



“Road safety is the real issue” at High Road flats

By Daphne Chamberlain

At the time of writing, Safeland's development application for 12-18 High Road (the present GLH site) still seems certain to go ahead. Furious local residents are saying: “The road safety aspect is a problem that will affect everyone in East Finchley. It is a real danger”.

Michael McGrath, who lives nearby in Ingram Road, told *The Archer* that virtually everything connected with the application was controversial. Size, architecture and excessive closeness to neighbours are all unacceptable, but access to the site was the most crucial. He questioned how the Highways Department could approve such a congested development, with only two parking spaces, on a major arterial road next to a nursery, a school and a busy park.

Tiny space for vehicles

Michael said: “How can they imagine that the space for vehicles to manoeuvre is enough? Parking close to the site is very difficult to find, and delivery drivers are usually in a rush. We estimate there could be 10-15 delivery vehicles a day. Part of this development is for business premises, and there will be over 20 flats. These flats, too small for affordable housing, will probably be occupied by

young single people, making mail order deliveries very likely.

Blind corner exit

“An average-sized car could make a four or five point turn to exit the site, but only if parking spaces were clear. Delivery vans will always have to reverse out. The Highway Code tells us not to reverse from a side road into a main road.

“The exit will be a blind corner, with a driver's view obstructed north and south. Waste collection lorries will have to stop on the High Road and reverse in.”

On 22 February Barnet Council's Planning Committee voted six to five to approve the application. Michael claimed there might be a degree of legal ambiguity about whether that vote was valid as councillors lacked key details and the plans were not finalised. “There have been so many conditions imposed, it is like giving someone a blank cheque,” he said.

Garden gates ready to swing open

By Susan Bennett

The National Gardens Scheme is 90 this year. Although it has donated £2.7 million to caring causes in 2016, and is the largest benefactor to Macmillan and Marie Curie, most people when questioned don't recognise what the scheme stands for. Many assume the money goes into gardeners' pockets.

Muswell Hill...

My partner Earl and I will be opening our garden again. Dates for our opening this year at 5 St Regis Close, Alexandra Park Road, N10, are 30 April, 18 June, 23 July and 30 July, all from 2pm to 6.30pm. Admission is £4 and children go free. We will have delicious home-made teas and a mega-plant sale. We have wheelchair access and can arrange for group visits.

East Finchley...

East Finchley open gardens this season include: 66 Abbots Gardens, N2, on Sunday 21 May from 2pm to 5.30pm



Garden greenery: Susan and Earl in their greenhouse. Photo Susi Koch.

(admission £3.50); 58 Summerlee Ave, N2, on Sunday 9 July from 2pm to 6pm (admission

£3.50) and 79 Church Lane, N2, on Sunday 30 July from 2pm to 6pm (admission £3.50).

Dramatic diaries reveal the horror of life inside Syria

By Neil McNaughton

Regular listeners to Radio 4's *Today* programme will recognise the voice of East Finchley resident Mike Thomson, one of the BBC's most intrepid and well-travelled foreign correspondents and winner of the Sony News Journalist of the Year Award in 2012.

Over the years he has made regular contributions to the programme, reporting from many war-torn and poverty-stricken regions of the world. Last year he presented a series of pieces in which he reported the words of Samer (not his real name), a brave resident of Raqqa in north East Syria, which has been under the rule of ISIS-Daesh for several years now.

Death by beheading

Samer began sending Mike his diary accounts of everyday life in the city, which is now one of the most isolated and fear-ridden places on earth, in late 2015. His encrypted words were sent to a third country before being forwarded to Mike and his team at the BBC where they were translated for broadcast.



Journalist: Mike Thomson

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Samer risked his life to write these harrowing accounts of life under jihadist rule in Raqqa. The penalty for anyone caught communicating with western journalists is death by beheading.

Descriptions of a frightening world

Mike has now edited these messages for a new book called *The Raqqa Diaries: Escape from 'Islamic State'*. Mike sums up his feelings: “Samer's brave words have affected me deeply. Despite the fact that we are separated by thousands of miles, it feels like his family have become my family, his friends, my friends, his frightening world mine too.”