



New community centre close to opening its doors

By Janet Maitland

East Finchley's new community centre on Tarling Road will soon open officially to the public after 18 months of keeping its doors locked and offering only very limited access.

A contract between Barnet Council and City YMCA, who will manage the centre, has finally been agreed in principle. Once it is signed, City YMCA will move into their office in the building and the centre will at last be open for business.

Balancing the books

A key issue in the negotiations has been how to make the centre self-sustaining as the council cannot fund the running costs. But if rents and service charges are too high, community groups hiring space will find it difficult to offer affordable activities to local people. Details of how the books will be balanced are not yet available.

East Finchley councillor Arjun Mittra said he was glad that the building would be open to full public use at last, but was disappointed the council "will set the charges at a full cost recovery rate". He added: "There may be more funding for councils in future, but for the time being it will be more expensive to book."

A Barnet Council spokesperson told us: "Some areas of the centre will be available for hire at charity rates and some of the general and communal areas will be available free of charge."

A story of losses and rights

The centre has been partially open for the last few months, to a nursery, and the Somali Bravanese Welfare Association

(SBWA).

The council has agreed a direct lease with the SBWA, who lost their space in the Coppetts Road Community Centre in Muswell Hill when it was destroyed in a racist arson attack in 2013. The council promised to put aside £1million in order to re-provide the lost facilities.

In 2015 the council decided to use this fund, plus £600,000 insurance money, towards the £2.65m cost of building the Tarling Road centre and to lease half the space to the SBWA.

It is on the site of the Old Barn which was a thriving centre for children and young people for over 25 years until it was taken over in 2010 by a group of trustees, who closed down all the services. The Old Barn Action Group campaigned for four years to get the centre restored to the community. It was finally wrestled back in 2014, with the lease reverting to the council, who demolished the old building in 2016.



Open soon: Tarling Road



Eye to eye: A young diner braves the dancing lion at Bund restaurant. Photo Mike Coles

Lion dance is mane attraction

Children shrieked with excitement when a traditional lion dance welcomed in the Chinese Year of the Rat at the new Bund restaurant in Fortis Green, N2. The modern pan-Asian diner was packed with families for the New Year celebration at the end of January. Mythology has it that the rat won the race to be the first animal in the zodiacal year by failing to wake the cat and then playing a flute while hitching a ride on the back of the ox. After its thrilling performance, our photographer Mike Coles caught the lion making a low-key exit through the kitchens.

Planting for bees more important than ever as food sources disappear

By Kerstin Fenelon

With planting season commencing it's the perfect time to think green. Planting for Bees is a new initiative being introduced by local resident and avid gardener Lesley Todd with the support of Grange Big Local community funding.

The aim of this project is to entice locals to come together to enhance the local area and the environment by planting a variety of colourful plants that are attractive to pollinators such as bees, butterflies, beetles, moths and a myriad other invertebrates that are vital to food security and biodiversity.

Since the 1970s, two thirds of the UK's pollinator species have seen a decline, mostly due to loss of habitat. Any new pollinator-friendly plants in



Spring project: Lesley Todd plants for pollinators. Photo Mike Coles

your garden or public spaces will help them keep a foothold.

Lesley is keen for everyone to get involved in her planting project and emphasises that it is open to all ages and gardening

abilities. All plants and tools will be provided. To take part, register your interest by emailing info@grangebiglocal.org where further information will be provided.

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Festival fundraiser hits target

The volunteer team organising the East Finchley Festival have thanked everyone who pledged towards their crowdfunding total to ensure the massively popular event can go ahead in Cherry Tree Wood as planned on Sunday 21 June.

With just hours to spare, the team were delighted to reach their £8,800 target at the start of February, unlocking all the pledges that had been made, and meaning they could press ahead with booking vital equipment like the performance stages and toilet facilities. Roll on, summer!

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