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ISLINGTON NOW

THURSDAY 12.03.2026



The Archway branch of Gail's is picketed by protesters. Inset: smashed glass on the shopfront.

Online 'wars' spark child safety fears

BY EVIE SELBY

ISLINGTON parents said they fear for children's safety after social media posts encouraged violence between schools located across London.

The anonymous posts divide schools into opposing "red" and "blue" teams with children being encouraged to use compasses, metal combs and rulers to "be violent" towards each other on named dates.

The "school wars" have spread nationwide and circulated online via TikTok and Snapchat.

"Half the school didn't attend on the day the war was planned. Parents kept them home because they were so worried," said mother-of-three Sinead Masterton. The school which her two teenage sons attend was named in posts advertising a school war due to happen on 27 February.

Masterton said: "Another parent said her son was on his way home and saw children from a different school showing each other a knife."

"Mums patrolled on that morning, and the teachers and police were out," she added.

Sinead said she fears "children are going to jump on it, go and see what happens, and then fights are going to come from that".

Sam Andrews said her daughter's school, a state girl's secondary school on Donegal Street, "introduced a policy whereby all pupils will have to leave by 4pm".

Last week, police arrested a teenage boy and a man in his twenties in connection to the social media posts.

Paul Convery, councillor for Caledonian ward, and father to two teenage boys said: "This episode has shown just how harmful social media can be in amplifying fears and stoking divisions."

Storm over Gail's

Archway bakery targeted by protesters over links to Israel

BY IMI DOBBER

NEWLY opened Gail's bakery in Islington has been targeted by protesters and vandalism.

The café, located on Junction Road in Archway, has faced backlash from residents and businesses who accuse the chain of "killing local businesses". The shop's windows were repeatedly smashed, and red graffiti sprayed across the shop front on the nights of 19 and 24 February.

Phrases including "reject corporate Zionism", "support local business" and "boycott" were painted across the shop.

The attacks reference Bain Capital, the US private equity firm that holds a majority stake in Gail's. The firm has faced criticism and has been the subject of protests and backlash over million-dollar investments in Israeli technology and security industries.

The chain has expanded rapidly across the UK,

and now operates more than 200 locations, but some Archway businesses say its arrival is an unwelcome sign of gentrification in the area.

Marianne Leigh, from local café Bread + Bean, said: "The first few weeks after it opened, we definitely noticed we were completely dead after like 3 to 4pm. It's a lot quieter now and I think you can see that people are upset about it."

Tamim Karimi of Holloway Road's Phyllo Bakehouse added: "[Gail's] should be closed, no one here in Archway wants it."

Syed Akhtar of Archway Estates Lettings & Management said: "I'm not in favour of them being here, I think it will kill local businesses."

Mahmoud Ismail who owns Café Metro, which sits on the same street as Gail's, said many customers were boycotting the chain due to its Israeli ties.

"I don't blame them [Gail's], I blame the people who go there and support them." He added:

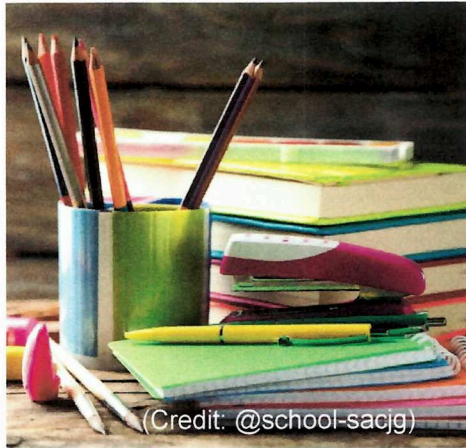
"We don't need this, somebody who's trying to kill independent businesses."

"This is not a very rich area, so we want reasonable prices," he said.

Jan Popelinksy, of 68 Degrees speciality coffee, had a different view: "Every place will have their own customers, I have nothing against them." She continued: "If anything, [Gail's] opening has impacted me in a positive way, people who don't like them find me."

In a statement, Junction ward councillors James Potts, Sheila Chapman and Janet Burgess MBE condemned the vandalism: "We are appalled by the damage caused to Gail's on Junction Road."

Gail's did not respond to a request for comment. However, Tom Molnar, the firm's chief executive, told the Times that attempts to "intimidate and endanger" the café were "completely unacceptable."



(Credit: @school-sacjg)

SCHOOL ABSENCES AT 'CRISIS' POINT

BY ISABELLA STEINMEYER

THE proportion of children absent or permanently absent from secondary school has reached "crisis" levels in Islington, a new report has found.

In 2024-5, 24.7% of secondary school pupils in Islington were persistently absent, compared with around 14% before the Covid-19 pandemic, according to Islington's Annual Education Report.

The report found that Islington's rate of persistent absenteeism, referring to pupils who miss over 10% of their sessions, has increased from last year and was higher than the Inner London average of just over 20% in 2024/25.

Cllr. Paul Convery for Caledonian Ward, said: "It is over four years since [the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee] first raised a red flag about absenteeism. It is currently running at a level that's more than double what it was pre-COVID. That is a crisis."

A further 4% of Islington secondary school pupils are categorised as severe absentees, meaning they missed 50% or more of their possible sessions.

Cllr. Siobahn Scantlebury, Head of Employment Services for Islington Council, linked the high rate of absenteeism to children who are most at risk of becoming NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training).

In her report on Post-16 Progression in Islington, Cllr. Scantlebury emphasised the need to identify early children with low attendance as they find it more difficult to transition into work or further training post-school.

Cllr. Ilkay Cinko-Oner for Laycock ward, agreed. She said: "We know colleges in Islington do not report [absenteeism] accurately because there is an off-rolling issue."

Off-rolling refers to children being removed from a school roll without a formal, permanent exclusion or when parents are pressured to do so.

Cllr. Cinko-Oner worried these severely absent children would become "invisible" to council services which endeavour to create a "smooth pathway" between school and further education and employment.

Islington's percentage of NEET 16-17-year-olds has fallen from 4.5% in 2025 to 3.9% in 2026, but is above the London average of 3.3%.

Locals tell council 'don't take us as idiots' over new budget

BY EVIE SELBY AND CHAYA NATHAN

ISLINGTON residents are calling for a systematic change in how council budgets are spent, warning councillors not to "take us as idiots".

The appeal follows announcements of increased investments into local priorities in Islington Council's 2026/27 budget which was passed on 26 February.

This included an additional £324m investment in current council housing and £5m for the Make it Happen fund, which pledges to help reduce anti-social behaviour, improve play spaces, and clean public areas.

Yet residents complain that similar investments have been wasted in the past, with accusations that councillors are using the new budget to bolster their campaigns for the upcoming May elections.

Barbara Ferguson, a resident of Finsbury Park, said: "It is very obvious it's only for the local election. Why don't we hear from you regularly?"

The £5m Make It Happen fund is a "drop in the ocean", she said. "A lump sum of money is great ... but if you think of how they want to split it, on new homes, safety, it gets so watered down that it doesn't do anything good for the community."

"Everything comes the few months before an election," she added. "Don't take us for idiots. We're not."

Jeremy Cox, of Tufnell Park, said: "For the problems that beset this borough £5m may not be enough, and where the money

ends up is a moot question."

Some residents living in social housing on Finsbury Estate, Clerkenwell, are concerned the increased funds won't be used to improve living conditions.

"I know people who have still got ongoing damp problems, mould problems, that are still trying to get them fixed. It

seems like an endless cycle - it never really gets done," said Gary Bendle, who has lived on the estate for 30 years with his husband Xavier Bendle.

They said money has been wasted in the past and urge the council to carefully consider where they spend their funds.

Xavier said: "When we moved 30 years ago, it had wooden flooring, wooden ceilings, and an electric shower. When we moved in, they ripped all that out. It was beautiful."

He said that expensive and

unnecessary changes were made, including a half bath that was installed and then shortly removed as it was too small for the couple's needs.

"I can understand them upgrading it to their standard, but if it's above their standard, why are they downgrading it? That would save money," Xavier said.



Gary and Xavier Bendle say damp and mould problems on the Finsbury Estate are "endless" (Credit: Chaya Nathan)

Pothole panic as cyclist injured

BY MARTHA CASSIDY AND PHIN HUBBARD

ISLINGTON residents expressed concern this week over several alleged injuries and vehicle damage from the deep potholes on Liverpool Road in Barnsbury.

Nakisha Nicholls, from Canonbury, said she crashed her bike after swerving into one pothole while trying to avoid another, bruising her coccyx bone.

"The bruising is very painful," she said. "These potholes are obvious for all to see but are increasingly getting worse."

"I try to stay off the main road as much as possible to reduce anxiety, but potholes are inevitable on most roads in Islington," she added.

One resident of Upper Street, who drives a wheelchair accessible vehicle for her disabled son and who asked to be anonymous, said she was afraid to drive down Liverpool Road.

"Liverpool Road is a nightmare with all the dangerously deep potholes," she said. "If I go into one of them, I am not only left with a burst tyre, but my son is stuck in the car."

"It is like driving a dodgem car at the fairground," she added.

Islington Council is responsible for

upkeep of the road and has encouraged residents to report potholes on the Love-CleanStreets app since 2015.

The app had 27 independent pothole reports filed for Liverpool Road in the last 30 days which have been logged as completed or in progress.

Last month, Islington resident Charlie, 39, set up an Instagram account which seeks to embarrass the council into long-lasting solutions for potholes across the borough.

He said he set up the account after becoming frustrated with the app system.

"The report says they have been filled in but I am standing there looking at these things. What does complete mean, then? They have a robotic response on the app, and it doesn't feel that there is any real engagement from their side," he said.

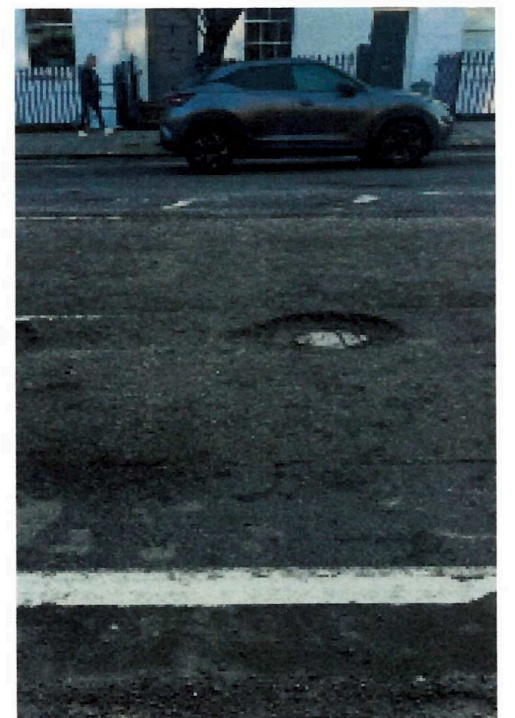
"The tarmac they use just blows out after a period of bad weather which means they are short term fixes which becomes deeper after five or six times," he added.

Dr. Mark Pack, a Lib Dem life peer in the House of Lords and Islington resident, said: "The 1 kilometre of stretch of Stroud Green Road has had 164 pothole repairs in 5 years. Those repairs are sim-

ply not lasting long enough."

According to their own data, last year Islington Council filled 1,896 potholes which amounted to 4.40% of their total revenue spend.

Islington Council was contacted for comment.



(Credit: @islington_potholes)

A bloomin' marvellous idea for Mother's Day

Chaya Nathan speaks to the florist with an innovative idea for reducing waste

IT'S the biggest day of the year for Britain's flower sellers, but one Islington florist is using technology to sell her flowers at a cut rate in a bid to reduce waste this Mother's Day.

Jennifer Panxhi, who founded Jen's flower shop on St Paul's Road in Islington, decided to reduce the waste from cut flowers that don't sell in her shop by signing up to the app Too Good to Go.

Too Good to Go is a service with a mobile application that connects customers to restaurants and shops that have extra unsold goods and food.

Mother's Day is one of the UK's biggest flower-buying occasions, but Business Waste management reported in 2025 that most cut flowers sold for it are discarded within 1-2 weeks due to their short lifespan, contributing significantly to seasonal floral waste.

Due to the high demand, florists buy more stock, often resulting in left-over flowers going to waste.

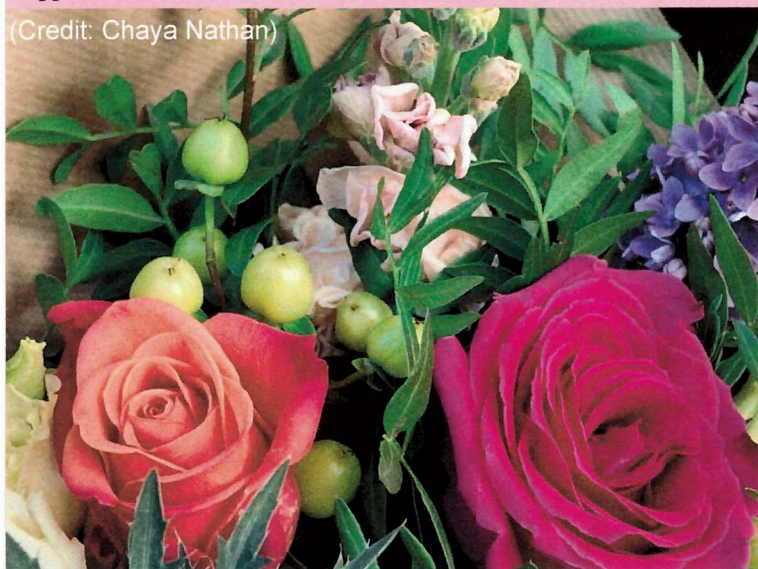
Panxhi uses the app to sell flowers at a reduced rate at the end of each day.

She said: "We have started using the app Too Good to Go in order to be more sustainable and reduce our waste, so many flowers get thrown away during busy holiday's and we want to change that."

Other florists in Islington have also started reducing waste in other ways.



Jennifer Panxhi in her flower shop. Most flowers cut for Mother's Day are discarded due to their short lifespan (Credit: Chaya Nathan)



(Credit: Chaya Nathan)

Gail Smith, founder of Gail Smith flowers, located on Liverpool Rd, has been sending unbought flowers for to the charity Floral Angels, who recycle and reuse from retailers and create bouquets for people who don't usually receive them.

"So many flowers get thrown away during busy holidays and we want to change that"

ISLINGTON NAMED SECOND MOST DANGEROUS AREA IN BRITAIN AS CRIMES SOAR

BY ISABELLA STEINMEYER

ISLINGTON is the second least safe area in the UK, according to the latest data from Get Licensed, a security training provider.

The report found that rates of theft and robbery in the area were "three times higher than the national average," and criminal activity had increased by 8 per cent compared to last year.

Similarly, Metropolitan Police crime maps for Islington's 17 wards which suggest criminal activity, is on the rise. Only three wards – Clerkenwell, Hillrise and St Mary's and St James' — have seen a consistent fall in criminal activity between 2024 and 2026.

Islington Council has tried to tackle rising crime rates by installing knife surren-

der bins across the borough, in partnership with the charity Word4Weapons.

It has also expanded its safe Havens scheme, increasing the number of designated spaces where individuals who feel threatened can go to seek help from 75 to 300 since 2021.

However, many Islington residents feel the council is not doing enough.

Jeremy Cox, of Tufnell Park, said: "Real crime is not on the council or police agenda".

Similarly, local resident Barbara Ferguson said that while she often feels unsafe around Finsbury Park Station, she doesn't think community safety is the council's priority.

Some locals argued that the lack of street

lighting and quieter streets as a result of Islington's Low Traffic Neighbourhoods scheme has made them feel unsafe.

George Hills from St Mary's and St James', said: "The council refuse to lock squares and parks at night, which feeds antisocial behaviour, [making them] no-go zones for women."

Other residents were less critical. Brenda Williams from Tufnell Park said: "All areas have crime, but it doesn't mean to say the whole borough is bad." Highbury resident Christine Drummond said: "There are always 'hotspots' to avoid in the dark, like Finsbury Park Station, but I don't think it's worse than any other big city borough."

Islington Council work closely with Islington Police. There are 16 Safer Neighbourhood Teams across Islington dedicated to local policing and community safety.

A constable in Caledonian Ward's Safer Neighbourhood Team said he disagreed with the findings of the Get Licensed City Safety Index.

He said Islington is "one of the safest boroughs in London" and "we've got a really good community safety team within the council, and good leadership within Islington police".

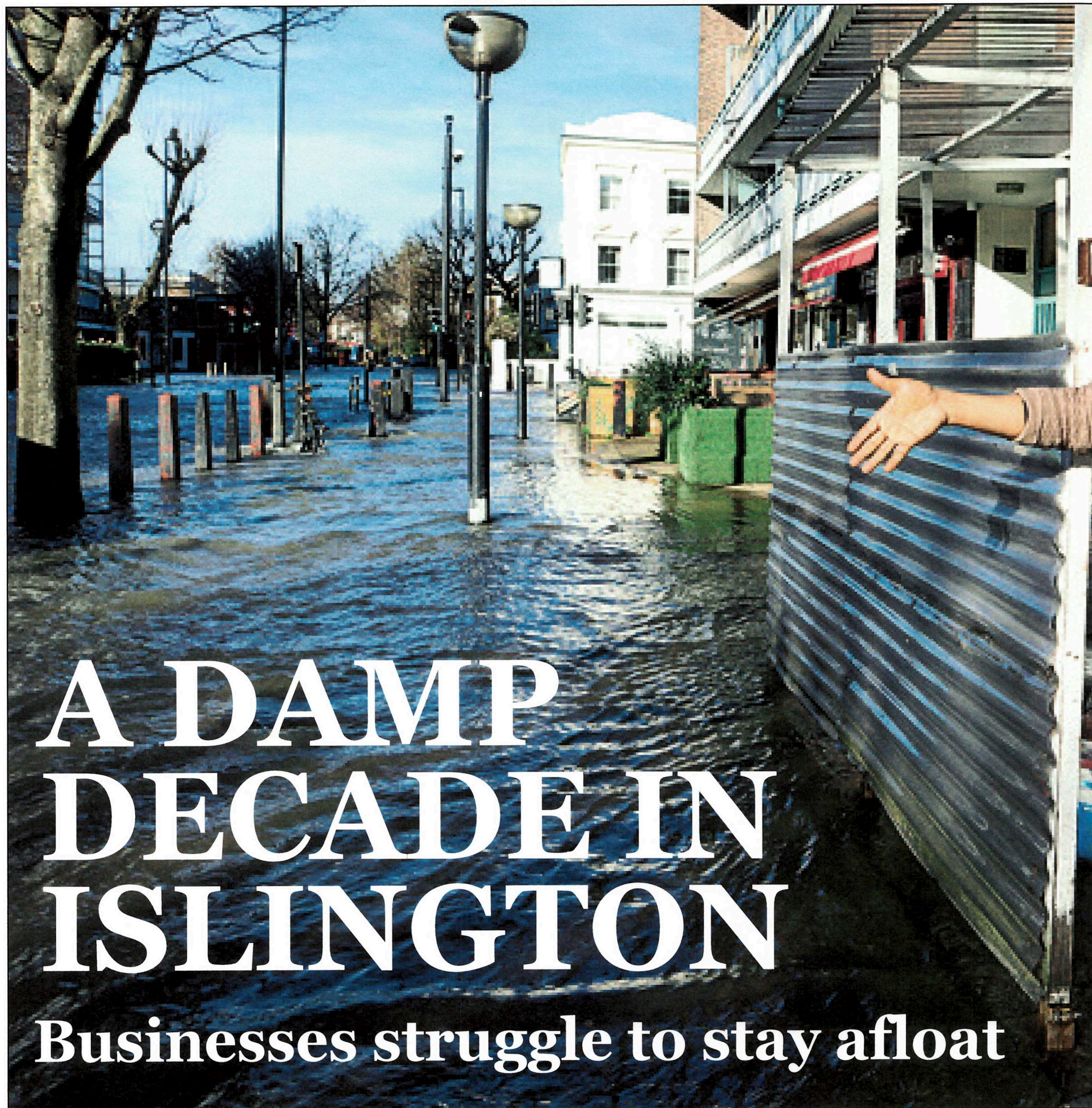
Despite the increased council and police focus on safety initiatives in the borough, many locals feel more can be done.

Livvie E from Tufnell Park said: "Judging by the number of daily NextDoor safety alerts, crime reports and pretty scary video doorbell footage [...] we are indeed living in a crime borough."

Councillor Angelo Weekes, Islington Council's Executive Member for Community Safety, was contacted for comment.



(Credit: Isabella Steinmeyer)



A DAMP DECADE IN ISLINGTON

Businesses struggle to stay afloat

BY IMI DOBBER AND PHIN HUBBARD

The burst pipe beneath Caledonian Road last month was Thames Water's seventh major system failure in the borough over the last decade, IslingtonNow data reveals.

Floods on Camden Passage, Offord Road, Northdown Street, Hornsey Road, Pentonville Road, Canonbury Street since 2016 all originate from faulty Thames Water infrastructure below ground.

Six fire engines attended the scene on the 24 February after the 36-inch trunk main burst around 2pm, flooding 350 metres of the Islington thoroughfare. The burst pipe was a stretch of the UK's largest water provider's approximately 12,800km of Victorian infrastructure beneath the capital.

Ali Ahmed who works at the local Alibaba Pound Saver told IslingtonNow this week how the flood has cost his business £50,000 due to water damage.

The owner of Sunflower Bakery, Paul O'Bri-

an, who also chairs the Cally Trade Association, said: "These small business down the road have no turnover and no money from insurance claims. The road has now been closed for two weeks; my prediction is that a lot of the businesses on this road will never reopen."

Kane Emerson, former chair of the Barnsbury Estate Residents Group, said: "Private renters completely fall through the cracks when you have an incident like this. If you're private renter, private landlords won't necessarily be giving you much support, and private renters do not tend to have any insurance."

Emerson organised a fundraiser on 9 March raising more than £650 for families and businesses. "The fundraiser showed the strength of community and how people can unify around something that's quite an awful event," he said.

In a letter to the CEO of Thames Water, Chris Weston, Islington Council Leader Una O'Halloran said: "This could have been pre-

vented, had it not been for years of Thames Water neglect and inaction."

"How many bursts does it take? Do you want to wipe us out? Apologies are not good enough. We want action," she added.

A water scrutiny committee raised concerns over the condition of water infrastructure in Canonbury ward last January, pointing to two 36-inch mains pipes installed as long ago as the 1870s.

In August, the pipes burst, flooding forty homes in the ward which many residents are still unable to return to seven months later.

Sasha Donaldson, whose home on Cedar Court was flooded said in a council meeting last month: "They were working on Canonbury Street and then we got flooded. They were working on Pentangle Road and then they got flooded on Caledonian Road. Is there a coincidence? I would like to know."

Several residents affected by the flood are

still living in hotels.

Thames Water has the highest leakage rate of any water supplier in England according to Ofwat, the UK's water services regulation authority, with nearly a quarter of water put into supply lost through leaks in its network.

Ofwat also found that across the water industry just 0.13% of pipes are being replaced per year, far below the level regulators expect.

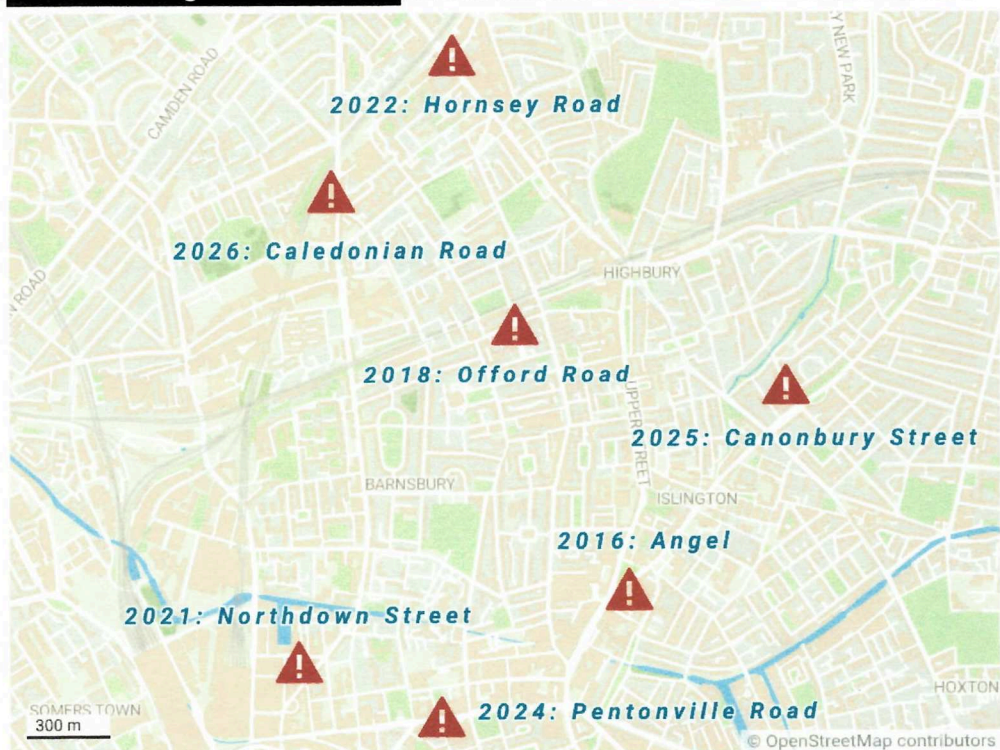
Since the water industry was privatised in 1989, over £7 billion has been paid out to Thames Water shareholders. The company won a High Court case this week, seeking £3.3 billion bail the company out of £16 billion debt.

Thames Water could not be reached for comment but in a previous statement the water company said: "We are looking to replace approximately 60km of pipe in Islington. We will carry out these works, but we face several challenges meaning we cannot give precise timelines".



Business owner Ali Ahmed says water damage due to the flood cost £50,000 (Credit: Islington Tribune)

Floods in Islington since 2016



Map: Phin Hubbard • Created with Datawrapper

£1m boost for EV

BY SAM TURNER

Electric vehicle (EV) charging points will receive £932,500 in additional funding as part of the Islington Council's plans to make transport more environmentally friendly.

The new funding will enable the installation of at least 840 new EV charging points across the borough.

New installations support the council's ambition to deliver more than 1,400 on-street EV charge points by 2030.

Councillor Rowena Champion, Islington's Executive Member for Environment, Air Quality and Transport, said: "By making sure we have the infrastructure in place for electric vehicles, we can encourage drivers to make the switch to more environmentally friendly forms of transport, which helps improve air quality across the borough and delivers a huge range of health and wellbeing benefits."

Some Islington residents think that the measures announced do not go far enough. David, an EV driver, said: "Charging points are very expensive, £55 for a full charge, and it takes two and a half hours. [Other charging points] take 9 or 10 hours."

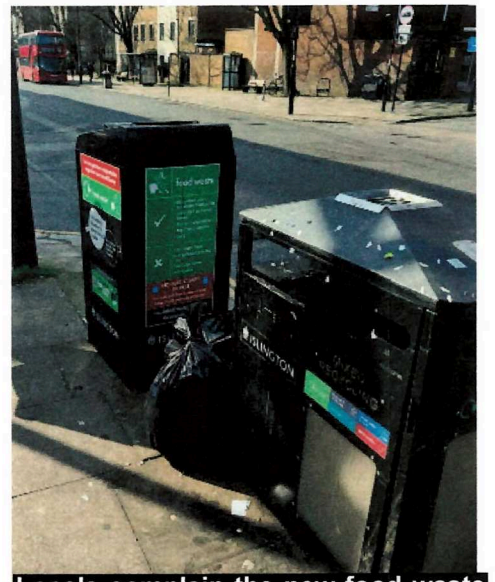
Another issue for EV drivers is the congestion charge. Previously, EV drivers received a 100% Cleaner Vehicle Discount, exempting them from the congestion charge. But this has recently changed.

"Before, I liked electric cars. There was

no congestion charge before, but I've now been paying it since January. It's almost £75 weekly," David said. "I'm not happy. I'm going to sell this car because of the congestion charge."

Electric cars registered on Auto Pay receive a 25% discount on the congestion charge. The daily charge is £13.50 for electric cars, instead of £18, and £9 for electric vans, HGVs, and quadricycles [small four-wheeled vehicles] instead of £18.

According to the council, the new funding is needed to prevent more than 2,000 additional vehicles a day from driving during operating hours [7:00 – 18:00 on weekdays and 12:00 – 18:00 on weekends] in the Congestion Zone.



Locals complain the new food waste bins look "bloody ugly" (Credit: Chris Russell)

These bins are just totally rubbish!

BY MARTHA CASSIDY

Islington residents have railed against new "ugly" food-waste recycling bins recently introduced by the Council.

The large black bins, introduced by Islington council for use by people living in flats, and with the objective of making food recycling accessible for all residents, have annoyed some locals who do not feel included in the initiative.

Chris Russell from Archway, who noticed the food waste bins along his high street, said that bins "look bloody ugly".

"They're an eyesore and completely stupid. They're making the high street look awful; like an assault course with disregard for wheelchair users and pushchairs."

After posting on Nextdoor about the bins which he said were "littering" the streets of Islington, Mr Russell turned detective and investigated the council's decision to implement them.

"The street bins are a compliance shortcut. DEFRA's Simpler Recycling policy gave councils until 31 March to provide food waste collection."

"So, councils dumped bins on high streets instead, ticking the box for the tiny minority living above shops," Chris told Islington-Now.

He added: "People above shops lived without them before and can continue to do so. They're not essential and simply tick a box to comply with policy changes than

meaningful impact."

Another resident, Sunnie De Pass, complained about the size of the bins causing accessibility issues for pedestrians. She said that the council had "added another bulky structure to the street". "They could have been streamlined it, but in narrow parts on Hornsey Road I've seen people dodging around the sides squeezing by."

Ms De Pass went on to describe the bins as "ugly", and the Labour council as "tired":

"I think they have done their course. I don't think the imagination is there. They're not thinking in terms of sleek design for the neighbourhood."

"Cylinder type objects are not appealing to the human eye, and people will not appreciate them, especially on their own streets." She added: "It's basically more street furniture, people just leave and dump their stuff on the already overflowing litter bins."

Islington council promoted the food waste recycling bins this week as part of London's Food Waste Action Week (9-13 March), reposting council leader Una O'Halloran's comments on Instagram from July 2025, which said: "We need your help to make Islington cleaner, greener, and healthier."

"Whether it's using your food waste caddy, rinsing out containers before recycling, or helping a neighbour understand what goes where. Do your bit, recycle it."

When Vladimir Lenin visited Clerkenwell...

IslingtonNow celebrates EC1's long-standing radical history

BY ANNA HINDMARSH

Clerkenwell's radical history of socialist activism is being reignited, as preparations get under way for this year's May Day Rally. Trade unionists, migrant worker organisations, women's groups and politicians are preparing to gather on the Green to mark 100 years since the General Strike in 1926 – a nationwide work-stoppage in solidarity with miners.

Mary Adossides, a member of the London May Day Organising committee, said this will be the focal point of the day. Roughly 1.7 million workers participated in the 1926 strike, led by the Trades Union Congress. May Day will remember "those nine days that the country struck in support of the coal miners threatened with a pay cut."

For centuries, left-wing radicals and industrialists have gathered on Clerkenwell Green, a prominent geographical aspect of London's political folklore. Wat Tyler camped there during the 1381 Peasants' Revolt, and the Green hosted the first-ever May Day march in 1890.

The Marx Memorial Library, situated on Clerkenwell Green since 1930, will open its doors to May Day marchers. Meirian Jump, senior archivist, said the library is "a cornerstone of Clerkenwell's radical history, a treasure."

"It's a really good chance for us to bring people in to celebrate May Day and to have a look at our historic site, our wonderful collections on socialist history and connect with that past, whilst looking to the future," she said.



Credit: Creative Commons

The library is home to a rich history of printing and socialist ideology. Ms Jump said: "This building was home to the Social Democratic Federation, the first socialist party in this country with people like William Morris and Eleanor Marx as party members."

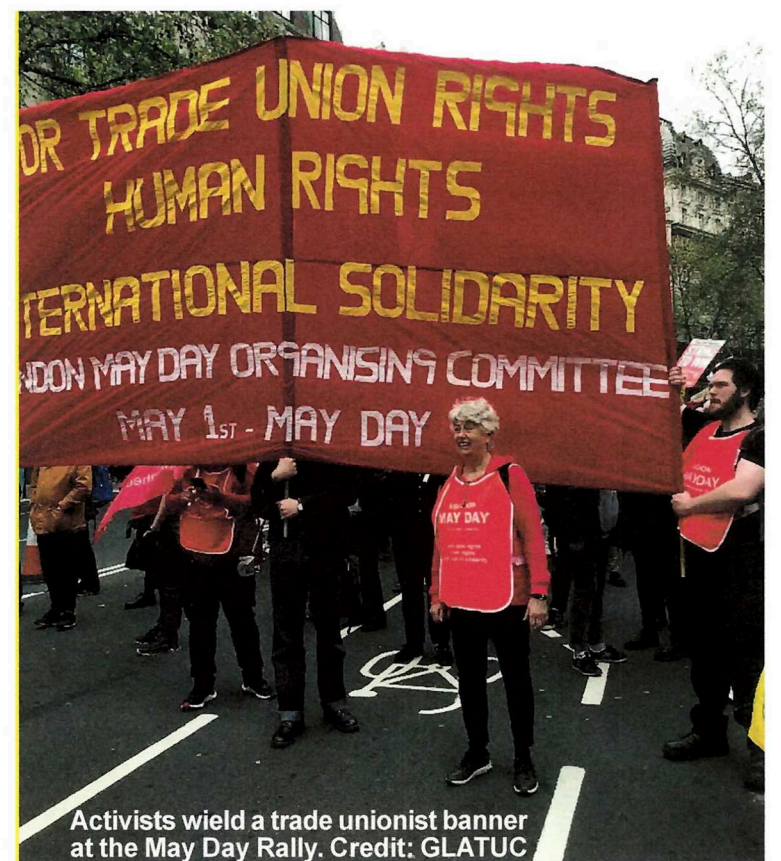
Vladimir Lenin worked there for thirteen months when he arrived in Clerkenwell in 1902 with his wife. He moved the socialist news publication, *Iskra*, here. During this time, the library bore witness to several Russian Communist Party meetings, led by Lenin.

What was once the perfect industrial base for workers to gather and demand better conditions has undergone a major cultural shift. Clerkenwell's rapid gentrification over decades has visibly wiped out its industrial past.

Finsbury, to which Clerkenwell was formerly allocated, was one of the poorest boroughs of London during the nineteenth century. Local tour guide Nigel Smith traced Clerkenwell's epic transformation from the place where Charles Dickens chose to set *Oliver Twist*, depicting it as "a den of thieves and pickpockets and terribleness", to a hub for artisan shops.

A particular symbol of this shift is the imminent closure of the historic Smithfield market, which is expected later this year, and the longstanding trading culture that embodied the working-class origins of the area. Mr Smith said: "[Smithfield] has been a meat market since the 1860s, but that's ending ... all those market traders are being essentially forced out."

Despite the area's evolving social landscape, Clerkenwell's past of left-wing politics still beats on today. May Day will reignite this history, where socialists have fought



Activists wield a trade unionist banner at the May Day Rally. Credit: GLATUC

for centuries to better workers' rights.

Visitors can expect a speech from Sarah Woolley, the first ever woman to lead the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers' Union, on the Green. The procession will follow The Big Red Band all the way to Trafalgar Square, where there will be more speeches.

Ms Adossides added: "It's a celebration", [it's about] how workers, if they're united, can actually impact positive developments for society."

Review: Green Party Zack Polanski at Union Chapel

BY JOANNE HAMILTON

LAST Thursday, Islington's Union Chapel played host to a live recording of the comedy podcast *The Guilty Feminist*, with special guest Green Party leader Zack Polanski.

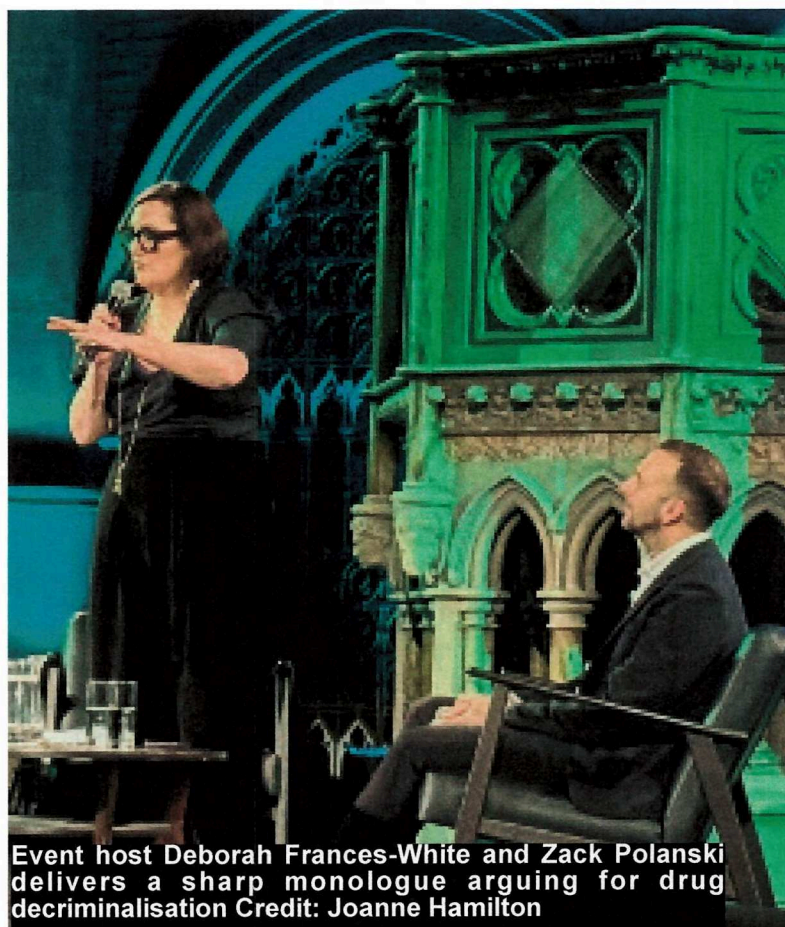
Three chairs sat centre stage beneath an imposing stained-glass window. The stage was dimly lit with a dark pink stage light.

As the show began, the room darkened, and a spotlight swept across the guests. Deborah Frances-White, author of *The Guilty Feminist* and podcast host, was introduced first, setting the tone with her trademark opener, "I'm a feminist, but..." before welcoming her guest co-host for the night, transgender author, actress, and screenwriter, Juno Dawson.

The light shines on Polanski who is met with roaring applause. He offers his contribution: "I'm a Feminist, but I've only slept with men ... so far."

Frances-White opened the night with a sharp monologue merging humour with politics. She spoke about the long-running drug decriminalisation debate. She argued that decriminalising drugs should be treated seriously, stating plainly: "Our leaders and our media know this to be true."

The pink backlight shifted to Green as a homage to the star of the show, but Polanski wasn't the only guest. The night unfolded with musicians, activists,



Event host Deborah Frances-White and Zack Polanski delivers a sharp monologue arguing for drug decriminalisation Credit: Joanne Hamilton

and a stand-up comic.

Applause filled the room as Polanski emerged. He opened by reminiscing on his last appearance at Union Chapel, before Frances-White raised the question burning on everyone's mind: what led him to use hypnotherapy to enlarge a woman's breasts?

In 2013, *The Sun* published a story detailing the use of hypnotherapy to increase breast size, and Polanski was the hypnotherapist in question. He appreciated the opportunity to explain himself and owned up to his mistake, stating: "This does not represent me."

In an emotional moment, the war on drugs resurfaced as Juno Dawson spoke about losing loved ones in the queer community to chemsex, where drugs are used to enhance sex, typically among gay and bisexual men.

She asked how people with experiences like hers are meant to support drug decriminalisation, when those same drugs have caused harm.

Polanski sympathised with Dawson, before addressing that whatever we're doing now is clearly not working, and something must change.

As the audience filtered out, the atmosphere felt charged - not just with laughter, but with the sense that people had been invited into something bigger than a show.

Make do and mend: Islington's sustainable living boom

BY ELLA DAY

YEAR after year, London's Repair Week has seen locals and businesses coming together to help each other make do and mend. This year's was particularly special, however. In Islington, it saw the highest participant demand on record. From used-clothes upcycling to refining furniture, the sold-out sessions, held at venues across

the borough, were buzzing with a range of projects and participants leaving sessions asking about the next one.

Alongside the usual events devoted to textile repairs projects, there was clear interest from attendees in having "more regular sessions and potentially introducing some more specialised workshops," according to Beth Davy-Day, director of

the textile repair and upcycling drop-in workshops.

These included requests for tuition in visible mending and creative upcycling techniques which would allow participants to continue building their skills and broaden workshop interest reach.

Workshops for clothing, electrical appliances and furniture repairs took place in FC Designer Collective workspace, Mildmay Library, and Bush Industrial Estate. Fashion designers, furniture makers, and tech experts offered attendees support and advice on how to fix their

beloved items, providing them with the knowledge and skills to make amends.

"The workshops provide hands-on opportunities for participants to learn practical sewing, repair, and upcycling skills using industrial equipment and professional techniques," says Ms Davy-Day.

"Chairs, bedside cabinets, storing units and various types of furniture needed repairing, sanding, removing the old paint, varnishing and then repainting," said Pawel Ryczan, Islington Council's Waste Minimisation and Recycling Officer, organiser of the furniture upcycling workshop.

A number of these were organised by Islington Council as part of commitments to reduce waste across the area. The furniture workshop is one of these.

Several organisers attribute this uptake in demand to a general shift towards more sustainable consumer behaviour. Driving this shift appears to be a greater awareness of the mainstream fashion industry's damage to the environment, cost-of-living pressures deterring people from buying new clothes, and the normalisation of slower fashion on social media.

Mr Ryczan said: "People have become aware of how many resources go into producing a monitor, phone or laptop, and that not much of the product is actually being recycled or reused at the end of its lifespan."

"Conversations online around repair, vintage fashion, and upcycling have helped make these practices feel creative and

desirable rather than simply economical," added Ms Davy-Day.

Workshop organisers were extremely pleased that more residents are embracing slower fashion and find it fulfilling to nurture their existing items like they do.

To Ms Davy-Day, one repair in particular was a great example of the value of upcycling. "A cyclist stopped by with a pair of ripped shorts and repaired them on the spot, still wearing his helmet. It perfectly captured the spirit of the workshops: practical, welcoming, and focused on giving people the skills and confidence to extend the life of their clothing," she said.

The community feels of the workshops enriches participant enjoyment. "Many people look forward to workshops as an opportunity to connect with others in the community."

The workshops have even kickstarted further socialising beyond the workshops.

"Archway Upcycle now has over 150 members!" said Mr Ryczan. This group exchanges advice and support on how to upcycle beloved items in the area.

He added: "Not only do the repairs projects bring people lots of joy, they help them feel valued when they bring skills."

London Repair Week took place between 2 and 8 March 2026 across London venues.



A participant learns how to upcycle used clothes during London Repair Week. Credit: Fashion Capital UK

London Met jobs at risk

BY CLAUDIA EFEMINI

THE threat of industrial action at Holloway's London Metropolitan University may become a reality this week, as students and staff members anxiously await the results of a ballot this Friday. The vote follows the announcement earlier this year of proposals which campaigners say may lead to 120 job cuts at the institution.

Glyn Robbins is one of those affected. The 61-year-old senior lecturer fears losing his position after his job title appeared in an email by the university listing roles at risk of being cut.

According to Robbins, the announcement in early January said most are in the School of Social Science and Professions. "I think it was 100-plus jobs just in our school that they're deleting," Robbins added.

A spokesperson for London Met said no final decision on the cuts have been made but "we recognise that this has been an unsettling time for colleagues and that uncertainty causes real concern."

Protests have followed the announcement and have been attended by the likes of Jeremy Corbyn, MP for Islington North. On 2 March, the University and College Union (UCU) hosted an online rally.

Christina Paine, UCU branch chair at London Met, was pleasantly surprised by student support saying they are "heartbroken and worried for their futures and the reputation of their courses and degrees".

The move by London Met will impact

Robbins's career. "I'm 61, so I'm going to be at somewhat of a disadvantage when it comes to getting a new job," he said.

Financially, it could threaten his only source of income. But Robbins, who owns a property and has grown-up children, fears for his colleagues "who might be in their thirties, taking on a mortgage, maybe got small children. This is disastrous," he said.

The institution is being critiqued by some for not living up to its commitment to diversity and empowerment across particularly race, class, and neurodiversity. "To dismantle the structures that provide that diversity is an act of vandalism and damage to students," Paine said.

Beata, a PhD student who is neurodivergent, will lose her supervisors should the cuts go ahead. "My relationship with my supervisors is particularly important for me as they understand how I work and how to support my research," she said.

A spokesperson at London Met responded: "Our commitment to diversity and inclusion, and to the quality of education our students receive, remains at the heart of everything we do and will continue to guide every decision we make."

A reduction in international students has affected funding at London Met and is reflective of a nationwide decline. Home Office statistics showed a 14% drop in student visa applications in the 2023/24 year compared to the previous 12 months. But the university's funding issues and management of funds has been called into

question by campaigners.

"We know that they're committed to spending 2 million pounds a year on things I think students don't care about, and are getting rid of all the mentoring staff which are really important for students who might struggle with keeping up. It's a terrible situation," Robbins said.

A spokesperson at London Met said they are facing significant financial pressures and "regulated tuition fees no longer cover the full cost of teaching. Further action was needed to secure the University's long-term financial sustainability."

For Robbins and Paine, the response from London Met to their protests has been quiet and dismissive.

"There's no actual discussion or collaboration or care about what we think," Robbins

said. Paine said the union has only had one "rushed" negotiation meeting with the university.

Friday's results will be a defining moment for Robbins and other campaigners. "I hope that my colleagues will see that we've got to fight. We've got to fight for our jobs, but we've got to fight for the future of London Met," Robbins said.

"This is disastrous," said Glyn Robbins, Senior Lecturer at the London Met Uni



The University and College Union protest against the possible job cuts at London Met. Credit: Christina Paine

ISLINGTON SPORT

Arsenal Women score big for local economy



BY AMY RUSHTON

Arsenal saw the highest matchday revenue of woman's football club in the 2024-25 season according to the most recent figures released by Deloitte.

As of August 2025, Arsenal's women's matchday revenue reached €7 million across the year, nearly double that of the next highest club, Chelsea Women, at €3.6 million.

With an average attendance of 34,110 across 2024-25, this marks a significant boost to the local economy. The season saw a record number of Women's Super League (WSL) matches played at Emirates stadium, increasing the number

of matches at the stadium overall and bringing more customers to local restaurants and pubs.

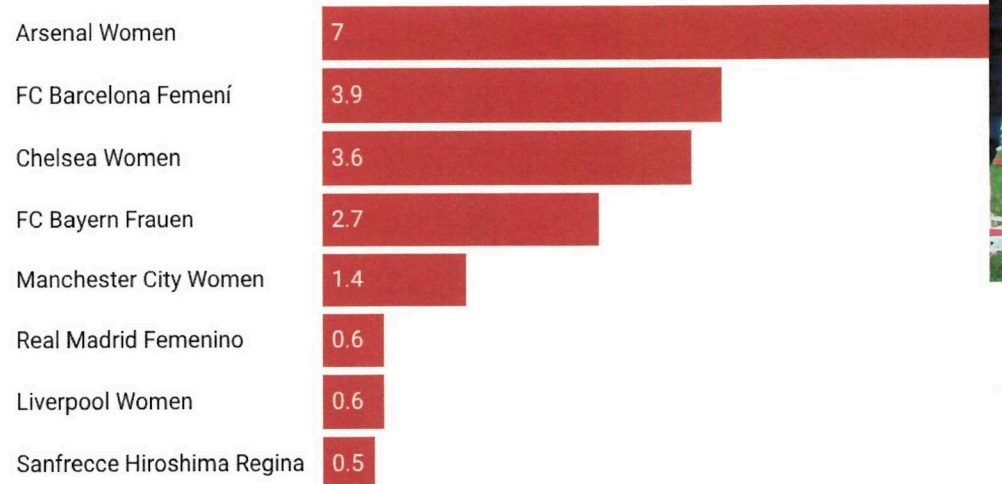
This has increased across the 2025-26 season as the women's team play every home match at Emirates Stadium in a WSL first.

Martin Whelan owns the Tollington Arms, a popular pub among Arsenal fans which is packed during home matches.

He said Arsenal Women moving to the Emirates Stadium on a permanent basis has boosted his matchday customers.

"It's had a very positive effect on our business, and long may it continue."

Match revenue of women's clubs in 2024-25 (€m)



Islington Cycling celebrates its 50th anniversary

BY SAM TURNER

Cycle Islington, a long-standing local campaign group, is celebrating its 50th birthday this year, with several events planned to commemorate the anniversary in June.

For Father's Day on 21 June, the group, which has just under 600 members, is organising a bike ride, which will start and finish in Highbury Fields, looping around the north and south of the borough. This will be followed on 26 June by a ceilidh at Hocking Hall, Whittington Park Community Centre.

Eilidh Murray, Coordinator of Cycle Islington, said: "We're going to have a launch event at the Islington Museum in the second week of June. We're going to

screen a film interviewing people who've been involved over the years, particularly older people," she said. "We'll get Rowena Champion speaking. She's the current transport exec."

John Hartley, Secretary of Cycle Islington, said: "The best part is campaigning when we win. It's really nice to see where the council implements things that we suggested or had an influence over."

John and Eilidh are keen to get more people into cycling, especially young people and women. Currently, less

than one-third of cycle trips in London are made by women. Eilidh believes that safety concerns are the main cause. According to a London Cycling Report, 24% of cycle networks are unsafe after dark.

"We're campaigning to get more women on bikes. There's an issue with safety," Eilidh said. "Women prefer to cycle in segregated cycle lanes."

In addition to campaigning to improve networks with more cycle lanes and low-traffic neighbourhoods, Cycle Islington wants to make cycling understood as safer and more accessible.

John said, "People are frightened to cycle. Cycling is actually a very safe activity. People are understandably frightened of motor traffic," John said. "The perception of the danger

is almost as bad as the danger itself. That's what stops people, particularly women, from cycling."



(Credit: Sam Turner)



Islington Cycle are celebrating their 50th anniversary with a series of bike rides planned for June