



Volunteers get their wellies dirty for the Big Dig at Vale Farm Allotments. Photo by Hester Jones

Big line-up for Big Dig

Many hands made lighter work on Big Dig day at the Vale Farm allotment site off Tarling Road. Volunteers turned out to dig the land and continue the conversion of 15 plots into

a community food-growing centre.

Project leader Louise Wright was there to direct the digging and to pitch in herself. Tree specialist Mick Parkin came along with some of his workforce to remove stubborn tree trunks.

Row upon row of crops and trees will be planted this year and raised beds are being constructed so that wheelchair users and children from Oak Lodge School, off East End Road, can get involved in growing food.

The project is part of London's Capital Growth initiative for food-growing spaces. Produce from the plots at Vale Farm will supply 't5 community food - Barnet', a social enterprise set up by Sally-Anne Wigfield that aims to provide healthy packed lunches for local schools and busy commuters. Sally-Anne and her team started work on the plots last June but this will be their first full growing season.

"It's all coming together as a local sustainable project," said Sally-Anne, who runs the café kiosk in Cherry Tree Wood. "We want to use local produce to provide balanced meals, and get local people involved in growing it."

Anyone who is interested in

volunteering for the project, and taking a share in the spare produce, can contact Sally-Anne at sally-anne@think5.co.uk

Sign up to save Newstead

Following our report last month on concerns over the future of the Newstead Children's Centre in Fallows Close, off Tarling Road, parents and carers from the Newstead Users Group have written to THE ARCHER. They have set up a campaign website at www.savenewstead.com and we print their message below:

New proposals are seeking to cut funding dramatically to Newstead children's centre from September 2012. Unless we let Barnet Council know how much East Finchley's residents value Newstead's outstanding work for families, East Finchley will lose its childcare facility in the near future.

Newstead's budget has been severely cut by 35% despite promises to pay by results. Barnet has closed or merged eight of 21 centres. It is vital that we safeguard this award-winning and top Ofsted-rated centre's future. We need to send a very clear message to Barnet Council that closure of this excellent centre will have a devastating effect on local families.

On a positive note, our campaign last year was very successful and helped to secure Newstead temporarily. Our letters and petition really were heard, we do have a voice!

So please take five minutes to sign up to our petition as well as to shoot off a quick email to the politicians in charge with your thoughts/experiences of Newstead and its childcare. We've prepared proformas and a link on our website making it easy and quick to show your petition and e-mail support. Please encourage others to sign up and write a quick e-mail as numbers count!

Many thanks in advance.
Newstead Users Group

Armed youths rob man on The Walks

By Janet Maitland

A man was mugged by two armed youths as he walked home from work on 16 February. Duncan Watson left the tube station at about 7.15pm and took his usual route home through Market Place. As he approached The Walks, he noticed two youths in their late teens standing close to the gates of the children's playground.

Mr Watson had almost reached Leslie Road when he was grabbed from behind by the taller of the two youths, who demanded his money. "I threw him off me and he landed against the wall behind the garages on Leslie Road," said Mr Watson.

"The taller one held a knife to my throat, then severed my iPod. The shorter youth also had a knife which he used to slash open my bag. They took my iPod, a new smart phone, my wallet and my Oyster card. Then they told me to 'walk'. As I walked away, I saw a young woman coming down Leslie Road. I alerted her to the danger. She then courageously assisted me in calling the police and my mobile provider." The youths went off in the direction of Leopold Road.

"The taller one held the knife close to my eye at one point," said Mr Watson. "Residents of East Finchley should stay on the main thoroughfares until these youths have been apprehended."

Police action

Police have informed THE ARCHER that they are making active enquiries and are fully aware of the recent increase in attacks of this nature. The Safer Neighbourhood Team has increased their high visibility patrols around Market Place, The Walks and nearby streets. Metropolitan Police CCTV has also been installed in these areas recently. From April, the team's shift pattern will include many more late shifts, some until 2am. "My team is working as hard as possible to prevent any further incidents taking place," said Sergeant Mark Kelly.

In this incident, one suspect was black, slim and about 6ft 3 ins, wearing a dark fleece hoody. The other youth, also wearing a dark hoody, was skinny and about a foot shorter, possibly of mixed race, with black curly hair and a sculptured beard. If you have any information that might help the police, ring 101 quoting crime reference number 2403774/12 or call Crime Stoppers anonymously on 0800 555111.

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