



# Salon owner faces next step in court battle

By Lynn Winton

As we reported in September, one of East Finchley's longest standing businesses took the unusual step of challenging their new landlord's substantial rent hike, and has at last received a 40-page arbitration award.

Alban Trugu, owner of the Retreat Hair and Beauty Salon on Fortis Green with his wife Eriona since 2005, said he felt forced to go to arbitration when their new landlords, local couple Darren and Sasha Gayer, requested a 54% rent increase.



Rent rise: The Retreat

Alban said "I believe that would have forced us out of business. I'm so relieved to tell you that the arbitrators rejected that demand. My rent has now risen by 16% which I can manage, so I am delighted to tell all my customers that I will be staying."

However, due to arbitration rules, Alban will have to pay both parties' costs totalling around £20,000, a heavy price to pay for challenging the increase. He will be partly helped by donations to his GoFundMe page that he set up on the advice of his many loyal customers who wanted to help.

"There are not enough words to describe my gratitude to all the people who supported me through the worst time of my life," said Alban. "I couldn't have done it without the sound advice and financial help I have received. I have been on a rollercoaster of panic and despair, so fearful of not being able to support my family."



Fighting on: Alban Trugu

As well as working six long days a week in the salon, Alban is now embarking on a second fight. When his previous landlord Roger Brown, 86, decided to sell the freehold, Alban says he placed a formal offer for £300,000 but the freehold was sold to Darren and Sasha Gayer for a smaller sum.

Roger Brown, with whom Alban had an excellent relationship, has signed a letter of assignment which means Alban can now legally act on his behalf. A formal letter has been

sent to the appointed agent, Countrywide Commercial in Woodford Green, Essex, giving notice that legal proceedings are being considered in relation to the sale. Alban intends to represent himself unless the case reaches court, when he will have to appoint a barrister.

Jason Grant of Countrywide Commercial told The Archer: "We strongly reject these allegations. The sale of 5 Fortis Green was handled transparently and professionally, in line with our client's instructions and all regulatory requirements."

We have reached out to the Gayers for comment. Alban's fundraising page can be found at [gofundme.co.uk](http://gofundme.co.uk) by searching for 'Save The Retreat'. The current total of £14,000, donated by 179 people, has been absorbed by arbitration fees. It is still open for donations for the next phase of his campaign.

Alban said: "If I had accepted the rent hike, it would have set a new precedent and all my fellow traders could have had similar increases when it came to rent reviews. That's how it works. I appeal to local shops to contact me for advice. Some of us will even share the same landlords and not know. We must share knowledge and experiences."

## Easter appeal

**Young Barnet Foundation is appealing for donations of books and chocolate eggs to its Easter Campaign this month to bring joy and opportunity to children and young people.**

Financial donations are also welcome and will be used to support local charities and community groups through the foundation's Space2Grow Children & Young People's Fund.

Find out more about the appeal and how to donate at [www.youngbarnetfoundation.org.uk/eastercampaign](http://www.youngbarnetfoundation.org.uk/eastercampaign)



Art on the go: Muswell Hill Creatives artist Simon Gazzard paints live at Ally Pally. Photo Geoffrey Davies

## Real-time painting at Ally Pally

By Geoffrey Davies

Local artists were well represented at the two-day Fresh Art Fair at Alexandra Palace last month. Muswell Hill Creatives, a group that includes artists from East Finchley, took a booth and reported a lot of interest and sales, especially in glass and vases.

On the opening night Muswell Hill landscape painter Simon Gazzard gave a real-time painting demonstration, and showed his works depicting the Parkland Walk and Alexandra Palace. "This is the first time we have appeared here," said

Rachael Booth-Clibborn, the group's founder. "Given the success I hope we will be back next year." As well as glass, work by their nine artists featured other media such as textiles, wood and paper prints.

Fresh Art Fair ran at Alexandra Palace from Friday 30 January to Sunday 1 March, giving visitors the chance to browse and buy original works by emerging

artists and established names. Artist demos, like the one by Simon Gazzard, were among the key attractions, alongside workshops in artistic techniques run by dozens of experts.

Event organisers have already said they will be back at the same venue in January 2027, with dates to be announced nearer the time.

## New playground

**A newly spruced up playground has been officially opened in Muswell Hill in the latest stage of a popular park's regeneration.**

The expanded facility in Halliwick Recreation Ground, off Coppetts Road, N10, includes swings, somersault bars, picnic benches, a tower with monkey bars, and a sensory dome for climbing on.

The £275,000 playground will serve children aged from two to 14 and it was made possible after an extensive fundraising campaign by the Friends of Halliwick Rec.

It was funded with £150,000 from Barnet Council, £82,000 from the London Marathon Trust, £25,000 from the CSDS Foundation and £18,600 from The National Lottery Community Fund. Additional funding for the project came from Cadent Gas and Affinity Water.

## Tell us the news

Have you got a news story or an interesting photo for us? Our readers are our eyes and ears, and we are always pleased to hear what is going on in East Finchley. Tips, ideas and stories, large or small, are very welcome. Please email [news@the-archer.co.uk](mailto:news@the-archer.co.uk) or leave a message on our free phone line 0800 612 0748. Thank you

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