



Natural paradise: The community lawn at the mansion block off Aylmer Road before, left, and after it was allowed to develop into a more nature-friendly meadow. Photos Deborah Greenfield

Tightly mown lawn turned into meadow

By Deborah Greenfield

Until early this year, the communal lawn at a large block of flats in Aylmer Road, N2, was kept pristine and closely cropped, a green carpet mown twice a month for neatness, but at the expense of wildflowers, bees, and butterflies. A tidy but lifeless patch of green.

This changed when a director on the block's board proposed a partial meadow idea. Instead of a featureless lawn, why not bring a slice of wild countryside into the city, encouraging new blooms and wildlife? The response was overwhelmingly positive, with

most residents voting in favour and only three opposed.

The block's regular gardeners welcomed the experiment, eager to foster more biodiversity. They even agreed to a lower annual fee to reflect the reduced mowing. Rather than spending thousands clearing grass and

planting new wildflowers, the team took a gentler and much more affordable approach, mapping out meadow zones and simply leaving them unmown.

Just a few months later, the transformation was striking. Once bare grass is now home to the gentle sway of yarrow,

knapweed, clover attracting honeybees, and bird's foot trefoil drawing delicate blue and white butterflies. Residents even seeded some poppies, with hopes they will multiply along with new wildflowers next spring.

The plan is simple: let eve-

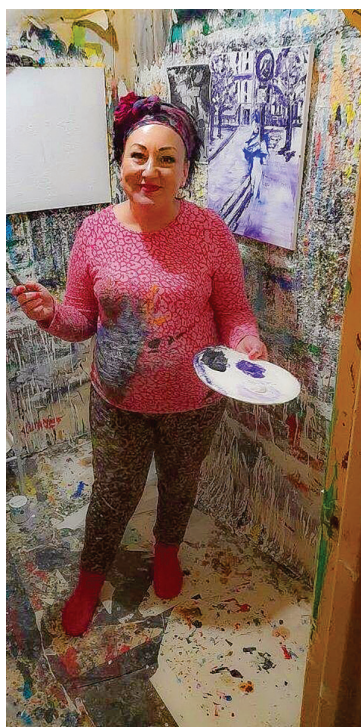
rything bloom and seed, then cut down the meadow areas in early September. Next year they should be even more beautiful, literally buzzing with life. The community is sharing this story in hopes of inspiring other blocks with communal gardens to give something similar a try.

Artists inspired by life

Art works by two local artists are on show and for sale at the Old Marine Arts Group tattoo and art studio in Colney Hatch Lane, N10, throughout September.

Theresa Monagle grew up on a council estate in Muswell Hill and has been painting since she was a teenager. She prefers to work with thick paint that she applies and sculpts onto the canvas using a palette knife. Theresa says: "Painting has become very much a therapy for my mental health. My paintings are inspired by life itself."

Meanwhile, Nigel Chaloner started drawing during



Life as art: Artist Theresa Monagle

the Covid lockdown and says: "My work tends to focus on real people, real situations and the odd existential crisis." He is now a filmmaker in Brighton.



Real people: Nigel Chaloner with some of his pieces

Sounds of the summer

Residents, trustees and special guests enjoyed The Finchley Charities summer party at the charity's Homefield Gardens site in East Finchley. Mayor of Barnet, Cllr Danny Rich, was the guest of honour and there was music from the band Interfunk.



Sun and smiles: Barnet Mayor Cllr Danny Rich, right, with other guests at The Finchley Charities

The Finchley Charities is the largest almshouse charity housing provider in Barnet and dates way back to 1488. It provides 174 homes across their three sites, accommodating men, women and couples aged 55 and over from a diverse range of ethnic and religious backgrounds.

Each of its schemes has its

own Community Hall where residents enjoy activities and events, from art classes to bingo, quizzes to bridge club, craft clubs and regular coffee

mornings. Residents are also encouraged to take up volunteering opportunities in the wider community.

RICKY SAVAGE... THE VOICE OF IRRESPONSIBILITY

Wrong hot summer

In the weird world of weather, this summer hit the jackpot. The rain gods decided to go elsewhere so Glastonbury was a sun-fest not a full-on mud-wallow and there wasn't a complete washout test match, which just isn't British. The only bit of proper sporting weather was a wet British Grand Prix. What we had most of the time was hot, hot and hotter.

At times like this, man's best friend doesn't want to go walkies. Instead the Crufts failure wants to lie listlessly in the shade whining quietly. Meanwhile, the family apex predator is equally annoyed and is avoiding hot tin roofs while it concentrates on its Snap-cat account.

But it was the perfect weather for a barbie, that annual horror show that scares the neighbours. Bright sun always brings out the worst in *homo stupido* as he dives into his wardrobe and emerges in his cooking shorts. Last time he destroyed the garden shed, next door's fence and an apple tree. And every year the result is a bin liner full of undercooked chicken for the local foxes.

Now I'm fed up with the heatwaves. If I'd wanted wall-to-wall sun, bright blue skies and sunburn, I'd have headed for the Costa Del Living for the full-on Spanish lager experience, but I didn't. I wanted a proper British summer. You know, warm, wet and full of dive-bombing seagulls.

It usually starts with two days of sunshine in late April before horizontal drizzles sets in for May. It means taking an umbrella and an extra jumper and avoiding anywhere that offers an al fresco dining experience with added wasps. And rain for the first week of Wimbledon at least. As my grandmother used to say, if God had wanted us to have long, hot tropical summers in Britain, he'd never have given us Blackpool or Butlins.