

# REPORT from Jeremy Corbyn MP

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## Arsenal Development

I am constantly concerned that all major new developments in Islington should have at least half their housing allocated to people in desperate need. The original Arsenal Planning Application linked Lough Rd, Ashburton Grove and Highbury. Planning permission was given on the basis of a high proportion of social housing, welfare facilities, and replacement of the sports centre that is currently housed to the south of the Highbury Stadium on Avenell Rd.

Subsequently Arsenal submitted a new application for the stadium site (now to be known as Highbury Square), which includes 711 dwellings, most of which are 1 bedroom flats, no replacement for the sports centre, and a huge underground car park for over 500 cars. After protests, the developers have claimed that Arsenal will take over the existing “free to use” pitches on Highbury Fields, resurfacing them, and providing better changing facilities, thus fulfilling their obligation entered into at the time of the initial planning applications.

I strongly dispute this and believe that the Highbury pitches should remain free to use, and that Arsenal should be required by the Council as the planning authority, to provide a new sports centre for local people, in particular, youngsters.

After Islington had granted permission to the new scheme, Ken Livingstone as London’s Mayor felt he didn’t have powers to intervene, and so I have objected to the Secretary of State.

Local people strongly support Arsenal as their team, and for many young people the joy of playing in the Arsenal Sports Centre has been the nearest they’ve ever got to Arsenal. It seems very sad that we should have a new stadium and in return, get a gated community and no replacement of the sports centre.

I will continue to pursue this and have responded to the many local inquiries I’ve had on this subject.

## Mexico

I was invited to take part in a three member APPG (All Party Parliamentary Group) delegation as an officer of the Mexico Group. The fares for this were paid for by the Interparliamentary Union and I made my own arrangements for accommodation.

During the visit we met Congress Members and Senators and then divided work up. My remit was that of human rights and women. I met a large number of human rights organisations through the Commission Against Discrimination, and separately, a number of independent womens’ organisations, both in Mexico City and in Merida, in the Yucatan.

I was impressed by the strength of the new anti discrimination laws that the Congress and Senate passed last year, but appalled at the level of violence against women, particularly in the Mexico/US border areas and the seeming inability of either local or federal police forces to do anything about it. For example, of the 433 known murders and

disappearances in Ciudad Juarez, only 7 have resulted in a prosecution from the small number of 25 which were investigated.

I was also interested in the Yucatan regarding the minority language groups (in this case Maya) and systematic discrimination against minorities throughout the country. I am contributing to a report on this.

### **Civil Liberties**

Earlier this week, parliament debated Identity Cards and I voted against their introduction, the house having earlier rejected demands that they be non compulsory and free. I did so because I believe that we have actually authorised the establishment of a national identity register of an intrusive nature, which will not solve the problems that it is claimed to be able to solve. It will also cost £16 billion, and won't be introduced for at least 10 years.

In the next few weeks we will be debating the proposed Anti Terror legislation, about which I have very serious concerns regarding the time in which a suspect can be detained without being charged (90 days is the proposal), the ability to prosecute someone on a very loose basis of promoting terrorism, and the bill's authorisation to the UK Security services to act extra-territorially.

Obviously, no one wants to see terror attacks taking place in London or anywhere else, and July 7<sup>th</sup> was a reminder of just how horrific civilian deaths are. I do not believe that a more secure or cohesive society is created by draconian laws that deny free speech and civil liberty, and I hope to be able to make these points during the debate.

### **Public Transport**

The chaos of the Northern Line over the past week is surely a reminder of what happens when we allow our transport system to be run by TfL (Transport for London), ostensibly as a public service, but then sub-contracted out to

Tube Lines and GEC-Alstom. I have the greatest admiration for those who work for TfL in keeping the system going, but I hope a lesson that can be learnt from this is to bring maintenance back in-house, with tube refurbishment being done directly by those who have decades of experience in running a very complicated underground railway.

We have a much better public transport system thanks to this government, and the Mayor's investment, but I do think the best guarantee of return on this is a greater degree of direct public control. Nationally we've learnt the lesson of the demise of Railtrack. I hope we can learn the same in London.

### **Below is a selection of my diary for the past 4 weeks.**

**21<sup>st</sup> September:** Along with other local peace activists STW (Stop the War) leafleted Highbury and Islington Station in advance of the demonstration on 24<sup>th</sup> September. Later that day I attended a day long seminar organised by the London Group of Labour MPs, and relating to housing, crime and public transport strategies. Among the guest speakers was Ken Livingstone who I questioned closely on the future of the East London Line Extension.

On the same day I participated in the Whittington Hospital Annual Public Meeting at which I presented achievement awards (to staff), and received a report on the hospital's very successful year in which it achieved the equivalent of a 2 star status.

**22<sup>nd</sup> September:** I went to a Service of Remembrance and an interfaith rally. This was organised by Islington Interfaith Council, with the support of Emily Thornberry and myself, and proved to be an opportunity for the whole borough to come together to remember those who lost their lives on 7<sup>th</sup> July, and those who were injured. Emily and I spoke, together with representatives of all the major local faiths including Muslim, Christian, Jew, Hindu and Buddhist. In

attendance were representative of the Mayor, police and fire organisations and other local organisations.

**23 September:** I met Tom Hayden. Tom originally came to prominence in the 1960s as an opponent of the Vietnam War, founding Students for a Democratic Society in the US, and later becoming a California State Senator (Democrat). Since retiring from public office he has devoted himself to opposition to armament and war. Tom came to London to speak at a STW Rally at Friends House. Whilst here it was an enormous pleasure to entertain him at the House of Commons, and to thank him for all he's done.

**24<sup>th</sup> September:** The Angola-Mozambique Committee met for its day long conference and as chair of the Angola Group I was asked to give an introductory talk on my visit, and on my support for a Donor's Conference, to alleviate the dislocation of war and poverty in Angola.

The 24<sup>th</sup> was also the big Anti War Demonstration in Parliament Square - the 12<sup>th</sup> national demonstration organised by the STW Coalition. We marched from Parliament Square to Hyde Park, with speeches from many including the families of soldiers who have been killed in Iraq, Tom Hayden, Tony Benn, and myself. Islington North Labour Party banner was prominently on display in the march.

**25<sup>th</sup> September:** The Labour Against the War Rally in Brighton was a large gathering at Friends House on the eve of party conference, and included a very interesting speech from former Cabinet minister Michael Meacher MP.

**26<sup>th</sup> September:** CND organised a fringe meeting at conference to call for "No replacement to the Trident Missile System" and I was a speaker.

The Arab Ambassadors and Middle East Council held a joint buffet and reception

which I was honoured to attend in my role as a patron of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign.

**28<sup>th</sup> September:** LRC (Labour Representation Committee) / Socialist Campaign Group (SCG) held their annual conference rally and social, which was enlivened with music, entertainment and comedy. To me the high point was SCG's (retirement) presentation of a beautiful vase (made by artist Robina Tabberer) to Alice Mahon, thanking her for all her hard work in and outside parliament over so many years.

**29<sup>th</sup> September:** Hanley Crouch held its AGM (Annual General Meeting) at the "Laundry" in Sparsholt Rd today. This community Centre was founded nearly 30 years ago when a group of tenants took over a disused laundry to make it into a community centre. Since then it has developed into a preschool, pensioners', and youth centre, providing a whole range of activities and support networks in the community. It's a credit to those who run it, and I was delighted to be able to attend the meeting (with Cllr Derek Sawyer) and thank the staff for the work they do in the community.

The People's Advice Centre (225 Seven Sisters Rd) had its opening today and I was asked to perform the opening ceremony, which I was happy to do. A large number of people from all over the world and Finsbury Park were there! The aim is to provide free advice where necessary and appropriate, but also to provide a supportive community network.

**12<sup>th</sup> October** A substantial group of Islington pensioners came to Parliament to Lobby their MPs: for the linking of the state pension calculation with earnings, and protection of occupational pension schemes. I was delighted to meet them, including George Durack, Annette Thomas, Angela Sinclair and Dave Warby, with others.

A group of the Iranian diaspora from varying political points of view, all having sought

asylum in Britain from Iran, have formed a “Hands Off Iran” Campaign. I was privileged to speak at their opening meeting to support them. They all expressed concern at the current anti-Iranian rhetoric coming out of the US state department, and our government, and the dangers of escalation of the Iraq War into Iran. I specifically questioned Defence Secretary John Reid about this on October 18<sup>th</sup>. Instead of answering my request for a lowering of the temperature concerning Iran, he was bellicose in his response concerning his perception of the threat to British troops from Iran.

I met with the Minister Kim Howells MP regarding Western Sahara. David Drew MP is also an officer on the APPG on Western Sahara and he joined me in reiterating our plea for a UN organised referendum, and an understanding of the sense of grievance and isolation that the Saharwi people feel after more than 30 years in Algerian refugee camps. Kim was very open and frank in his discussions with us.

**13<sup>th</sup> October** I met with James Fielder of the Grainger Trust, which is the Council’s partner in the redevelopment of the Hornsey Rd Baths site, following my expressions of concern about the social housing and nursery proposals aired at the public planning committee meeting. We had a useful discussion about the progress of the scheme, and the consultation and expenditure of the Section 106 community gain money.

On the same day a group of Angolan MPs visited the Commons at fairly short notice, in preparation for their elections (due late next year). The Foreign Office asked me to meet them (I am Chair of the Angola Group) to give them a briefing on the results of my delegation to Angola last year, and the likelihood of a Donor Conference being held on Angola.

**14<sup>th</sup> October:** The Morning Star held its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration at the Camden Irish Centre and a big crowd of over 200 people

were there. The BBC Politics Show filmed the event and among other speakers, Tony Benn was present, having recovered from his recent ill health with the fitting of a heart pacemaker.

**15<sup>th</sup> October:** CND held their conference at the University of Westminster. The theme of the conference once again was “No Replacement for Trident”. The Iranian Ambassador was a guest speaker and he asserted very clearly that his country is not developing nuclear weapons, and is prepared to adhere to the Non Proliferation Treaty. I was re-elected as National Vice Chair on an affirmative ballot.

**18<sup>th</sup> October:** Along with Patricia Hewitt MP I attended the official opening of the Highgate Mental Health Centre (the Waterlow Centre now being closed down) which makes me very optimistic about the future of mental health treatment in Islington.

That evening I presented architectural and conservation awards for the borough of Islington to the new City and Islington College building on Blackstock Rd. From my point of view, the building is a mix of the great traditions of the London School Board building (circa 1880) and much newer works revealed in the frontage onto Blackstock Rd, which is delightful, very user friendly and very attractive to the hundreds of students that use it every day. It’s always a pleasure to go into the building and feel the sense of excitement that exists there.

**19<sup>th</sup> October:** I attended ASLEF’s Campaign to increase the amount of freight travelling by railway.

**Details of my Advice Sessions** are available by telephoning 020 7226 5775. If you have a political query of any sort please telephone the parliamentary office on 020 7219 3545.

