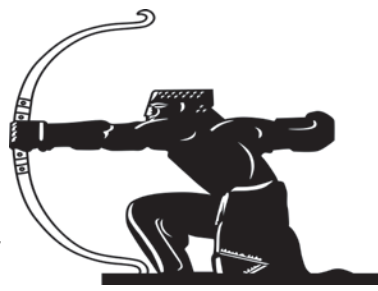




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April 2017 No. 277 **20p**
ISSN 1361-3952 where sold

A community newspaper for East Finchley run entirely by volunteers.



National Book Day protests against library closures in East Finchley. Photo Mike Coles

Children protest at being excluded from their library

By Daphne Chamberlain
Hundreds of supporters of all ages turned out on World Book Day last month to support a protest against Barnet Council's reorganisation of libraries. It took place outside East Finchley Library, which is closed

until August for the reorganisation.

The library will be without professional staff for 69 of its 85 opening hours. During that time, entry will be by a library card with a registered PIN and, except for some 15 year-olds with school permis-

sion, nobody under 16 will be allowed in unless accompanied by an adult.

Demonstrators were saying that excluding children strikes at more than the ability to borrow books. It penalises children whose parents or carers have not registered for PIN entry. It also cuts out the

pleasure of meeting friends to borrow books they enjoy or to look up projects they are interested in. Campaign group Save Barnet Libraries (SBL) make the point that this is at a time when fiction borrowing by East Finchley children has gone up by 18% since 2011.

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Bail and trial over 'double murder'

Two people arrested in connection with the alleged murders of Annie Besala Previous Ekoko and her nephew Bervil Kalikaka-Previous Ekoko in Elmshurst Crescent, East Finchley, remain on bail.

A 23-year-old man was arrested on suspicion of murder on Thursday 8 December. He was rebailed in February to return on a date in late March 2017 pending further enquiries. A 20-year-old man remains on bail and is due to return in late April.

A third man, Obina Ezeoke, 24, of no fixed address, was charged with two counts of murder on Tuesday 20 September. He was due to appear at the Old Bailey for trial on Monday 20 March as we went to press.

Last High Road bank is to shut

East Finchley is to lose its last remaining bank after NatWest announced that its High Road branch will shut as part of a raft of 128 closures nationwide. Staff will lose their jobs or move to different roles.

The closure will be a blow for those who regularly use counter services. Muswell Hill will be the closest available NatWest branch and East Finchley will be left with just two cash machines. NatWest justified the closures by saying that its customers were increasingly moving to online and mobile banking.

There are also concerns at the prospect of another prominent High Road property lying empty for a long period. Santander was the last bank to close last year and its former premises opposite NatWest are still unoccupied.



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