



School scrambles after safety alert over concrete

By John Lawrence

Staff and students at Bishop Douglass RC School in East Finchley were forced to spend the first weeks of term last month dealing with the fall-out from the government's last-minute decision to isolate all buildings containing sub-standard concrete.

The secondary school in Hamilton Road, N2, was on the original nationwide list of 147 affected schools issued on 30 August and had to take emergency measures to comply with the government's orders. Three religious education rooms plus the sixth form study area and common room located in a single-storey extension to the rear of the site were closed. Four Portakabins were brought in to provide temporary accommodation while remedial work was carried out to buttress the rooms.

The extension, built in the 1980s, was known to have reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC), and had been subject to regular safety surveys for well over a decade, the last one in May, with no problems being found. Michelle Henderson, Head of School, said the government's safety alert had come as a shock but her staff's quick response meant that all 250 sixth-formers and pupils from other years were able to carry on with face-to-face teaching. "We have been working to ensure the impact on students and staff is kept to an absolute minimum," she told The Archer. "We had a

lot of support from parents. They understood that it's not a problem of our making." In 2010, Bishop Douglass was in line for an £18million investment as part of the Building Schools for the Future programme, which would have dealt with the RAAC-affected rooms, but this was cancelled by the government at the time. "We would have been hoping that at some point there would have been a school rebuild to take account of these issues," said Michelle. "The school has increased in popularity and we were looking to expand anyway. "But our RAAC has always been well maintained and regularly surveyed. We always look at the surveys and follow any regulations that are necessary.

"Bishop Douglass is also a community space used by lots of clubs and local people. We'd like to reassure people that only a small area of the school is affected and that we are doing everything necessary to deal with the problem."

RAAC is a lightweight form of concrete with a lifespan of around 30 years and was used in the construction of schools and other public buildings for several decades up until the mid-1990s.



Long way to go: Chris Berlingieri, left, with friends Mike Keet and Phil Vallentin pass their first marker at The Bishops Avenue

Chris takes 18,000 steps towards a normal life

By John Lawrence

In April 2021, Chris Berlingieri was involved in a car accident that left him with multiple serious injuries. Thirty-six months on the chiropractor and musician still needs surgery to repair his broken body.

His latest operation was a total left elbow replacement last month. This wasn't available on the NHS so Chris, of Durham Road, N2, has been left to find the money for a private operation, including surgeon, anaesthetist and nursing care.

Unable to work since his accident, Chris decided to set himself a challenge to raise some cash. So just four days before his surgery he set out to walk the 10km from East Finchley to the hospital where he was going on the operating table, The Princess Grace in Marylebone, W1.

This was a huge achievement for Chris, who was in a wheelchair for many months and still has great trouble walking. "I don't normally do more than 3,000 steps a day but this was 18,000," he said. "When I set out I had no idea if I could reach the end." Chris met friends and support-

ers at Amici Delicatessen on the High Road before setting out, then made his way very slowly into town, eventually arriving at his destination seven hours later.



Final destination: Mike and Chris at The Princess Grace Hospital

Chris, who played with popular local band Sound of the Suburb, explained why being able to fund this latest operation was so important to him. "If it is successful, I will hopefully be able to get back to the work I love, being a chiropractor and helping other people with pain," he said. "Also I may be able to play the guitar again, and if I'm really lucky, I'll be able to play at the East Finchley Festival as I did many years ago."

Chris would welcome any donations to help him reach his £200,000 target. Find out more on his page at <https://gofund.me/d113745f>.

To boost the total, his friend and pub manager Niall O'Connor is hosting a horse-race fundraising night at Madden's on the High Road on Monday 6 November from 7.30pm. Everyone is welcome to join in the fun.

BLACKEYED THEATRE IN ASSOCIATION WITH SOUTH HILL PARK PRESENTS
THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY TOUR OF
OH WHAT A LOVELY WAR
 JOAN LITTLEWOOD'S WILDLY SATIRICAL AND DEEPLY MOVING SHOW
 BY THEATRE WORKSHOP, CHARLES CHILTON, GERRY RAFFLES AND MEMBERS OF THE ORIGINAL CAST
"MAGNIFICENT"
 THE STAGE
THU 9 - SAT 11 NOVEMBER
 arts depot Box Office: 020 8369 5454
artsdepot.co.uk

From The Ritz to a school cafeteria

World-class chef Amber Francis took over as Head Chef at Christ's College Finchley, off East End Road, N2, last month after ten years of experience in the restaurant industry working at the finest establishments, including The Ritz.

Amber, who also competed in last year's *Great British Menu* TV series, is following her ambition to work closely within the local community with the help of the Chefs in Schools charity.

She is leading food-based education at CCF, directly linking what the pupils are taught about healthy eating with the food they are served in the cafeteria. Amber says: "To share my knowledge and passion for food and cooking is a privilege. We have some very big aspirations for school meals and food-based education at CCF and cannot wait to see what can be achieved together with pupils, staff and the kitchen team."



School chef: Amber Francis