, is the only way police can maintain public confidence, especially in areas which have previously had a troubled relationship with the police."



THREATENED: Notting Hill station's front desk faces closure

Flippin' heck! Call to end rubbish hell

By Tim Baker

OVERFLOWING piles of illegally dumped rubbish have driven Mitcham residents to outrage.

Mattresses, bin bags and building refuse have been seen blocking the pavement on Willow Lane, Mitcham.

Jeff South, 43, a tube driver from Mitcham, is calling for more to be done about Merton's fly tipping problem after four years living in the area.

Mr South said: "It should be a sidewalk not a dumping ground."

Merton Council have come under increased pressure to resolve this issue and said that a wheelie bin service will be introduced in October 2018.

In a council meeting on September 13 they acknowledged as much as 50% of waste in residential areas comes from black sack and box collection schemes.

Wimbledon MP Stephen Hammond said: "If the council do not tackle this then the situation can only deteriorate further."

The local authority has previously taken steps to clean the streets and organised a 'Big Tidy-up' in March which saw residents cleaning up rubbish in public areas.

Mr South said: "I've sent so



many complaints you'd think the council would actually do something.

"It seems to take them months to sort it out."

He has taken to social media to voice concern about the situation, and is not alone, with #muckymerton gaining momentum on twitter.

Twitter user @MabelFonge slammed the council, tweeting: "Where wheelie bins haven't made a difference to street cleanliness," alongside photos of fly tipping in Lavender Fields Ward.

The council have created a new Neighbourhood Client Team to undertake site inspections and to ensure Veolia are fulfilling their contractual

obligations.

Rats have been noticed by fly tipping sites yet Merton Council axed their pest control service on December 21, 2015 with 1,113 pest control incidents in the year preceding and no alternative suggested on their website.

In addition to rats, Mr South's FIVE-year-old Jack Russel became ill after eating rubbish raising further concerns for animal lovers.

Veolia UK obtained the contract for waste collection in Merton on April 1, 2017, and are due to start waste collection services in October 2018.

Merton Council have been approached for a response to the accusations.



EYESORE: Runaway Rubbish that has been dumped on Willow Lane
Credit Jeff South

Temple's need for donations

By Daniel Hammond

WIMBLEDON monks have launched an appeal to raise £2million to save their temple. The iconic roof of the temple is leaking and risking collapse.

One generous Londoner has already donated £10,000 to the temple on Calonne Road – believed to be the first Thai Temple in Europe.

Monk and deputy head Bhatsa Korn, 48, from Thailand, is grateful for any potential donations.

He said: "The Buddhapadipa Temple is open to all and the community is growing."

"We have people coming from the USA, Canada, Thailand, Europe, China, Singapore and more."

The erosion of the landmark building could lead to the destruction of a centre of Thai and Buddhist culture that draws up to 500 people every Sunday.

The temple attracts people from across the world.

Alan Townsend, 60, an electrician from New Morden, has found inner peace at the site, visiting four times a week since 1987.

He said: "Meditation teaches you, I've learnt a lot about patience and focus. The temple is open to all."

The site covers four acres, including a lake and an orchard alongside halls for meditation. The main temple is preceded by large white marble steps and surrounded by a variety of trees providing a tranquil atmosphere.

Everybody is welcome this weekend at their open house event from 4-6pm.

To donate visit watbuddhapadipa.org.

Will this girl's letter save Merton Hall? Art festival returns



TAKING ACTION: Felicity English and her letter to the council

By Laura Sharman

A 10-year-old schoolgirl is waiting for a response from Merton Council after she wrote to them pleading to save Merton hall.

Felicity English, from Kirkley Road, Merton, was inspired by her father Richard English, 46, to take action against the planned demolition of the community hall and wrote a letter to the Planning Applications Committee last Friday.

She wrote: "I'm only aged ten and I know this letter may mean nothing to you, but I really don't want people to be affected by this decision."

"We don't like the idea of putting a nursery and café in the church because it will create a lot of noise and when people are in church they do not want to hear children."

Felicity concludes Merton

Hall should remain because it was intended for community use by founder John Innes and is still widely used.

Felicity's mother, journalist Kirsty English, 45, explained Felicity handwrote several draft letters before marching upstairs to type it.

"She is a determined character," Ms English said.

"I'm very proud of her for having the initiative to write a letter and wanting her voice to be heard."

Felicity attends Pelham Primary School in Merton, a Rights Respecting School affiliated with UNICEF.

Deputy Head Emma Greer, 45, said: "It's marvellous Felicity has an invested interest in her community and we can impart that in other children."

"It's great she feels she can make a difference."

Merton Council have been contacted for a response.

By Laura Sharman

AN explosion of art will hit Merton today.

Merton Arts Festival includes 71 open house artists as well as group exhibitors, showcasing textiles, glasswork, photography, ceramics, paintings, drawing and print works over two weekends throughout the borough.

The festival has almost tripled in size since last year's Merton Arts Trail due to the introduction of group exhibitions and schoolchildren.

Festival secretary Claire Morgan said: "We are delighted that schoolchildren are taking part. It's fantastic."

Artists have responded very well to this year's theme, Reflection and Transformation.

"One of our artists has taken a door and turned it into elephants drinking from a pool," Ms Morgan said.

Merton based Artist Paul Tanner, 42, is working with St Mark's Primary School children in Mitcham, whose work will be displayed at Mitcham Library.

The children draw while wearing special glasses to prevent them seeing their creations until finished.

"It's a great way of freeing up your inhibitions," explained Mr Tanner.

"There needs to be experimenting, that's how you invent things."

Festival organisers want visitors to discover art while discovering Merton and have positioned exhibition venues in clusters so that visitors can walk or cycle in-between them and enjoy the borough as they travel.

The festival will take place September 16-17 and 23-24.

For information, visit mertonartsfestival.org.

Sell out for Mercury hopefuls

By Bonnie McLaren

CHART toppers alt-J made their debut in Kingston with two sold out shows this week.

The indie rock band – who have sold more than four million albums worldwide – took to the stage at The Hippodrome on Monday.

The event was organised by Kingston-based record shop Banquet Records and assistant manager Max Nixon said they had been trying to organise a concert since the band's Mercury Prize winning debut, *An Awesome Wave*, in 2012.

The band's third album *Relaxer* was shortlisted for this year's Mercury and Max said: "Bands get into the habit of coming here to celebrate a release, but it's had to be re-scheduled a few months after *Relaxer's* release.

"It feels a lot more like a standalone show than a celebration of the album."

Joe Newman (guitar, lead vocals), Thom Green (drums) and Gus Unger-Hamilton (keyboards, vocals) played songs from all three albums, including tracks such as *Breezeblocks* and *Something Good*.

Jon Tolley, head of Banquet Records, said: "It was a magical event."

"As there were two sets they were shorter than at an arena show, but seeing them in an intimate venue – and for many in their home town venue – it was a great show."

New look at Raeburn

By Alex Marrow

RESIDENTS voiced concerns over proposed improvements to a Kingston nature reserve at a public meeting last night.

Around 60 people attended the Kingston Biodiversity Network meeting to discuss the Raeburn Open Space, a neglected nature reserve near Berrylands station.

The Environment Trust was awarded £168,000 by Thames Water last year to renovate the space.

Nature conservation manager, Elliot Newton, 27, said: "We want a real focus on the legacy."

Mr Newton highlighted social problems, such as chronic litter issues, casual drug users and invasive plant species.

Mr Newton aims to give residents an environmentally beneficial space to enjoy.

But some residents were concerned that development work might put their properties at risk.

Flooded gardens, overgrown trees and security were the biggest concerns.

But Mr Newton sought to allay their fears.

You won't catch many robbers on that!

By Kaisha Langton

A RECORD number of cycling enthusiasts attended this year's Surbiton Trycyclingathon on Sunday as Kingston stepped up its bid for London Borough of Culture.

The event consisted of two cycle rides including the 10-mile Family Ride and the 6-mile Heritage Ride with 66 participating riders aged 7 to 70.

Organised by The Community Brain, the Trycyclingathon was devised to promote community spirit and introduce residents to the rich cy-

cling history in Surbiton.

There was also a BMX Stunt riding demonstration, street food stalls, a charity bar, live entertainment, apple pressing and vintage cycle displays including a Penny Farthing enjoyed by police officers and other revellers.

Robin Hutchinson, 58, director of The Community Brain said, "Having the Penny Farthing as a way of showing people the wonder of John 'Happy Jack' Keen was really great."

Surbiton resident John Keen, born in 1849, won international cycling competitions and developed the Ordinary cycle which led to the conception of the modern bicycle as



BOBBY ON THE BIKE: A Kingston police officer joins in with the fun at the Trycyclingathon

it is known today.

With the area steeped in such prestigious cycling heritage, the Trycyclingathon raised £1,000 for Creative Youth, organisers of the upcoming International Youth Arts Festival, planned for next July.

Winners of £30 million from the Mayor of London and Transport for London Mini-Holland programme in 2014, the Council instituted their 'Go Cycle' programme focussed on developing safe cycle routes with the prize money.

Lib Dem councillor Yogan Yoganathan said that the BMX show was his favourite part of

the day.

"Culture maintenance is more important than ever," he said.

"Events such as the Trycyclingathon help empower businesses, celebrate cultural differences and bring people and communities together."

London Mayor Sadiq Khan announced the search for the first London Borough of Culture in June.

Since then, Kingston has had the £1 million prize in its sight, and with around 750 visitors attending the Trycyclingathon on September 10, the attempt to win the bid is well underway.

Kingston has an ageing population and the highest council tax rates of any London Borough meaning culture would usually be a low priority.

"In about 15 years' time, Kingston is demographically set to smell of urine and lavender as it will age so considerably," said Mr Hutchinson.

"The Trycyclingathon and Culture Bid are bucking the trend and Kingston is well-positioned to win the culture bid."

"We should be feeling prouder that we have both a rich heritage that is relevant today and the opportunity to make it dynamic for tomorrow."

Heron killing leads to calls for stronger penalties

By Marine Remoue

A LEADING charity has criticised penalties for animal cruelty after a heron was shot and killed in Kingston.

The Wildlife Aid Foundation deals with more than 20,000 wildlife emergencies every year and airguns deaths are not uncommon.

Chief executive Simon Cowell, 65, claims not enough is being done in the courts.

Last year, 890 calls reporting airgun attacks were made to the RSPCA 24-hour cruelty hotline. In the first six months of this year, the figure was at 471 calls.

Under current law, individuals who kill or injure a bird can be fined up to £5,000 and face up to six months in prison.

Mr Cowell fears the legal system is not sufficient in its dealings with animal cruelty.

"It's far too lacking," he said. "The current penalties don't dissuade perpetrators."

Cowell reported that the charity can only save half of the animals injured by airguns.

He added: "They think it's fun, which is tragic."

Laws surrounding airguns have been called into question by the RSPCA, whose backing campaigns for stricter airgun owner regulations.

Under Section 40 of the Violent Crime Act, it is illegal to sell an imitation firearm to anyone under the age of 18 years.

The heron, found dead in Kingston, was shot in the neck by teenagers in the Charter Quay area around 9.35pm on Sunday, August 28.

Trainee RSPCA inspector Helen Wheeler, who retrieved the bird's body, said: "It's mindless and unnecessary cruelty."



TRAGIC: An adult heron was allegedly killed by teenagers with airguns

"The heron did not die instantly and was struggling for a while before he sadly passed away."

The perpetrators have not been caught but a witness at the scene saw a group of

six teenage boys which has led the RSPCA to make an appeal.

Authorities believe if the legal punishment for airguns violence against animals does not change, attacks will

reach a five-year high by the end of 2017.

Anyone who wishes to report cruelty or an animal in distress should call the RSPCA on 0300 1234 999 with information.

Child abuse survivor to meet council bosses

By Dora Allday

A GRANDFATHER who claims he was sexually abused as a child in Wandsworth Council's care is due to meet their executives face-to-face for the first time tomorrow.

Graeme Sergeant, 62, is chairman of the Beechholme Survivors and Justice Group.

He spent two years at Beechholme Children's Home in Banstead, Surrey, where he remembers regular sexual assaults starting when he was just three years old.

London County Council controlled Beechholme before Wandsworth took over in 1965 until its closure in 1974.

Mr Sergeant is meeting at

his home in Kent with council chief Paul Martin, director of children's services Dawn Warwick and director of adult social services, Liz Bruce.

"I'm lucky, in a sense," he added.

"For years, children in care were seen and not heard.

"I want to get free counselling for victims.

"There should be a direct line of communication for victims to contact the council without interference, otherwise we slip through the cracks."

Victims currently pay £10 to access their individual care records. Mr Sergeant now wants the council to waive this fee.

He said: "We need free ac-



SEEN AND NOT HEARD: Graeme Sergeant at home (inset: as a child at Beechholme)

cess to our records. It's a lot of money to some people."

A council spokesman said: "We are having a private meeting with the chairman of the survivors' group so that we can listen to his concerns and fully take his views on board."

Surrey Police have made several arrests following reports of alleged sexual offences at Beechholme between 1957 and 1974.

A police spokesperson said: "This is a large and complex investigation with ongoing active enquiries."

The council added they are doing everything they can to support and assist the police.

James Reeves, 79, from Camden, is a member of the survivors' group and lived at

Beechholme between 1952 and 1957.

He remembers being forced out of bed, blindfolded and raped by men despite Beechholme not employing male staff.

"The house mistress told me afterwards, 'Little boys who tell lies go to bad places. Is that what you want?'" he said.

"I want an apology. I want them to admit they failed us."

Many of the alleged abusers and victims died before Mr Sergeant started the Beechholme Survivors and Justice Group in 2015.

After being diagnosed with a brain aneurysm earlier this year, Mr Sergeant is seeking justice while he still can.

"I consider my abuse not as bad as some," he said.

"I wasn't raped or b*****ed, just badly beaten."

Mr Sergeant was told a financial redress scheme is likely to be implemented after the criminal investigation is concluded, but his campaign is not financially motivated.

"They can't put a price on what I've been through," he said.

The Beechholme Survivors and Justice Group will hold a vigil outside Wandsworth Town Hall in October.

Any victims or anyone who has concerns about potential abuse is urged to contact police on 101 and ask to be referred to the Complex Abuse Unit.

Tooting trees to be axed

By Rhiannon Long

DOZENS of trees in Tooting Common are facing the axe after the deadline to save them passed on Tuesday.

Despite more than 6000 signatures on the Save Chestnut Avenue petition, Wandsworth Council will remove 51 of the Avenue's 77 horse chestnut trees over a two-week period within the next six months.

Two council surveys deemed the trees dangerous, after some were found to have Bleeding Canker disease, which affects horse chestnuts and causes them to ooze a dark sticky fluid.

The Friends of Tooting Common group commissioned their own independent arboricultural report, conducted by Jeremy Barrell, who found the trees did not pose enough risk to warrant their removal.

London Mayor Sadiq Khan voiced his support for the campaign and said: "The council has its head in the sand and is not listening to residents' concerns."

Candida Jones, Furzedown ward councillor, labelled the felling austerity at large, claiming the estimated £3000 annual upkeep of the trees was the true reason behind the decision.

Residents held a vigil on Sunday called which saw them collect conkers, produce bark rubbings and write messages to hang on the trees.

Treasured mayor dies

By Jess Lester

TRIBUTES have poured in for Wandsworth Mayor Jim Maddan OBE, who died this week.

Mr Maddan passed away at St George's Hospital in Tooting on Wednesday morning.

Deputy Mayor Cllr Ian Lewer, 32, said: "He was the first person I met when I moved here.

"We were as close as councillors could be."

Mr Maddan was elected Mayor twice, in 2006 and this April, after being awarded an OBE for work with the Neighbourhood Watch and Adult Social Services.

London Mayors' Association chairman Clare Whelan OBE, 61, said: "He went to more than 700 events during his first term as mayor, just to meet people - he didn't have to do that.

"He was there to serve the people. He had a lot of wisdom."

Mr Maddan was formerly officer-in-charge of policing in Putney and Roehampton. His career with the Metropolitan Police spanned 30 years.

Burger stand brings Middle Feast to Battersea

By Calum Fraser

THOUSANDS of Middle Eastern tourists are flocking to Battersea for a five quid burger.

The Chelsea Bridge Burger is a street food stall on the south side of the bridge by Battersea Power Station.

Abdul Almazroi, 23, a student from Qatar, said: "It's the famous London burger! Everybody has heard of it.

"We go after the party, before the party. Sometimes even instead of the party."

Renato Dipaolo, 45, from Battersea, has owned the stall for five years.

"We've had people coming to the side window offering hundreds of pounds to slip them a burger.

"But I make sure the boys

say no. Respect the queue, respect the people."

During peak hours, 1am to 5am, queues can last up to two hours driving some to desperate measures.

Renato keeps it simple. The burger is a single thick slice of beef with melted cheese. A fried onion is the closest thing you'll get to a vegetable.

A spokesperson for the nearby Garton and Jones estate agents said: "We often have young Middle Eastern clients calling to ask if the property is close to the burger stall.

"They won't even know the name of the development."

Nourah Alkuhaisi, 20, another Qatari student, has a burger every time she comes to London.

She said: "It's more than just a burger, it is a place to

make friendships.

"I want to take it back home and start one there."

Abdul added: "When you're waiting in the queue you meet people, talk to them and maybe buy them a burger."

The stall used to cater for cabbies, labourers and the police, but Renato noticed things changing about three years ago.

He explained: "We just started getting more and more people from the Middle East.

"So, I catered to the customers. Made it all halal, no bacon and gave the place a paint job."

They face competition as big food franchises move in to the Power Station development, but their customers are loyal and the burgers are unbeatable.



HOT PROPERTY: Weekend revellers get a round of burgers in

Literary Festival will return

By Danielle O'Brien

CROYDON Literary festival will return next year after its debut last Saturday.

A team of four set up the festival in six months, which organiser Clair Woodward, 54, said was record-breaking time.

To demonstrate the literary heritage of Croydon, writers spoke at the event about Croydon and their affection for the borough.

Aspiring writers and book enthusiasts attended sessions about self-publishing, female writers, and multiculturalism.

Ms Woodward said: "Our aim was to express interest in books and bring people together. We wanted to put on something stimulating and interesting as Croydon is entering a real art renaissance."

The organisers wanted to show a cultural and artistic side to Croydon that they feel are underrepresented.

Ms Woodward said: "There are bad stories everywhere, but there are good things if you find them."

Ms Woodward commented on the positive social media reactions to the festival saying organisers were "blown away" and "gobsmacked."

Planning for next year's event, Ms Woodward stated: "It's early days but obviously there's things we will do differently."

Croydon blooming

By Sam Skubala

A COMMUNITY pop-up garden is set for its final event this weekend before making way for apartment blocks.

Croydon Saffron Central, a walled garden within The Queen's Gardens, will close after an event on Saturday.

The garden contains flowers, and artwork from Croydon-based artists.

Youth engagement leader Alastair McKinlay, 41, set it up in 2015 to raise awareness of Croydon's name being based off the crocus flower.

Born and raised in Croydon, Mr McKinlay was enthusiastic about the lasting effects of the project.

"I think it can change the perception of Croydon," said Mr McKinlay.

"Croydon has a chequered history.

"But the flower can make us think of Croydon in a more positive way."

The developers of the new apartments will be on-site to consult the public this Saturday.

Croydon Saffron Central will be open from 1-5pm.

Appeal to save 'unique' space gathers speed

By Rachel Dobbs

AN APPEAL to save a 'culture and creative hub' in Croydon from demolition is gaining momentum, as residents and the Night Czar of London offer their support.

The future of Matthew's Yard, located off Surrey Street, is uncertain.

Owners and residents fight plans to demolish the building to build luxury flats on the site.

Founded in 2012 as a co-working space by Saif Bonar, Matthew's Yard now operates as a theatre, gallery, and

hosts award-winning food pop ups.

Mr Bonar believes that it offers unique value to Croydon, because it has grown organically to best serve the needs of the community.

"It became something much bigger and better than I ever thought of or dreamed," he said.

"I do think it's unique, across London, if not the UK."

However, property developer Regent Land and Development has put in an offer to purchase the site Matthew's Yard is located, this has been accepted subject to planning permission.

In order to stay in its cur-



THREATENED: Matthew's Yard seeks to prove value to community to protect its future

rent venue, Matthew's Yard is requesting status as an asset of community value (ACV), and is seeking funding from the Greater London Authority and Croydon Council.

In order to achieve this it must prove its importance to the community and the team at Matthew's Yard have set up an online petition for the venue, which has received almost 3,000 signatures.

Amy Lamé, the first Night Czar of London, has strongly praised the venue, and the role it plays within the Croydon community.

In a letter from the Mayor of London's office, she said: "I have seen first-hand how Mat-

thew's Yard is a focal point for the grassroots arts community in Croydon.

"It has helped cultivate and grow a unique creative community in Croydon and is important to the long-term regeneration of the borough."

Ms Lamé also acknowledged that the loss of venues like Matthew's Yard was part of a wider problem across London.

"At a time when London's cultural infrastructure is at risk, Matthew's Yard's contribution is valuable and significant" she continued.

"It is essential that artists and makers in London have access to a range of spaces

to suit diverse needs. London simply can't afford to lose any more affordable workspace or grassroots music venues."

Ahead of a meeting with Croydon Council in early October, Mr Bonar and his team are continuing to campaign on social media under the hashtag #SaveMatthewsYard.

If the team secure special status and funding, the venue will be protected from development.

Management can try to purchase the site directly from the landlord.

Regent Land Development was unable to comment on their development plans when we went to press.

Mural, mural on the wall, new street art very tall

By George Roberts

A THREE-STORY mural which took a week to paint was unveiled on the side of a disused shop in Croydon on Monday.

The painting, on Fell Street, features a rhinoceros beside a young African girl.

The mural was painted by street artist Sonny, and is a part of his 'To The Bone' project, promoting the conservation of endangered animals.

Hailing from Manchester, Sonny moved to South Africa aged 11, painting murals in New York, Canada, and Russia as part of the project.

Explaining why he chose to paint his mural in Croydon, he said: "I was sourcing walls in the centre of London, like Shoreditch and that sort of area, but the walls are very temporary there."

"The UK is actually a big supporter in stopping rhino horn trade, so the rhino is a very fitting animal to do in the UK."

RISE Gallery, who champion street art in Croydon, approached Sonny before he opted to paint in a more central location.

Well known in the street art community, his mural has become the new headliner for the growing Croydon street art scene.

Street art has a growing presence in Croydon. Originating in the derelict St George's Walk, the Croydon Art Quarter has been nurtured by RISE Gallery, spreading all over the town.

Celebrating Sonny's mural, RISE's community resource manager Charlie Henson said: "Everybody who has seen the mural has absolutely loved it."

"We're really lucky and really happy that he's chosen Croydon."

RISE's unique approach in encouraging this art form across the town has brought results, with street art becoming a large part of Croydon's identity.

The hole that Nestle left in the community when they departed in 2012 has been filled with bright and vibrant colour.

Speaking about the impact of street art on the community, Ms Henson said: "It's something that connects to the community, it brightens up what can be quite a depressing area."

"It's become an attraction in itself. It's something that photographers love, it's something that families love, it really joins up so many different people in the town's community."



ALL RISE: Croydon Art Quarter's latest addition

'From care to career': A young man's life story

By Will Thompson

A FORMER homeless schoolboy has spoken about the depths of his traumatic life as a youngster sleeping rough.

Travon Steadman's mother died when he was seven and then his relationship with his father broke down.

Travon felt trapped and, on his 16th birthday, he decided his only option was to run away from home.

He said: "You spend so much of your life confined, restricted and controlled; it's a heavy price to pay to find your identity."

After around eight weeks of relying on foodbanks and the kindness of strangers, his mental and physical health was severely damaged, resulting in a full breakdown and suicidal thoughts.

"Being homeless made me want to stay in college and work really hard because I didn't want this to be my life," he said.

"I didn't realise how much it was eating away at me."

Now 22, Travon has found a welcoming new family, studies photography at Norwich University of the Arts and has started his own YouTube channel to show an extremely positive attitude towards life.

Drive Forward Foundation have worked with more than 1,000 young people like Travon across London since 2010, providing access to training, education, support and employment.

Having found national mental health teams ineffective in the past, Travon said: "The foundation provides valuable support and regularly checks the progress of the care leavers instead of simply walking away at the first chance.

"They will always be there for you and that is what counts."

Travon's story - and that of eight others - features in the foundation's This is Me exhibition, launched on Monday at Waterloo Action Centre.

He hopes by sharing his challenging experience of growing up in care, he can inspire confidence in others in a similar situation.

He said on returning to his hometown Walthamstow to be photographed at the town hall for the exhibition, he felt a sense of pride in seeing how far he had come.

But also a realisation of how far he still has to go.

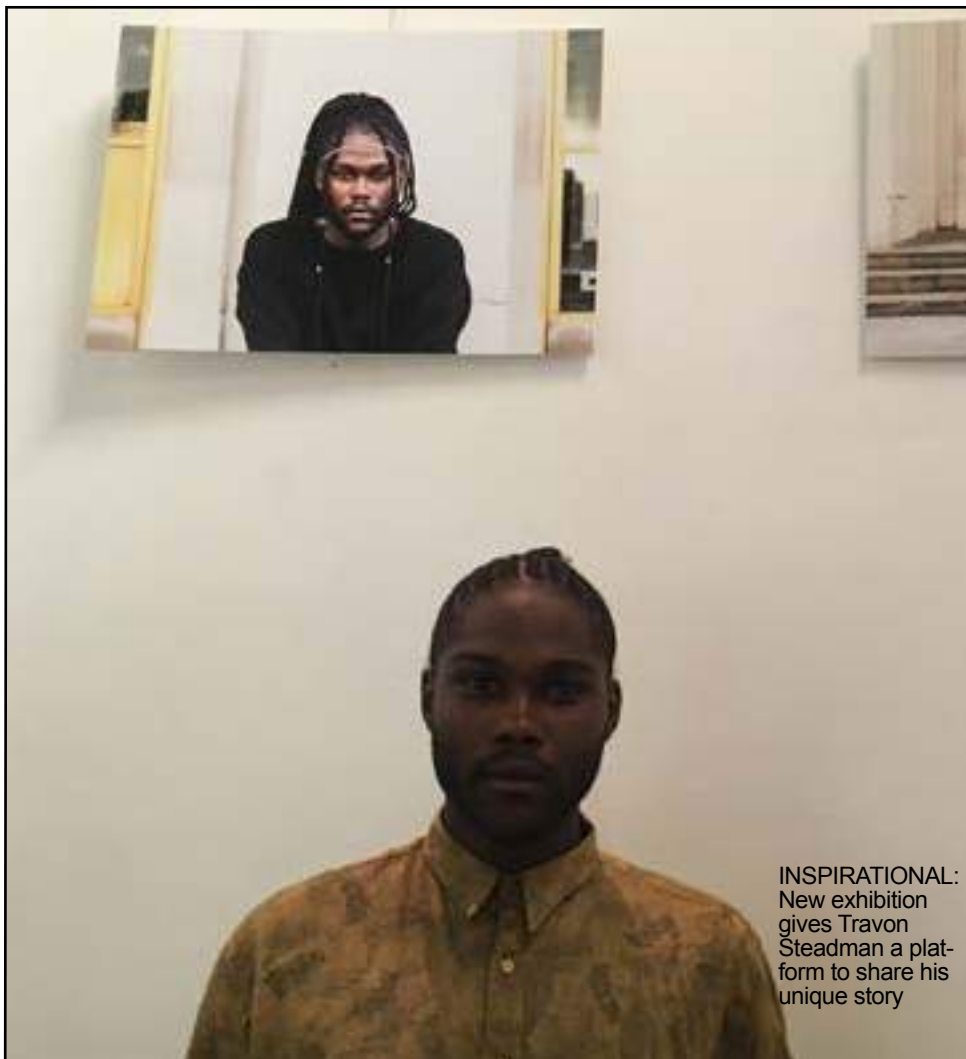
"It was like I was owning my identity and embracing the parts of my life that make me who I am," he said.

Juno Schwarz, the foundation's Fundraising and Com-

munications Officer, said: "By sharing their stories, they challenge our perspective on London, its social make-up, inclusiveness and plurality, whilst providing a positive outlook for other young people."

According to the Drive Forward Foundation, their lobbying resulted in Fulham and Hammersmith becoming the first London borough to scrap council tax for care leavers.

This is Me exhibition, which runs until Sunday 17 September, offers the chance to hear clips from interviews with the participants, to enhance the emotive experience and publicise their inspirational pasts.



INSPIRATIONAL: New exhibition gives Travon Steadman a platform to share his unique story

Ramblers rollick in faith walk

By Lucy Lyth

DOZENS of urban ramblers will join forces to trek across Lambeth this Saturday.

The intrepid walkers will visit five places of worship on their 1.6mile journey from Mostyn Road in Brixton to Renfrew Road in Kennington from 10am-3pm.

The group will be walking for the Faiths Together organisation to celebrate the diversity of religion and faith.

Faiths Together, founded in 2008, is a charity supported by Lambeth Council.

Maureen Johnson, 56, of Nichiren Buddhist Centre, Brixton, said: "I am a universal community-minded person. There is a lot of power in the community working together."

The social care and mental health professional from south Lambeth even volunteered to help organise one of the many lunch meetings the organisation has held.

Alan Gadd, 72, a trustee of Faiths Together from Somerset has worked with the organisation since 2009.

He said: "I find it so helpful to get to know other people of faith and to learn more about their religions."

"It is about promoting harmony whatever people's religions."

For more information: visit www.faithstogetherinlambeth.org.

New flats on track

By Jessica Cripps

EARLY plans to build new homes and developmental spaces in Clapham Junction were confirmed by Network Rail yesterday.

Mark Carne, Chief Executive of Network Rail, spoke about the development at the London Infrastructure Summit, which was held at the QEII Centre in Westminster yesterday.

A Network Rail Spokesperson said: "We are currently in the very early stages of working with Capco to look into the redevelopment of Clapham Junction station, the busiest passenger interchange station in Britain, as part of our Railway Upgrade Plan."

Network Rail confirmed a proposal for decking over Clapham Junction to create 57 acres of land for development, and space for 9000 new homes had been put forward.

Other speakers at the conference included the Transport Commissioner Mike Brown and Deputy Mayor for Transport Val Shawcross CBE.

Cinema 'cyberattack' prompts picket line protest



By Danny De Vaal

PROTESTORS demanded the reinstatement of four sacked union representatives as drama continued to unfold at Brixton's Ritzy cinema on Monday night.

Workers have been protesting for a living wage and better sick pay since October 2016, but the latest demonstration included the firing of BECTU union reps.

Cinema owners Picturehouse claimed union members were sacked due to an email sent from an BECTU address which encouraged pro-strike action cyberattacks on the Picturehouse website.

In a statement, Picturehouse said: "BECTU disassociated itself from any such unlawful activity and we began an investigation into who was responsible."

However disgruntled Ritzy

workers claim the e-mail was legitimate trade union business. A spokesperson for 'A Living Wage for Ritzy Staff' said:

"The four reps were dismissed because of an email that was sent round the branch which mentions topics discussed in a meeting, which the company claims was illegitimate."

They added: "We agree with BECTU that this was legitimate trade union activity."

"We're confident we'll win a tribunal."

Staff members have protested for more than a year to be paid the London Living Wage of £9.75 an hour.

Picturehouse, owned by cinema giant Cineworld, pay their workers £9.05 an hour which increases to £9.65 if they have an eight hour shift.

Picturehouse website claim they are the highest paying

employers in the cinema industry.

Helen Hayes, Labour MP for Dulwich and West Norwood, spoke in support of the workers.

She said: "I think it's a very brave stand."

Helen added "It is surprising that the Picturehouse refuse to become an accredited Living Wage Employer."

Picturehouse claim its staff package, including free popcorn and free weekly guest tickets, is adequate compensation.

Mrs Hayes said: "That argument does not stack up."

"You can't pay your rent with a cinema ticket."

A Living Wage for Ritzy staff are planning their next protest on September 23, a year on from their first strike.

They are planning protests during the London Film Festival next month.

Industrial action in the post

By Stephen Mahon

POSTAL services in Richmond could be hit by an impending postal strike.

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) is balloting its members with a possible view to taking action, the results of which will be known on October 3.

The move comes after members complained about a deterioration in working conditions over the past 12 months.

A CWU spokesperson said: "Many of our members feel that conditions have become intolerable in the last year.

"We have seen an increased workload, but face a potential 30% cut to pensions and no pay rise.

"There has been an offer of a lump sum, but no consolidated pay increase."

But Royal Mail bosses claim they provide the best pay and terms in the industry, with their wages up to 50% higher than commercial rivals.

"We believe there are no grounds for industrial action," said a spokesman.

"Royal Mail is very disappointed that the CWU has issued a formal notice to ballot for industrial action.

"We remain committed to reaching a negotiated agreement with the CWU on pay and pensions."

Nearly 500 years of a publicly owned postal service ended in 2015.

It's going to be brutal

By Lela London

RICHMOND FC have been warned by rival rugby team Ashton Gate's head coach to expect a 'brutal' game when they visit Bristol this Sunday.

Pat Lam, former captain of the Barbarians, said his players must 'keep their foot on the throat' during the game – particularly after losing their 16 point lead against the Cornish Pirates last weekend.

Richmond's director of football Steve Hill, 56, responded to his warning.

He said: "I think for Richmond this is the toughest challenge of the season.

"The players are all very excited to play at an international level.

"Especially as they are part-time evening players.

"I expect a very big challenge but I think our past performances show we can beat the best in the league."

Fans travelling to Bristol for the game should be aware that there are road closures in place due to the Bristol half marathon.



Rolling back to where it all began

By Stephen Mahon

THIS year marks the 50th anniversary of the Rolling Stones controversial album *Their Satanic Majesties Request*.

Though not as critically acclaimed as *Beggars Banquet* and *Let it Bleed* which were to follow, the album still made it to number three in the UK chart and achieved gold status in the US.

The legendary rock group started out in far more humble surroundings – playing their first residency at the Station Hotel, Richmond in 1963.

Other notables to start out at the iconic venue include David Bowie (then Davie Jones), Manfred Mann and rock star Rod Stewart.

Kevin Jones, co-owner of Eel Pie Records in nearby Twickenham, knows only too well the rich heritage of the local music scene, and says it

has been a big draw since they opened in June this year.

He said: "We're very conscious of it and we have tapped into that.

"The Stones are one of our biggest sellers and the Station Hotel was one of the most important buildings in the history of British music."

The venue has undergone a few refurbishments since those halcyon days, and is now known as One Kew Road.

But staff are well prepped

for the questions they may face about the location's storied history from curious tourists.

"It has almost become a key part of the job," said duty manager Ryan Swaby, 23.

"I have been in the job three months and I regularly get American, French and other tourists asking me about all the Stones, Bowie and other acts.

"They are heartbroken when we tell them the bad news that the stage area where

the Stones used to play is now a men's toilet."

In a more sympathetic nod to the hotel's past, One Kew Road host 1960s nights upstairs, where tribute acts perform and also offer an oral history on the hotel's role in the growth of the British music scene.

"The take up for that has been incredible," said Mr Swaby.

"Our link to the past is important and it is great to see that come full circle."

Council faces racism claim

By Eoin Wilson

A GYPSY and Traveller organisation has accused Richmond Council of perpetuating racist attitudes towards such communities.

A press release from the council last week said that Travellers had been 'given the boot' when they were evicted from Old Deer Park.

Around 17 caravans were evicted by council officers and police on Thursday, September 8.

The council's comments were condemned by Debby Kennett, CEO of London Gypsies and Travellers, an organisation which 'challenges social exclusion and discrimination' in partnership with Gypsies and Travellers.

She said: "The language used on the council website, 'Travellers given the boot', is

highly unacceptable and only serves to perpetuate the view that racism towards the Gypsy and Traveller community can be tolerated."

She added: "Richmond Council should be aware of their equality duties towards Romani Gypsies and Irish Travellers as legally recognised ethnic minority groups."

Ms Kennett urged the council to consider the option of 'negotiated stopping' as an alternative to immediate evictions, which would allow Travellers to enter into informal agreements with the council to facilitate halting.

The criticism comes after Scottish Tory MP Douglas Ross was criticised last month for 'anti-Gypsy' comments.

In a video posted on YouTube of a question and answer session, the Moray MP said he would like to see tougher

enforcement against Gypsy travellers if he were 'Prime Minister for one day without any repercussions'.

Ms Kennett argued that many factors led to a lack of suitable halting sites for Traveller communities.

Those factors included a lack of strategic coordination by government, the high costs and limited availability of land, as well as prejudice and negative stereotyping of Gypsy and Traveller communities.

London's estimated 30,000 Travellers face a "huge housing crisis," she added.

"With many families living on the side of the road and facing constant evictions."

SW Londoner was unable to reach the Travellers involved for comment and was awaiting a response from Richmond Council on the issue when we went to press.

A charitable tune

By Eleanor Sharples

A NEW charity choir will sing its first notes at the Holy Trinity Church in Richmond tonight.

Created by singing teacher Helen Astrid, Ella's Choir will support React, a Richmond charity helping children suffering with potentially terminal illnesses.

Ms Astrid, who was brought up in Richmond and graduated from The Royal Academy of Music, set up the choir that will sing popular and uplifting favourites to support the charity.

She said: "The aim of the choir is to give the charity publicity, as well as providing opportunities for like-minded individuals to enjoy themselves and feel no pressure.

"Not only will the families of React benefit but the people

attending will too."

The name Ella embodies the meaning of 'light', which exudes positivity, an atmosphere the choir wants to create.

React assists low-income families by providing basic essentials including educational, specialist and homecare equipment, as well as respite breaks.

Their family liaison manager Lisa McCluskey said: "The money raised by the choir will be massively beneficial to React."

The first session is free, then £12 (or £10 if booked together) with all proceeds going to React.

Ella's Choir will meet at Holy Trinity Church in Twickenham every Thursday, 7pm-8.30pm.

Anyone interested in joining can email helen@thehelenastridsingingacademy.com.