



Willow House fire damage may be repaired by the spring

By Janet Maitland

The long-awaited refurbishment of Willow House on the Grange Estate following a fire that destroyed the roof and made residents homeless two years ago may soon finally be finished.

Barnet Homes, who manage the estate, hope the repairs will be completed in early spring, but this depends on

rent lockdown this isn't always possible in practice.

A Barnet Homes spokesperson told us that an "outbreak of coronavirus cases resulted in temporary shutdowns involving workers having to isolate or undertake tests" early last month. Nevertheless, workmen were hard at it in the pouring rain in mid-January when our photographer took pictures.



New roof: The block was partially destroyed by fire

the workforce being able to work. Although construction is allowed by the rules of the cur-

The site was closed during the first lockdown last March and when it reopened in July



Refurbishment: Willow House last month. Photo Mike Coles

there was a slow start because of problems with staffing and materials. However, by December work had sped up and was going well. In fact, just before the latest lockdown, Barnet Homes had been on the point of providing leaseholders access to the flats so they could prepare to reclaim them.

Cost and damp issues

The pandemic has not been the only cause of the long delay. A decision to re-tender the contract because the bids received "did not represent value for money" led to the work being put on hold for a year. Once work started in November 2019, the plan was to finish by March 2020.

But this quickly changed to July when contractors realised how long it would take for the building to dry out. There were

also challenges relating to the building structure which meant that Barnet Homes had to get expert advice and then undertake unforeseen work.

Coming and going

Two of the 13 households forced to leave their homes were tenants who were rehoused by Barnet Homes. One will be moving back in, the other was rehoused permanently elsewhere. Two resident leaseholders will return when the work is complete. The remaining leaseholders rent their properties out. Their tenants either made their own arrangements after they lost their homes, or were helped by Barnet Homes.

Although loss adjusters were able to confirm that the fire was caused by an electrical fault, they were unable to draw any further conclusions.

Plant a tree in remembrance

This winter the Royal Horticulture Society is inviting individuals, community groups, schools and businesses to plant a tree in memory of those who have lost their lives during the pandemic.

Anyone who would like to remember a loved one who passed away is urged to plant a tree of any size, shape or variety where they have permission.

Then they can add the location of their tree to a Roots of Remembrance map, as well as download a dedicatory plaque, on the RHS website at: www.rhs.org.uk/get-involved/community-gardening/remembrance

RICKY SAVAGE ...

"The voice of social irresponsibility"

A world turned upside down

With the virus striking back, we're all living in a Hollywood sequel of the worst kind. But now we have the coming of the vaccine and it's a game-changer because as everyone over 70 gets the jab the world can open up in a seriously surreal way. There will have to be new rules, starting with pubs and restaurants. To go into your local bistro, you'll need to bring ID... to prove you are over 70. No kids or hipsters will be allowed and menus will have to change: an end to the gastro tyranny of quadruple fried chips stacked in a miniature shopping trolley and the return of dumping them in a proper pile on your plate. The same thing goes for hipster coffee that has been passed through the digestive system of an endangered species and served in old jam jars. Instead, it will be all the tea you can drink in white mugs.

Don't get the idea this will be a return to post-war stodge, though; remember that your average 70-year-old would have been hitting their local Chinese restaurant or curry house in the 1970s. These are people who remember when pizzas were special and not just delivered by some kid on a scooter.

And what about live music? They're not looking for an evening of Herb Alpert or Mantovani. No, these people bought The Beatles on vinyl, just like they bought the Stones, Black Sabbath and Led Zeppelin. They probably have much-loved copies of David Bowie in the loft. So if the only people allowed into Glastonbury are the over-70s, they'll want a classic line-up. Just think of Paul McCartney, Robert Plant and Iggy Pop playing on the same bill in a sunny field. Of course, the toilet situation will have to be cleaned up somewhat, but they'll all be there wearing their T-shirts proclaiming "I may be old but I saw all the best bands". And The Coffin Dodgers, the radical biking wing of the Pensioners' Alliance, will come on their Harley Davidsons to drink beer and see fair play. At a festival of this calibre, who could possibly fill the legends slot on the Sunday afternoon? There can be only one choice. He may have had to cancel his "I'm Nearly 80" tour last year but, freshly vaccinated, he'll be fit and ready. Yes, folks, it'll be time for Cliff to remind the crowd why they like to 'Move It'. Like I said, this summer is going to be the world turned upside down.

Good advice for seniors on staying well this winter

By Daphne Chamberlain

Age UK has put together an advice sheet on how to stay safe and well this winter. Here are some extracts:

Keep warm

Cold puts pressure on hearts and circulatory systems, increasing the risk of heart attack or stroke, as well as hypothermia. If you suspect yourself, or another, is experiencing any of these, call 999 immediately, or 112 from a mobile. For symptoms of heart attack or hypothermia and advice on how to help, see NHS websites.

Wrap up well, with layers, and take extra when spending time outside. Keep a comfortable home temperature through the day. Close bedroom windows at night, and curtains at dusk. If necessary, get help with heating costs. The Age UK website www.ageuk.org.uk has advice, as well as tips for keeping hands and feet warm.

Keep moving

Try not to sit still for more than one hour at a time. The Age UK website has simple home-based exercises, plus advice if you are unsure where to start, or find moving difficult.

In East Finchley, the Ann Owens Centre in Oak Lane, and the Green Man Centre on Strawberry Vale offer a range of fitness and exercise classes, but obviously these are affected by Covid-19 restrictions. Please phone 020 8629 0269 for details.

Eat well

If you've lost weight without meaning to, or have a smaller appetite than usual, find out why. It's important to eat, even if you only fancy a slice of cake. Something is always better than nothing.

Try the Age UK "winter

warmer" recipes.

Medical advice

Everyone aged 65 and over, anyone who cares for a friend or family member, front line workers, and anyone in a clinical risk group, or who lives with someone previously asked to shield, is entitled to the free flu jab. For over 65s it will help boost the immune system's response to flu and is not incompatible with the anti-covid vaccines. A flu jab is even more important this year, with the coronavirus threat still looming large.

Check if you're eligible for the pneumo vaccine, which helps protect from pneumonia. For more information, see www.ageuk.org.uk/campaigns. To order printed copies of the full fact sheets, call 0800 678 1602, 8am - 7pm, 365 days of the year.