

Camden New Journal

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UK WEEKLY NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR

WE LOVE
GROUND STAFF
&
CORAM'S



PARK JOBS THREAT

Claims historic fields are being 'privatised' – See page 2

Campaigners' joy over runner who fled brutal civil war in 2016

SEYFU WINS MARATHON BID TO STAY



All in white...
but Elke was
full of colour

– See page 4

Quiz host is latest to
back a Barry plaque

– See page 5

Boss Arteta
defends club
recruitment

– See back page



by TOM FOOT

A "SAVE Coram's Fields" campaign has been launched after the cash-strapped charity running the historic park threatened its groundskeepers with redundancy.

Seven staff who have worked in the children-only park for generations may be laid off as part of a cost-cutting shake-up.

A restructure plan has been agreed by the board of trustees in a move that campaigners say will break a long-lasting bond with the community.

The Coram's Fields Users Group (CFUG) say the charity has in recent years overseen "a slide into total commercialisation" and the neglect of what they consider "a national treasure".

The petting farm has been shut down, the paddling pool has run dry, and football pitches used by children are being rented out more frequently to young professionals.

Parents said the park felt "unloved" and asked why there had been no meaningful investment despite large grants from the council and other organisations.

The charity's boss said there was a need to restructure the workforce due to "limited financial resources".

But parent Michelle Zini, who has set up a petition, said: "Two of the ground staff we all know really well, Noel and



Coram's Fields Users Group claims the park has been allowed to 'slide into total commercialisation'

Save our park! Fears keepers will be axed

John. They have been there for over 20 years and the park can't run without them.

"They know the history of the place, the families and the generations that

have gone through there. The grounds staff do 101 things, too – they chase people off if they need to, [and] fix the toilets."

She added: "Where is all the money going? They have this marquee that takes over half of the park for rental, but we feel like we don't see any

Fields and Harmsworth Memorial Playground charity which raises funds through grants, the football pitches and fundraising events.

Labour councillor Julian Fulbrook, who was a trustee at the charity for 40 years but stood down in 2019, said: "The

are consulting with a small number of staff within the charity.

"This is in relation to proposals to reform some of our working practices and to ensure the best use of our limited financial resources. We understand that this

Joy as runner is told he can stay

from page 1

"Seyfu's delighted, he's doing well and he's very happy," said Alex Eagle, the charity's chief executive.

"We're delighted for Seyfu, too. We've worked with Seyfu for a number of years and [following the rejection of his claim] we could see him deteriorate in front of our eyes. But Heathside coaches have emailed this morning to say he's a transformed person: a weight is off his shoulders."

Mr Eagle added: "We don't know on what grounds they withdrew their decision, but our lawyer Esme has requested that information. She has been incredible. It was all done with her

Fields Parkrun and continues to compete at elite level with The Running Charity.

Mr Eagle said: "It's a brand new chapter for Seyfu, but even when you get your immigration status and you're given leave to remain, it's still a challenging environment to succeed in for asylum seekers and refugees."

He added: "We did a little fistbump in the air, and then it's, 'What's next?' We had a triumphant five minutes."

Of the young people The Running Charity works with, 30 per cent are asylum seekers.

"Seyfu has got this unique running ability, which enabled the community to get behind him," said Mr Eagle.



Home Secretary urged to stop deportation
Runners' plea: Don't send our Seyfu back to danger zone

How the New Journal reported on Seyfu's case last year

oversight. From a human perspective, I wish all lawyers were as good as her."

Mr Jamaal told the New Journal in December how he saw unthinkable trauma before leaving Ethiopia in 2016.

"I witnessed people being murdered in the desert so that the traffickers could assert their authority," he said. "To scare you into submission they beat you

"We've got other young people in the exact same position, but maybe their story wouldn't get as much traction – but they still deserve to be treated with the same empathy. It's an absolutely brutal system for them to navigate."

While the Home Office said it does not comment on individual cases, a spokesperson said: "The

Our resident

resources .
But parent Michelle Zini, who has set up a petition, said: "Two of the ground staff we all know really well, Noel and

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The grounds staff do 101 things, too – they chase people off if they need to, [and] fix the toilets."

She added: "Where is all the money going? They have this marquee that takes over half of the park for rental, but we feel like we don't see any of money back into the park. The sheep and goats and rabbits, they're all gone. It feels unloved."

Coram's Fields is a unique park for youngsters, sitting on land which was once part of the Foundling Hospital for homeless children.

Veljko Zizic, the CFUG secretary, said: "It has gone from being what used to be an asset controlled by the community, to an asset that has become privatised. Despite all the commercialisation there has been no investment in the park whatsoever."

He added: "The renting of the football pitches has been slowly ratcheted up. It's really affecting the spirit. I do describe it as a national treasure."

After it was part of the Foundling Hospital, the park was eventually bought by a group of investors and reopened in 1936 as a "safe haven for the children of King's Cross, Holborn and Bloomsbury". Its current custodian is the Coram's

Memorial Playground charity which raises funds through grants, the football pitches and fundraising events.

Labour councillor Julian Fulbrook, who was a trustee at the charity for 40 years but stood down in 2019, said: "The finances cannot have been easy in the last couple of years, but the ward councillors for Holborn and Covent Garden raised over £100,000 of capital grant for them. I ran a fundraising 26-mile marathon over 10 days

are consulting with a small number of staff within the charity.

"This is in relation to proposals to reform some of our working practices and to ensure the best use of our limited financial resources. We understand that this may cause some concern within our community.

"However, the petition makes a number of false claims, and we feel it's important that our users have access to accurate information."

He added: "The consultation remains in its

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for them in the first lockdown, and when there was a security issue we raised additional amounts to employ additional temporary staff on the gate."

The charity's most recent accounts predict a £300,000 deficit for 2021/22 and reveal a "major challenge" in keeping the park open without the "normal levels of income".

Chief executive Stuart Woods said: "We are aware of a petition that was started over the weekend, relating to a proposed restructure of our grounds team at Coram's Fields.

"It is correct that we

early stages, the purpose of which is to provide the opportunity for all staff affected to give feedback on proposals that we have put forward.

"No decisions have or will be taken until we have been able to hear from everyone affected and consider their views, including listening to any alternative proposals.

"The petition claims that new roles have already been advertised. This is completely false.

"We understand this is a difficult time for those affected and we are providing as much support as we can throughout the process."

Journal in December how he saw unthinkable trauma before leaving Ethiopia in 2016.

"I witnessed people being murdered in the desert so that the traffickers could assert their authority," he said. "To scare you into submission they beat you and ransom you, buy you and sell you.

"Running removes my stress, my mental problems – I forget, it's my remedy. When I run I am healthy, I am happy. There are times you remember the problems, the journey, the traffickers, but I feel safe in England."

Mr Jamaal is a winner of the London Landmarks Half-Marathon, beating 14,000 others. He regularly participates in the Highbury

story wouldn't get as much traction – but they still deserve to be treated with the same empathy. It's an absolutely brutal system for them to navigate."

While the Home Office said it does not comment on individual cases, a spokesperson said: "The asylum system is broken, which is why our New Plan for Immigration will ensure we are fair to those in genuine need and break the business model of heinous people smugglers.

"We are committed to resolving asylum claims quickly, but we are dealing with a significant number of claims that should have been made in a first safe country, rather than people risking their lives making dangerous crossings."



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