



Before and after: Volunteers cleaning up the Tarling Road wood last summer, left, and how it looks today with a circular path and ground cleared for new growth

Wood is transformed from impenetrable to impeccable

By David Melsome

Nine months ago, the hidden patch of woodland known as the Sleeping Beauty wood was a tangle of undergrowth and strictly off-limits to everyone who lived around it. Now the enclosure off Tarling Road, N2, is a beautifully manicured open space waiting for spring and summer to bring it fully to life. The remarkable transformation was led by local co-ordinator Leo Smith and supported by dozens of hard-working volunteers and landowner Barnet Council. Dense growths of bracken have been removed to be replaced by a circular path and open areas for flora and fauna.

There are plans for the woodland to be opened up for nature classes with children visiting from East Finchley schools, and for special community events. It neighbours the new Tarling Road Community Centre, which is itself due to open very soon.

Drop an item into the food bank any time

Shoppers can now leave items for the Finchley Foodbank in a collection box at the new Sainsbury's Local store in the High Road, N2, for onward distribution to families and people in need. Donations of tinned meat, fish and vegetables, jars of pasta sauce, jams and spreads, packets of sugar, boxes of cereal, along with tea, coffee, rice and biscuits, and any non-perishable food items are very welcome. Shampoo, conditioner, deodorant and sanitary items are also requested.



The food bank is based at St Mary's Church, further up the High Road, past the junction with Church Lane, and donations can also be dropped there directly every Saturday between 12.30pm and 2pm.



Award after Grange fire

A church minister who helped lead the emergency response to the devastating fire that left 60 residents of the Grange Estate homeless last November has been awarded for her service to the community.

Rev Helen Shannon, of the St Barnabas Church network, helped organise a rest centre and essential supplies after the residents were evacuated in the middle of the night from Willow House, just off the High Road, N2. Willow House is currently being refurbished.

She was also recognised for her work in running a food bank in the annual Civic Awards list organised by Barnet Council. Winner of a lifetime achievement award was John Barry Russell, who joined the Finchley Sea Cadets when he was 11 years old and still helps them run their activities from their base in Long Lane, N3.

Man sent to prison for charity shop break-in

By Janet Maitland

A man who burgled the RSPCA shop on the High Road in East Finchley, stealing cash and causing more than £1,000 of damage, has been jailed for two and a half years.

Pierre Wassef, 38, smashed the charity shop window with a slab of paving stone on the night of 19 October last year. Once inside, he shattered the CCTV camera's hard drive, then broke into the safe, stealing £680 in cash. He also grabbed a box of expensive animal medicine and altogether did more than £1,000 of damage.

Police identified him by the blood he left on the fridge door handle inside the shop. Wassef pleaded guilty to a total of five burglaries in north London carried out in 2018.

One burglary at the Locanda Italian restaurant in West End Lane, West Hampstead, netted him £3,670 in laptops and other devices and a further £2,800 in bottles of champagne.

Defence barrister Pieter

Briegel told Harrow Crown Court in mitigation that Wassef was being treated for post-traumatic stress disorder triggered by a sentence of 25 years in Egypt for drug trafficking, which he claims he confessed to under pressure. He was released in 2010 after a regime change.

Wassef had also had drug problems for many years and been attacked for a debt of £80,000 he was trying to repay by stealing, said Mr Briegel.

Judge Lana Wood said the sentence took into account the overall criminality involved in all the offences and their seriousness, along with the fact that that Wassef had breached a community order made earlier in 2018 for two break-ins, one of which was at a Scope charity shop in West Hampstead.

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