

MAY NEWSLETTER

Spring is in the air and so is change. As blossom brightens the streets and the evenings stretch out warm and golden, our community in Barking and Dagenham is buzzing with anticipation. This Thursday 7th May, residents across all 19 wards head to the polls in the borough's local council elections, with every single seat up for grabs for the first time since 2022. After four years of unanimous Labour control, this election is shaping up to be one of the most hotly contested in recent memory, with the Greens, Conservatives, and Reform UK all making a play for the borough. So make sure you are ready to make your voice heard on the day. Whatever the result, one thing is certain: this is a community that cares deeply about its future, and that spirit of engagement is exactly what we celebrate here at the hub every single month. Welcome to May's newsletter, let's get into it!



Here's what else we've been part of recently:

Recent Community Actions

Accountability Assembly at St Margaret's Church

On 23rd April '26, residents and community groups gathered at the Barking & Dagenham Citizens Accountability Assembly at St Margaret's Parish Church, following a housing enquiry that engaged over 100 local people. The assembly brought community led demands, especially on fair work, wages and living standards, directly to decision makers. The Leader of the Council and party representatives, including Dominic Twomey(Labour), Andrew Boff (Conservative), Emma Grove(Green) and Ben Suter(Reform), were held accountable to residents' asks.

Organised by Citizens UK, Thames Life and BD Citizens, the event focused on holding decision makers accountable to community priorities, with candidates responding directly to the issues raised. It was not a traditional Q&A, but a structured assembly where local voices set the agenda. Representatives said yes to almost all of the asks, and now we wait to see those commitments turned into action, showing the real power of organised community action in shaping the borough's future.



Thames Life at London Marathon

Our CEO, Matt, took on the challenge of the 2026 London Marathon on 26th April, completing the iconic race in aid of Thames Life. Thanks to the incredible generosity of supporters, Matt raised approximately £850, which has been ringfenced to fund a community event at Thames View and Barking Riverside. A fantastic personal achievement and a wonderful contribution to the local community!

Health and wellbeing outreach with elders

Our Community Organiser, Marion, continues her fantastic wellbeing and health outreach work at Hockley Mews retirement housing complex. Just look at how happy everyone is getting their hands in the soil, planting coriander and strawberries together, proof that a little gardening goes a long way in bringing smiles, connection, and a sense of purpose to the community!



Upcoming events



Get your fingers moving and lend a hand to the BFF team. They are doing an amazing job keeping a green space alive in what can feel like an dystopian reality of concrete. Join them at the Terrible Gardeners Club, every Saturday from 12 to 2pm at the Barking Food Forest.

Our Wednesday residents group meetings are undergoing an exciting structural change this month, one we expect to carry forward from here on. To kick things off, we have four wonderful community events lined up, each centred around a key theme; planning, business networking, the environment, and our residents charter values. It's a fantastic foundation for a more focused and engaging residents group going forward! Drop in to any or all and get involved in shaping your community.



Join our residents planning forum online or in-person, a vital space for residents to discuss issues on housing decisions that affect their community.



We will be hosting this, a free social evening bringing together local organisations and volunteers around community conversations and collective impact. Our last event was a great success, providing a fantastic platform for local business owners to share their stories, skills, and inspire one another.



Or come and be part of the Barking & Dagenham Friends of the Earth meeting, where vital environmental campaigns are getting launched for the future of our borough; from fighting for clean air and water, to championing better health outcomes and open, accessible green spaces for all.

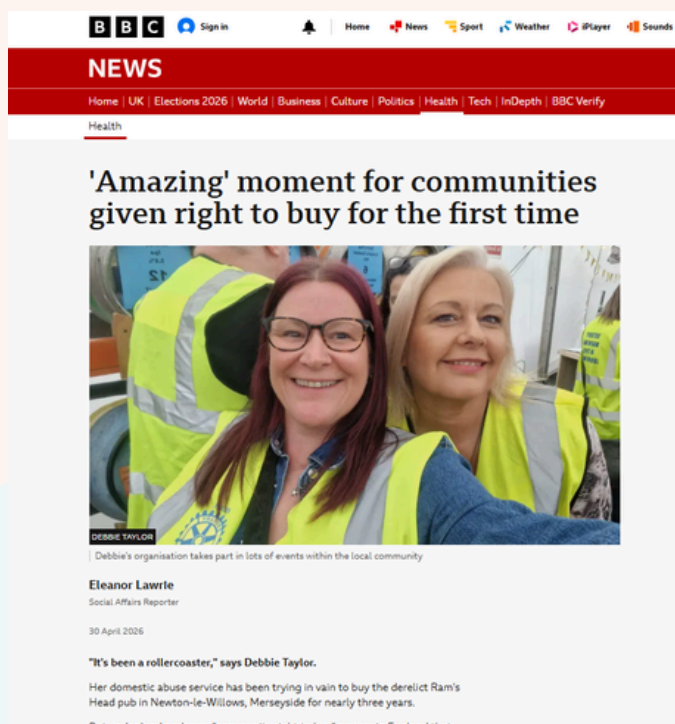
Please keep an eye on our socials for details on more upcoming events! We share our philosophies, insights, and everything we are involved in along the way. Our growth is entirely organic, and we depend on the support of our community to keep doing what we do. We fight for the causes that matter most including housing, green spaces, health outreach, and research-backed work through university partnerships, while giving a platform to local business owners and delivering a diverse range of events that truly serve the community. If you believe in what we do, please give us a like, share our work, and drop us a message to get involved as every bit of support makes a difference! Scan the QR codes that will lead you to our respective socials.



Last but not least, feel welcome to join an incredibly beneficial two-day Community Organising Training organised by Citizens UK, taking place Wednesday 20th to Thursday 21st May, 9:00am to 5:00pm at St Mary's Church Walthamstow, London E17 9RJ. This is your stepping stone to becoming empowered, finding your voice, and gaining the skills, tools, and confidence to stand up for the rights of your community.

Previous trainees have gone on to negotiate with Prime Ministers, CEOs, and local councils on issues ranging from refugee resettlement to the real Living Wage. You will learn the core principles of community organising including relationship building, leadership development, and working with decision-makers to drive real social change. To register, please visit the link in our bio. Please note this training is for those already active in core or campaign teams who have had a one-to-one with a Citizens UK community organiser.

In other news



A landmark new law in England has given community groups the right to buy local assets for the first time, as part of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act.

Grassroots organisations now have a 12-month window to raise funds and purchase community assets such as disused pubs, market halls, and libraries, with an expanded definition of what qualifies as a community asset. A huge step forward for communities across the country!

How do you think we can leverage this law right here in our community?

Community spotlight

One of our seasoned community organiser Marion's granddaughter, Bethany Walker, recently completed her volunteering placement with us. Here is what she had to say about her experience!

With all the events and community organising we do, we believe nothing will change without honest, independent and unbiased insight from the people who matter most, our residents. That is why our approach is different. Guided by the Thames Life Resident Charter, our research is independent of developers, transparent in its purpose, and open to all views, including criticism and disagreement. These are not PR exercises. They are real conversations, led by residents, for residents. Our latest round of engagement is now complete, and findings will be shared in the coming months. If you would like to share your views in a safe, independent space, we would love to hear from you. Get in touch with Thames Life directly at info@thames-life.org, because meaningful change starts with listening, properly.

That's it from us!
Hasta la vista till next month.
Until then, keep being the change that you
want to see in society.

