



Uncertainty as park cafés are put to tender

By Cobi Jacobs

The City of London Corporation has announced plans to put five cafés under its management out to tender, including the popular and much-loved Highgate Wood Café.

The issue stems back to 2016 when leases for cafés in Parliament Hill, Golders Hill Park and Highgate Wood were awarded to coffee chain Benugo.

Following a strong public backlash and a petition signed by thousands of people, Benugo withdrew from the catering contract for all three locations. Ultimately, the running of the Highgate Wood café fell into the hands of local operator Hoxton Beach.

Now the tender process has reopened for the same three cafés plus two others at the Lido, near Parliament Hill, and at Queen's Park, NW6. This

Beach, echoed this sentiment, saying: "We have been immensely touched by the support expressed by our customers and we have our fingers crossed that we'll make the cut to stay on in this extraordinary place."

While the Corporation of London has not indicated any preference for large operators, critics point out that the financial strength and integrated supply chains of corporate entities could give them an edge.

One local café owner, not involved in the parks in question, told us that independent operators already struggle to compete with chains offering



Change of owner? The popular Highgate Wood Café.

Photo Mike Coles

has reignited concerns among the cafés' supporters that large corporate chains could once again be positioned to displace local operators.

In its announcement, the City of London Corporation said: "This process will provide greater clarity and security for the cafés' operators, supporting their long-term investment and future on these sites."

For some café operators, the promise of stability is welcome. One proprietor said that uncertainty over their long-term position had made it difficult to commit to the level of investment they had hoped to make.

Petition

Still, many residents remain wary. A petition urging the City of London Corporation to keep the cafés in local hands has amassed over 17,000 signatures. Opponents argue that the award of these contracts to corporate chains would contribute to gentrification and strip away local knowledge and character that make these spaces unique.

The current operator of Highgate Woods Café, Hoxton



Arts and crafts: Families enjoy the activities tables at the Grange Big Local Fun Palace with Finchley and Golders Green MP Sarah Sackman joining in (facing camera, second left). Photo Grange Big Local

Fun Palace brings cultures together for family time

The Grange Big Local team hosted their fourth Fun Palace on Saturday 6 September at the Tarling Road Community Centre, N2, the last event they will be holding as their 10-year regeneration project comes to an end.

Volunteers came together to share their skills, passions and interests.

Inside there were arts and crafts with Yaran Women's Club, Heritage Crafts CIC, Cecilia Montero Crafts, Katy, Felicity, Willemien and Brenda. Fatina from Marah Arabic Language Centre taught people how to write their name in Arabic calligraphy, Boost Barnet offered Jenga (and financial sponsorship) whilst Peps did some face-painting. There was

science with Little Volcanoes Science Club, Long Lane Pastures, and Wild Science, who brought snakes and salamanders to the centre.

Outside in the sunshine, people enjoyed live music from performers from Barnet Mencaps' Sound Hub, alongside soft axe throwing from 224 North London Air Scouts, forest bathing, and free food and ice cream.

"In times of increasing fear and division, it is so important

for people to be able to share their culture and their joy with their neighbours. I am so grateful to everyone who helped, and who came, for creating such a fun and inspiring afternoon," said GBL Chair James Masters.

There will be an exhibition of Fun Palaces research by GBL volunteer Dr Katy Pilcher at the Artsdepot in North Finchley from 17-31 October. The exhibition is entitled Creative Voices, Activist Voices: Sensory Stories of Creative Communities.

Black History Month

A celebration of African-Caribbean culture, music and food as part of Black History Month is taking place at the Ann Owens Centre, Oak Lane, N2, on Monday 20 October from 2pm to 4pm.

Author, actor and comedienne Andi Osho will be joining to share her life stories and there will be other speakers and performers. To register for the free event, call 07502 989403 or email teresa.gallagher@ageukbarnet.org.uk.

Your letters p.11

K O K O S
SHOE REPAIRS
SINCE 1976



AS SEEN IN
FINANCIAL TIMES
"THE WORLD'S BEST
REPAIR SHOPS"

72-74 HIGH ROAD • EAST FINCHLEY
LONDON • N2 9PN
020 8883 0876
www.kokos.co.uk
@kokosfinchley

THE MUSWELL HILL CLUB FITNESS AND LEISURE

Over 100 classes per month • Swimming Pool

Cardio floor • Free weights rooms • Sauna & Steam rooms

Spin studio • Coffee bar • Stretch room • Friendly team

DAY
PASSES
£15

Membership
From
£44.95
T&C's Apply

140 FORTIS GREEN, MUSWELL HILL N10 3EF 0208 883 0500
INFO@MUSWELLHILLCLUB.COM THEMUSWELLHILLCLUB

Join online NOW muswellhillclub.com