



Four-month delay before residents can return to Willow House

By Janet Maitland

Willow House on the Grange Estate is still shrouded in plastic sheeting despite Barnet Homes' assurances that the fire-damaged block would be repaired by this month (*The Archer*, November 2019). None of the 13 families who lost their homes after a devastating fire raged through the roof 14 months ago have been able to move back in.

Time was lost last year when Barnet Council decided to re-tender the refurbishment contract because the bids it had received "did not represent value for money". But a spokesperson for Barnet Homes told us in November that work would soon begin, to finish in March 2020.

Barnet Homes respond

So we asked Barnet Homes what was slowing progress. A spokesperson said that although the work did start in November it now won't finish until July, because of "extensive water damage to the building and having to allow time for the drying out process".

An electrical fault is being blamed for the blaze, which forced 60 residents to flee for their lives in the early hours. The Barnet Homes spokesperson told us: "A company was employed by the loss adjusters involved in the case to investigate. They were present during the clearance of the collapsed roof, which has been confirmed

as an electric fault, however they were unable to draw any further conclusions than this."

Concerns over safety and information

Residents living in the undamaged part of Willow House told us last November that although the council had promised them information about how the fire started and what steps would be taken to ensure it never happened again, they had not been told anything. They also felt unsafe because the front door was damaged.

"We have kept in communication with tenants and leaseholders via regular hand-delivered letters regarding specific information," said the Barnet Homes spokesperson. "Our contact details are published in all fire safety communication, so we encourage residents to get in touch with us directly if they have any concerns." They added that they'd fixed the broken intercom within their repair timelines and that the block is checked regularly by the caretaking team.



Damaged by fire: Willow House in July 2019



Keep dancing: Arsenal's Joe Wilcock joins a Saturday Social session in The Hub at Emirates Stadium. Photo David Price / Arsenal FC via Getty Images

The day we danced with the first team at the Emirates Stadium

By Daphne Chamberlain

Just before Christmas, I danced with Arsenal's Granit Xhaka at Emirates Stadium. A few minutes later another Arsenal player bolted from the room, clutching a necklace.

No, it wasn't a solve-a-crime mystery event. To celebrate the fact that the Arsenal Foundation and Islington Giving had reached a joint grant-making amount of £500,000, some of the first team squad were meeting some of the beneficiaries.

Dance and drama

One of them is a group I belong to, called Silver Threads, and run by local arts organization All Change Arts, founded by East Finchley resident Jim Mason. We meet once a month at the Emirates, but this time we were sharing an improvised performance workshop with the players.

We paired up with them to mirror-dance to Stormzy (by the way, Granit Xhaka is a great dance partner). Then we launched into improvisation, including fun with the necklace.

Friendly, polite and enthusiastic, the players definitely entered into the spirit of the occasion. They would be welcome to join us at any time – and I was brought up as a Spurs supporter!

Samir Singh, from Arsenal in the Community, told *The Archer* that the club has offered programmes for local older people since 1985. These include weekly short mat bowls sessions at nine community venues, and Saturday Socials sessions for over-50s in partnership with All Change.

Things happen with All Change

My Saturday Social, though definitely very sociable, is what All Change artistic director Suzanne Lee calls "a regular company". Led by poet Francesca Beard and photography artist Leticia Valverdes, our

last two shows mixed poetry, dance, photography, music and film. In 2018, we played to a sell-out audience at Union Chapel, and last year we staged a follow-up piece including HipHop Dance and Rap at Rich Mix in Hackney.

This year we are working on something different. We always enjoy a challenge, and you never know what may happen.

Under new management

East Finchley tube station has a new train operations manager. Stephen Read, who has been with London Underground for 22 years, has taken over the role looking after a team of 100 drivers based at the station.

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