Shoppers urged to be alert for car park thieves

By Margaret Crockett

A reader has warned supermarket shoppers to be on their guard after her phone and credit cards were stolen whilst she loaded groceries into the boot of her car at the Waitrose store in Ballards Lane, N12.

The local resident had just exited the store around 1.30pm on a Monday afternoon when a man came up and distracted her, asking her to step away to check whether some items in the trolley she had returned to the stand were hers.

On verifying the stuff in the trolley was nothing to do with her she returned to the car, collected her handbag from the boot and got into the driving seat. She noticed the bag was lighter than it should have been and discovered her phone and credit cards were missing. Someone else had appeared and snatched them from her handbag as the man diverted her attention with the trolley ruse. By the time she realised the theft there was no one around.

Our informant, who does not wish to be named, went back into the store and reported the theft to Waitrose staff. There are no cameras in that part of the car park, situated about half-way down on the left after driving in.

In her 80s and a regular customer at this Waitrose for 50 years, she was then faced with the grim task of reporting the theft to her bank and credit card providers. She also had to buy and set up a new phone, which is particularly challenging for a non-digital native. Her bank had refused the thieves' attempt to remove thousands of pounds from her account. However, they had taken £100 which, fortunately, the bank will cover. Unsurprisingly she feels violated and is not sleeping at night. She tells us she has since been told about other thefts from the car park, and at cash machines in the area, all with the thieves using a similar distraction ploy. She feels Waitrose should have security cameras covering all parts of the car parkand implement regular patrols, as well as put up notices to tell customers there could be thieves at work.



Car park: The Waitrose store in North Finchley

Waitrose & Partners Customer Care responded to her suggestions and request for compensation for the £500 phone, stating they have taken on board the suggestions but "cannot accept liability for the loss or damage of personal property within our car parks."

The John Lewis Partnership Press Office told The Archer that they are not aware of other incidents in this car park and: "We are really sorry to hear of this incident and the distress it has caused. While we cannot comment on individual cases, we take the security of our customers seriously and will support the police in any investigation."

The company recently announced the re-opening of the North Finchley branch in Ballards Lane following a multi-million pound refurbishment.This incident also serves as a timely reminder to us all about personal security when shopping and generally:

- Keep your valuables on your person
- Don't leave your hand (or man) bag on the passenger seat lest someone tap on the window as if wanting to talk but really intending to snatch your bag.
- If you can, reverse into your parking spot. You can also ask a member of staff to help you load your shopping into your car.
- Finally, if you are so unlucky as to be robbed in this way, do not blame yourself – it is not your fault if thieves take what does not belong to them.



TV star Michelle Collins helps to get the digging started at the North London Hospice. Photo Mike Coles

Foundations for a new future

By Beth Gregory

EastEnders star and ambassador for North London Hospice, Michelle Collins, put on her hard hat and builder's boots to mark a very special moment in the hospice's history.

She joined the Mayor of Barnet, Councillor Zahra Beg, one of the hospice's founders Harriet Copperman OBE, hospice Chair Simon Morris MBE, CEO Declan Carroll, and two hospice nurses in laying the first foundations of a new £10 million Inpatient Unit rebuild at Woodside Park in Finchley.

The project is the most ambitious venture that the charity has undertaken since the unit was first built more than 30 years ago.

The new unit will help North London Hospice continue to meet the changing needs of patients and families across Barnet, Enfield and Haringey and will provide a modern and comfortable setting in which the hospice can deliver its specialist care and support for decades to come.

It has been funded through a mixture of major donors, trusts and private sponsors as well as some government funding but the hospice must still raise a further £1.7 million. A public appeal launch ing this autumn will invite the community to help.

The hospice will be continuing to provide both inpatient as well as community services during this time. A temporary Inpatient Unit has been operating from the Jade Ward at Edgware Community Hospital since July. It is anticipated that the newly rebuilt Inpatient Unit will open in the autumn of 2027.

The Clissold Arms: London's Best Family Pub

Many congratulations to the team at the Clissold Arms in Fortis Green, N2, for winning the title of London's Best Family Pub at the Great British Pub Awards. It follows hot on the heels of them winning the Best Community Pub award in 2025.

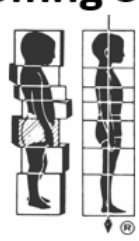


Natasha Markou, owner Kyriacos Pattichi and Christina T.

Besides everyday dining, the Clissold holds regular children's events around Easter, Halloween, Christmas and other occasions as well as being family-friendly all year round with baby-changing facilities, high chairs and colouring kits for young diners. It also hosts free arts and crafts workshops for youngsters twice a month on Sundays.

Recognition for the Clissold gives East Finchley its second prize-winning pub after Arina Piskunova and Eamonn England at the Windsor Castle in The Walks were named Licensees of the Year by the British Institute of Innkeeping in the summer.

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