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Playground is new village green

By Lynn Winton

The much anticipated Market Place Playground reopened last month and has been acclaimed by excited residents young and old as a welcome new green space in an area that has been sadly lacking one for years.

I had a ‘walk through’ with Kathy Batten and Roger Chapman, both long-time East Finchley residents and local activists, and Samantha Haycock, from the Friends of Market Place Playground group. They are some of the people we can thank for having the vision for seeing this ambitious project through to completion through many ups and downs.

Their long saga of battling for grants, Barnet Council contributions and fundraising from generous private donors in order to raise the staggering £500,000 needed to do the work has been well chronicled in previous editions of *The Archer*.

In May 2023, celebrated actor Bill Nighy lent his own support to the playground campaign by taking part in a special fundraising screening of his hit film *Living* at the Phoenix Cinema and tried out one of the park’s old swings for himself.

Considered for closure

The end result after years of hard work is a spectacular ‘village green’ where before there was only a grim slice of crumbling tarmac, a few sparse items of antiquated equipment and a park so neglected that Barnet Council had it earmarked as a potential candidate for closure.



Focal point: The new playground restores a shared outdoor space to Market Place and the schools and roads nearby. Photo John Lawrence

The renovation is a major addition to children’s play facilities in the area. There are small play parks at Prospect Ring and The Mead as well as Oak Lane green space and of course Cherry Tree Wood but Market Place is particularly central and ideally placed for youngsters leaving The Archer Academy, Holy Trinity Primary School and, a short way off, Martin Primary School.

Samantha Haycock, co-chair with Michelle Frith of Friends of Market Place Playground, was euphoric. “I was there at the first exploratory meeting all those years ago and I was there on its first day



In the swing: Actor Bill Nighy at the old playground last year

to see the students streaming out of The Archer Academy and straight into the park. It was joyous.

“Sixty per cent of children in East Finchley live in flats with no outside space and deserved better. And I’ll be going there

every morning to check the sand pit!”

The playground will be officially opened by Barnet Deputy Mayor Councillor Danny Rich on Sunday 20 October at 2.30pm.

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