



Players: Members of a basketball training team, with coach Kevin Lukau, second left, on the ageing courts in Cherry Tree Wood. Photo Mike Coles

Basketball courts becoming a danger

By Luke Tiratsoo

If one walks through Cherry Tree Wood it is rare not to see a rag-tag group of young, or in some cases “youthful looking”, gentlemen using the basketball courts. For as long as I can remember these courts have been a pivotal source of community entertainment and personal athletic development. To this day I have a scar on my knee from playing there as a 12-year-old.

Sadly in recent years, the courts have been reduced to a state of disrepair. The playing surface is known to be by far the worst in the area and it is almost a running joke locally when planning a basketball session and Cherry Tree Wood is suggested.

One player, Alex, 24, told me playing on the surface was “like trying to make quick turns on your grandmother’s gravel driveway.” Recently there have been many injuries, some minor, one serious.

Popular sport needs backing

It has never been more important to support the upkeep of public resources for underprivileged young people, and to ensure that there is equality of opportunity in sports.

A study by the Department for Culture Media and Sport revealed that basketball was the second-most popular sport

among 11- to 15-year-olds. Another study by Sport England Active revealed that of the 155,000 young people that play basketball regularly, 42% of them were of BAME origin, the most in any team sport.

In June, the tennis and basketball courts in Victoria Park, off Long Lane, N3, were completely resurfaced. In Cherry Tree Wood, the players have had to install new nets for themselves as there are no other affordable courts nearby but the surface continues to deteriorate.

However, Barnet Council has recently swept the courts to remove the loose grit on the surface and our East Finchley councillors are lobbying to get proper repairs done when money is available. Barnet Council told them this could cost anywhere between £5,000 and £60,000 depending on what is required.

Phoenix Cinema gets ready to welcome filmgoers again

By John Lawrence

East Finchley’s Phoenix Cinema was effectively mothballed in March when the pandemic closed down all entertainment venues. Now after almost six months of hibernation the historic picturehouse is getting ready to welcome film lovers again.

Trustees of the charity that runs the cinema are hoping to make decisions this month on a date to reopen and on how the building and screenings will be organised to keep audiences safe and socially distanced.

The Tenet test

They will be watching closely the delayed late-August UK release of spy blockbuster *Tenet*, directed by Christopher Nolan, who grew up in Highgate, which is being seen as a nationwide test for whether people are ready to return to the cinema experience. And the trustees are asking to hear directly from Friends of the Phoenix and any potential filmgoers in East Finchley about what will bring them back, and what concerns they might have. Email your views to: management@phoenixcinema.co.uk

Down but not out

All but one of the Phoenix’s 23 staff were put on furlough in March and the cinema was shuttered for the duration with the volunteer trustees taking it in turns to inspect the building each day.

Financially, the Phoenix has been struggling against fall-



Defiant message: The Phoenix Cinema last month. Photo Mike Coles

ing sales for some years. When lockdown came it had to refund thousands of pounds worth of tickets for sold-out screenings of live opera, which were cancelled at short notice.

However, chair of trustees Alison Gold said the cinema was no worse off now than at the start of March and it had been assisted by generous public donations and a £25,000 grant from Barnet Council, with the potential of further financial help to come from a British Film Institute grant scheme.

She said the Phoenix team were “cautiously optimistic” that screenings could start again soon. “It’s been an enormous challenge to be shut for this long but we have been able to keep stable,” she said.

“The next few weeks are when we have to make decisions. We know we can make the cinema hygienically safe for audiences and our aim is also to make sure we can stay open for years to come. We will be using this time to think about how we can make the Phoenix better and reshape it for the future.”

The man who walked backwards

By Diana Cormack

Many readers may have seen or heard of Michael Dickinson, who sadly died in July at the age of 70. They may not know his name but they might recognise him as the man who walked backwards.

Michael lived in Camden Town but was sometimes seen in East Finchley, where he used to visit the Phoenix Cinema. He liked to sit near the front of the cinema, which of course he reached by walking down the stairs backwards.

Born in the north of England, he began studying at Manchester School of Theatre in 1969 and became an actor in the 1970s, later taking up collage art. He spent nearly 30 years in Turkey working as a teacher and artist, but was eventually deported in 2013 amid objections to some of his political views.

In London he lived on the streets, in a tent and with squatters before acquiring more regular accommodation. Known for his political writing and admired art work, he kept up his acting talents and it was when leaving the stage after a performance that he suddenly started walking backwards. This was not long after his return from Turkey.

Michael claimed this “retropulsion” was not an act but a genuine psychological condition and that he would rather be walking forwards. Having been stared at, filmed and photographed wherever he went, let us hope that the man who walked backwards can now rest in peace.



Retropulsion: Michael Dickinson in East Finchley.

Two men arrested after High Road fracas

By Janet Maitland

A man was attacked on the corner of Huntingdon Road and the High Road, East Finchley, on Wednesday 5 August.

Reports from local people on social media described how a number of youths gathered on the corner by KFC, several of whom attacked another youth passing by and tried to rob him.

“We were called just after 5pm to the High Road following reports that a man had been attacked by approximately four males,” said a police spokesperson. “Officers attended and arrested two males on suspicion of robbery and assault.”

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