

## Ham&amp;High



## Editor's View

Ramzy Alwakeel

## 100AR could spell trouble for Camden

## Scrutiny is important.

It isn't just important because it is harder to make bad or rushed or selfish or corrupt decisions when people are watching you, but also because it helps people trust in decisions they don't personally agree with, which is useful if you ever want to get anything done.

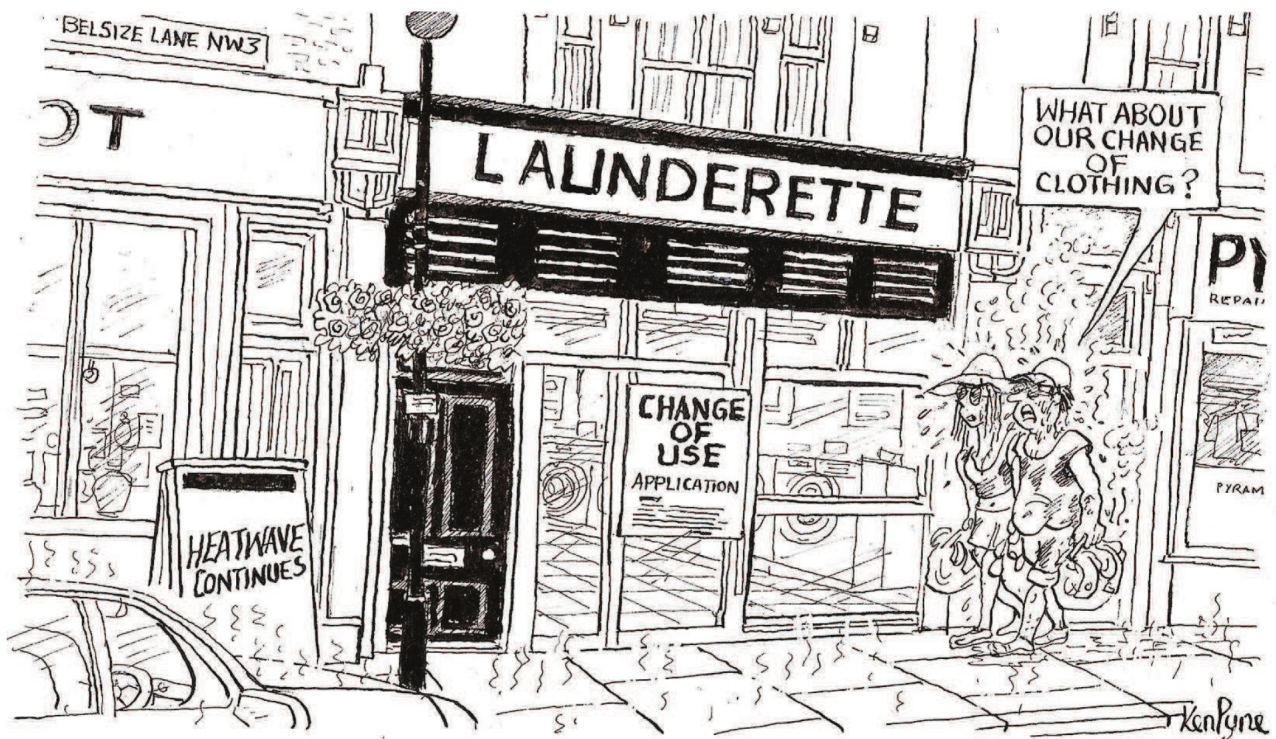
It is of course always tempting to believe that decisions we don't agree with by public bodies are the result of backhanders, errors, incompetence or vested interests, and there will always be people who oppose a scheme or decision no matter how thorough and open and balanced it has been.

But to use a slightly extreme analogy, there's a difference between the family of a murderer campaigning for his or her release simply because they cannot accept the truth, and an entire community distrusting the police for generations because of a litany of genuine wrongs. Public opinion is a big deal.

Camden Council will have a problem if it is seen to be considering the 100 Avenue Road application under anything less than intense scrutiny. Whether or not August is actually a reasonable time to hold a planning committee, whether or not anyone is actually on holiday, whether or not CS11 goes ahead, the years of frustration its neighbours could experience will be coloured by the sense that Camden didn't do its job properly, even if it did. That's a problem for a council that desperately needs to earn back the trust of Swiss Cottage following the Chalco's evacuation and the already less than well received independent review into it (*see right*). It's a problem for a council that will need the public's engagement in good faith during consultations, and their trust and support during tough times.

So for the sake of a month, I'd say: give the campaigners the time they ask for to prepare and to feel satisfied the town hall is doing its job properly – and to hear the not insignificant result of the CS11 judicial review – and the headache you save will be far greater than a few weeks' delay.

## Cartoon by Ken Pyne



## Chalcots report raised more questions than answers, says resident who refused to leave

On the evening of June 23, 2017, I received a knock on the door.

Upon opening the door I was greeted by two Camden Council staff members.

I was informed I had to leave my property due to fire safety concerns. I made it clear I wouldn't be leaving in the middle of the night without further information. It was at this point one of the two council workers said: "We've been told to say the police will be called if you refuse to leave." I chose to reside in my property.

The next day Camden changed its approach and informed me I was allowed to remain in my home. At this point there was a security guard posted on each floor of the building 24 hours a day as well as regular patrol and security at the front entrance alongside Camden Council staff. The building felt safer than ever!

Unfortunately it meant enduring drilling at unsociable hours, constantly being asked who you were as you entered and left the building, being escorted to your flat by security every time you entered, and continuous knocks on your door attempting to convince you to leave your property. At times this became incredibly forceful. On a couple of



## View from the Street

## Anonymous

occasions council staff held the lift open with the help of security as I attempted to go up to my flat because I had not registered my details at the library.

In truth I was one of the lucky ones. The behaviour I endured while remaining in my flat for the month during the evacuation was nothing compared to those who spent nights on an air bed at the leisure centre followed by the uncertainty of not knowing which hotel they would be moved to – and in some cases being moved from hotel to hotel due to lack of availability.

Like many, I was happy to hear there would be an independent review of the Chalco's evacuation and was hopeful it would provide residents with understanding and insight into the problems faced. But upon finally reading part 1 of Marian Harrington's review of the evacuation I almost felt like I



An independent report was commissioned in the wake of the evacuation. Picture: PA

had more questions than answers.

The first thing I noticed was the decision to omit any mention of Camden staff informing residents police would be called if they refused to leave. Marian Harrington was aware of this issue as residents relayed this to her during the information gathering process.

The reason given for the abrupt evacuation was the discovery of various fire safety concerns which led to one senior London Fire Brigade officer insisting it had to take place immediately or an article 31 prohibition notice would be sought and issued.

The review paints the picture that the LFB officer insisted the evacuation had to take place that night. But curiously the officer

was unavailable for comment due to retirement. Retirement alone is not a feasible explanation for being unavailable for comment.

The final point relates to Cllr Georgia Gould's decision to prioritise calling a press conference about the evacuation as opposed to calling an emergency meeting to inform residents.

The review was supposed to be an opportunity to learn from mistakes – to afford residents the honesty and transparency they were neglected during the evacuation process. Whether Camden Council has achieved this remains to be seen.

**The Ham&High has honoured this columnist's wish for anonymity, but has verified their address.**