



Diary of an allotment beginner

By Nadia Savvopoulou

I have always liked the porches of American houses seen in horror films, in the middle of nowhere with weathered wood, as symbols of defiance. The shed on my plot brought to mind those films, bluegrass music, and a glass of bourbon in hand. It was in desperate need of work, but otherwise, it was good to host my creative thoughts.



My shed at the end of the plot
Photos: Nadia Savvopoulou

When I saw the shed on the plot, its door was secured with a lock that had seen better days. Next day, I found it burgled, the door flung open to the elements, most of the contents thrown out as if in a state of panic and left scattered around. Perhaps I had summoned the forces of those horror movies too intensely. My inheritance included rusty old tools suitable for a big person, a floor that had been fouled by animals, cobwebs, and an ossified beehive.

With heavy duty gloves, mask, a bucket, and a lot of bravery, the shed was emptied, the unhygienic layer of rocks, feathers, and filthy soil was meticulously taken out and a 'clean', flat surface established.

Re-use vs buy new

Being an architect who prioritises restoration and refurbishment, all decisions are a balancing act between using existing materials as appropriate (e.g. no waste of high-quality materials better suited for other tasks,

minimum amount of sawing) and buying new ones.

The pieces of wood I found inside were large, solid timbers in good condition, perfect for replacing rafters or creating a much-needed workbench. Wasting them for a floor substrate was not a good idea, so the search to source 2x2 timber began. Market research was key when it came to choosing the supplier, so here is my next tip: **keeping an allotment is not a cheap activity, so always have in mind that savings are key.**



The shed got a new floor with a solid base, a waterproof layer of thick polythene (sourced from the plot) and nailed to the sides of the wall with inherited nails, and timber joists onto which load-bearing chipboard would be screwed. Deciding the orientation of the timber frame determined the amount and cost of the timber required, so I decided wisely! As a result, this task did not cost too much, and once complete, I was less worried about hygiene!

But how about the rest of the plot? Glad you asked! Let's talk about this in the next chapter...



Play project: The Market Place Playground had support from Grange Big Local. Photo Mike Coles

Grange Big Local: A decade of community action

As Grange Big Local (GBL) reaches the end of its ten-year term, project manager Karen Hart says the team behind it want to say a huge thank you to the residents, volunteers, and partners who helped make it all happen.

Back in 2014, GBL was entrusted with just over £1 million of National Lottery funding to support projects chosen, shaped and delivered by local people. Run by a partnership board of residents, the goal was to make East Finchley a better place to live for everyone in the community.

GBL has supported dozens of projects, large and small, from playgrounds and gardens to youth and arts programmes, including the transformation of Market Place Playground into an imaginative play space for families and the creation of Barnwood Community Forest Garden, now a haven for people and wildlife. It has also supported Lymore Gardens Football Club to grow opportunities for girls' football, Art Against Knives to help young people express themselves through creativity and stay safe from violence, and a Warm Spaces initiative, bringing people together for conversation and connection.

Among GBL's final projects is the long-awaited refurbishment of the Trinity Road/Manor Park Road underpass. GBL has

engaged local schools, residents and artists to feature new artwork and poetry. The refurbishment is also adding play features, lighting, landscaping and better drainage.

GBL has always been about local people working together and there has been so much positive collaboration across our community. Hundreds of people have given their time, skills and energy, running activities, leading projects and building connections.

Chair James Masters said: "This has always been about neighbours helping neighbours. Thank you to everyone who played a part. We did what communities do best - we listened, we disagreed, we tried, we adapted. Some ideas worked brilliantly. Others took longer than planned. But together,

we've shown the power of local people to make change happen" GBL would also like to thank Inclusion Barnet for hosting our team and supporting our final plan, as well as Local Trust, our main funder over the past ten years. Thanks also to our collaborators and friends: Barnet Council, East Finchley Community Trust, Finchley Charities, Age UK Barnet, local schools, churches, and so many more who shared our journey. To mark the end of this chapter, GBL is producing a short film and a legacy book, sharing reflections on what worked, what was challenging and what might inspire others to try and create change in their communities. Watch this space for further details on how to order a free e-copy or printed version.

At the heart of the Disneyland parade

As part of the 25th anniversary celebrations for performing arts school Razzamataz Barnet, East Finchley residents Emily and Ava Henwood joined a trip to Disneyland Paris, where they performed for a global audience in the iconic Disney parade. Here their mum Kate recalls the experience.

The Disneyland performance was a long-awaited return to the stage after a planned 2020 visit was cancelled due to the Covid pandemic. After group auditions and a year of rehearsals, to ensure they met the exacting Disney standards, Emily and Ava set off for Disneyland Paris with over 300 other Razzamataz students from across the UK.

Emily said: "It felt amazing to perform in front of so many people at such an amazing place. We were nervous before it but all the rehearsals paid off and made it an incredible experience."

Ava agreed: "It was a truly unforgettable experience and I am so lucky to have been given the opportunity to take part. It was really enjoyable." What they may not fully express in words is just how transformative this experience was for them. has helped to build their confidence, resilience, and self-belief, skills that will have a lasting impact on their lives, both now and in the future. A once-in-a-lifetime experience for our whole family. Razzamataz Barnet offers weekly



Fairy tale: The Razzamataz dancers at Disneyland Paris

classes in dance, drama and singing for children aged four to 18, with additional classes available to prepare those young

people who are considering vocational training. Find out more at www.barnet.razzamataz.co.uk

THE AVENUE TENNIS CLUB

The Avenue Lawn Tennis Club, Sylvan Avenue, Finchley Central, N3 2LE

We're seeking a dedicated Club Manager to oversee day-to-day operations of our well-established local tennis club.

Key Responsibilities:

- **Facilities & Member Services:** Supervise maintenance, manage supplies, handle membership renewals and enquiries
- **Court & Communications:** Oversee ClubSpark booking system, coordinate with Head Coach, maintain website and member communications
- **Project Management:** Supervise club upgrades and coordinate with contractors

What We're Looking For:

- **15 hours per week;** available 3 days per week with evening/weekend flexibility for urgent matters
- Ideally local to the Club for short-notice visits
- IT competent and willing to learn ClubSpark software
- Excellent communication skills and reliable self-management

You will work alongside the Head Coach and report to the Club Secretary or Club Chair in the absence of a secretary. You will be self-employed and be paid £10,000 p.a.

Perfect for someone who enjoys variety and wants to join a vibrant local tennis community!

To apply, please send cv and covering letter to Chair@avenuetennisclub.co.uk

For more information or an informal chat call our Head Coach, Sally on 07958 758 580 or email sally@avenuetennisclub.co.uk

The Avenue Lawn Tennis Club is committed to equal opportunities