



# Why children are like tomatoes



Smart space: Inside Tomato Tutors on the High Road.

By Thalia Pellegrini  
**Tomato Tutors, a recent addition to our High Road, has been set up by Laura Alvarado and her business partner Beth Fordham, two mums with a passion for holistic education.**

Laura tutored maths for 14 years and had always been focussed on traditional one-on-one academic support. In recent years, however, she'd begun to question whether there was a better way to teach.

"We are seeing more and more mental health issues in children," she says. "There is such an achievement treadmill. It shouldn't be all about getting to the next stage."

Tired of being part of the process of "hot-housing" kids, she turned instead to the concept of holistic education and so Tomato Tutors was born. There is no learning by rote here, or sitting silently, pen in hand; this environment intends to foster a love of learning and inspiring children to be happy and confident. Laura is clear that a child is taught best when their emotional, physical and mental needs have been assessed and understood.

### Good gardening

Laura studied horticulture at college. When asked about the unusual name of the company, she gave the analogy of growing tomatoes: if you water them too much they burst; if you don't water them enough, they won't flourish. Children, she says, require a similar, careful balance of nurture and independence.

Laura, a single mum, is keen to stress that many families may benefit from support. Just as for some children, school can be a source of anxiety, parents want to do their best in guiding their children through school, but may need guidance themselves on how best to do so.

### Choices for all

A range of services is available for both children and parents, including baby sensory groups, GCSE revision classes, a free Stay and Play drop-in session on a Sunday, as well as Creative Writing, Coding and Free Expression Art classes during the week.

For the grown-ups, there is a New Mothers circle, book



Laura Alvarado

binding, candle making, as well as various workshops. If you'd like more information, Laura welcomes your enquiry: hello@tomatotutors.com or check out www.tomatotutors.com for the latest schedules.

## Letters

### Bishops Avenue island

Dear Editor,  
It is good to see *The Archer* continuing to seek answers from Barnet Council about the changes proposed for the junction of The Bishops Avenue and the High Road. However, what was proposed by the council was not a pedestrian crossing as would ordinarily be understood by that phrase, for example a pelican or zebra crossing clearly demarcating a safe crossing place giving priority to pedestrians.

What was in fact proposed was simply a small island in the middle of the road where pedestrians could stop. In order to make space for this, the right turning lane would be done away with, causing traffic to use surrounding residential streets as an alternative rat run.

At our on-site meeting with council officials they conceded that alternatives such as traffic lights at the junction had not been considered, and as the decision to "obtain more information" shows, nor had all of the implications of the scheme. It is this lack of consideration and the failure to consult that has caused both local residents and Haringey Council to object to the plans.

Yours faithfully,  
**Jon Benjamin,  
Bancroft Avenue, N2.**

### Prospect Ring assumptions

Dear Editor,

I note with wry amusement the letter from Ms Joan Merritt concerning the demolition of homes and the imposition of a 13-storey block of flats in Prospect Ring (*The Archer*, January 2018).

If, as she writes, "we need to be considering every available plot of land for building them", I assume that she will be making available her back garden to help?

May I also point out that Barnet Homes say that nothing is finalised yet and the matter has not yet been passed to the Planning Committee. Why then, have the residents of the maisonettes that are threatened with demolition been given Notices to Quit already? It suggests that a decision has already been made, as the residents always assumed, and that Barnet Homes are merely keeping up the pretence of "consulting with the residents".

A further additional point of concern is that consultants paid by Barnet taxpayers to conduct a 'traffic impact survey' have stated (totally in line with what Barnet Homes wanted) that there will be no noticeable increase in, or danger by traffic. This view is based on the incorrect assumption that Kitchener Road is a one-way street and that there will be only an additional 26 cars owned by the 50 families being housed.

Once again, Barnet Homes can be seen to be in contempt of the existing residents.

Yours faithfully,  
**D P Donnelly,  
Prospect Ring, N2.**

### Surgery closure motive

Regarding the closure of the Cherry Tree Medical Centre in East Finchley (*The Archer*, January 2018), I contacted the Care Quality Commission in June 2017 following a report in the Finchley Times, as it implied that the staff were at fault for the problems.

Finally one of the Inspectors corrected that impression but it took months before I was told that this was not the case. In the interim, having spoken to health professionals, it became clear that the CQC is against GPs working on their own in a practice.

My last letter to the CQC said: "It would have been more honest if this was made clear". I have not received any reply.

Yours faithfully,  
**Ralph Eschwege  
Abbots Gardens, N2.**

### Commuter parking

Dear Editor,

This is a polite request to people in East Finchley asking them to consider if they really need to drive the short distance to park in the roads nearest to the tube station, for example Ingram Road, Baronsmere Road or Park Hall Road for their daily commute or trip into town. We have a number of elderly and frail residents living on these roads as well as parents with small children who can't park anywhere near to their homes now due to the high number of residents in other

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parts of the Controlled Parking Zone using these spaces. This means that they have to park many roads away and struggle with heavy shopping, small children and numerous trips to and from their cars to unload.

The same problem occurs on occasions when the council asks us to free up the roads for cleaning or repairs. We remove our cars and the spaces quickly fill up with commuters cars so consequently the work never gets done. Please ask yourselves (if this applies to you or someone you know) if it is necessary to save yourself an extra 5-10 minutes walking time to the tube station. Also, are you happy to contribute to the pollution problem caused by driving short distances with cold engines?

We believe there is an additional problem with commuters parking here from outside the area who are regularly buying visitor tickets from at least one resident who sells them on for a profit. This is being looked into at the moment and will be dealt with by the council and police when the evidence has been gathered.

I know that the people of East Finchley have a great community spirit and hope that anyone who drives to commute will consider the impact on the residents who are adversely affected. Thanking you in advance.

Yours faithfully,  
**Wendy Gledhill,  
Ingram Road, N2.**

### Pavement parking

Dear Editor,

For years the west end of Brompton Grove, outside Park House, opposite the tube station, was blocked off for cars by concrete bollards erected by Barnet Council. When these were knocked down the council did not replace them, with the result that commuters park cars in this area obstructing the pavement and the emergency exit from Park House. There is a sign saying: 'Private car park, no public access, L.B. Barnet, no parking at any time'. Recently two more signs were erected by the council saying that the penalty for parking on this stretch is £30. Months have elapsed and no parking tickets have been issued. These fines would provide much needed income for the cash strapped council. A parking warden told me that they are unable to issue tickets for the illegally parked cars, even those on the pavement. So why has Barnet erected the notices if they are not prepared to discourage the nuisance and, at the same time, raise necessary income?

Yours faithfully,  
**Judith Filkin,  
Address supplied.**

Any reader who feels strongly about any matter is invited to use this "Soapbox" column.

Please note that opinions expressed are those of the writer alone.



## A lost gem

Dr Ruth Brown writes an open letter to Larry Lipman, managing director of Safeland, who have won permission to demolish Valona House and redevelop the former GLH site opposite East Finchley tube station.

Dear Mr Lipman,

The Finchley Society has opposed demolition of Valona House, built in the 1820s. For decades the house was part of a small settlement around the Bishop's Tollgate on the Great North Road. Until the tollgate closed in 1862, most traffic on Britain's main road paused here. Stagecoaches changed horses at the Old White Lion opposite, there was a smithy, and drovers herded their cattle through the tollgate to London.

Valona House was built by East Finchley brickmaker Nevil Smart. He bought the land in 1800 from the Bishop of London when it was countryside, and set up a brickworks. So Valona House has a rare provenance: its bricks are made of clay from the field it was built on. The house has a clean, elegant Georgian style that is popular today, but done to a quality that's hard to replicate. The slightly arched windows are found on some other 1820s houses in London. The brickwork is excellent craftsmanship and looks like new after 200 years.

You boasted in September's *Archer* that you are bringing "high quality residential investment in the area". In fact your plans are to demolish a high-quality historic building and replace it with a design that residents have widely condemned as poor quality and ugly. Your plan will bring 21 flats: few, compared to the three much bigger old garage sites along our High Road. One of these big sites is still undeveloped.

You say, "It gives us a chance to bring improvements to the neighbourhood." Over 1,000 residents have said in a petition: this is NOT "improvements", this is harm. Your site will be overdeveloped with only two parking spaces, and delivery vehicles will have to reverse onto the High Road. Your plan is a danger to pedestrians and will spoil the historic look of East Finchley.

You claim to have removed "the blight of a mini-cab office." GLH is a long-standing and highly regarded business with strong links to East Finchley which looked after Valona House for 65 years.

Are you not concerned that your flats will be a blight? Please re-think your plan for two cramped blocks of flats. It would be welcomed if you reduced your plan to one apartment block (perhaps Georgian-style in yellow brick), and kept Valona House to serve you well as a characterful and historic office building made of East Finchley clay by local craftsmen, that's stood at the gateway to Finchley for 200 years.