

## Betting shops are high street plague

DESPITE being the capital's second smallest borough, Islington now has 72 betting shops; more bookmakers than there are schools. They're a plague on our high streets, pushing out independent retailers and preying on the poor and vulnerable. The Portas Review called for legislation to be tightened to make it harder for betting shops to dominate our high streets. Yet the Government, which commissioned the review, has done the opposite, relaxing planning laws in May to allow betting shops to open without planning permission.

In Islington, we are saying enough is enough. We've written to Eric Pickles asking for our planning powers back. Local businesses deserve to thrive – not betting shops and payday lenders. **Clr Richard Watts (Lab), leader, Islington council**

In contrast to Redbridge and Southwark, trying to halt the tide of bookies' shops, the lead licensing officer in Haringey has written to councillors to say that anti-social behaviour by customers of a Betfred shop on Tottenham High Road is not grounds for objecting to an application for a second shop a little down the road. Thus it would appear that operating a business where customers are responsible for making residents' lives a misery, including by aggressive begging from passers-by and threatening to rob workers on the nearby market stall, is no barrier to imposing more of the same. Local people expect better.

**Martin Ball**

## The darkest days of Doctor Who

AFTER the galactic self-congratulation around the 50th anniversary Doctor Who, could we have a "touching drama" about how the BBC wrecked the show in the years after 1977? It could start with head of serials Graeme MacDonald surrendering to Mary Whitehouse and bullying producer Graham Williams into making Doctor Who unscarly; then there could be Tom Baker and Douglas Adams turning it into a bad comedy, Michael Grade taking the show off air for 18 months and Jonathan Powell cancelling it.

Finally, it could portray the 13 years that saw anyone who said the show was great and should be back on TV dismissed as "geeks", "nerds" and "anoraks".

**DA Fisher**



**Out and over-stressed:** Jonathan Trott walks off after being dismissed in the First Test in Brisbane

## The pressures of cricket today

RE concerns over Jonathan Trott's illness and the warning from the Ashes match referee over bitterness between players – was cricket more gentlemanly in the past? I don't think so. Aside from the physical threat of fast bowling from the bodyline series to the Eighties, there is the story of the young batsman sledged by Victorian cricketing greats WG and EM Grace. On being asked if they were intimidating him he is said to have replied: "No, but they are trying to." Frank Worrell recorded the oppressive atmosphere in the West Indies' game against Surrey in 1957, concluding, "I would give up cricket altogether before I would play in another game like that one."

What is different today is the rhythm of the international game. It is almost a continuous round of representative cricket where the player is on line for his country with far fewer friendly games to vary the pressure. Add to that the intensity of coaching, probing for weaknesses in yourself as much as in others and relentless media and public attention. The past may not have had some of the "language" of today, but then it didn't have wall-to-wall coverage and the Barny Army either.

**Clayton Goodwin**

## Staff cuts will damage the Tube

TfL's decision to introduce 24-hour weekend Tube operation is a bright idea but nevertheless a smokescreen for the closure of almost every ticket office on the network. I would understand if ticket staff were being reassigned to customer-facing roles, but their jobs are just being cut – very surprising when TfL is at the same time recruiting people to stand at the back of Boris buses to simply check that people touch in.

Having travelled in more than 50 countries, I consider the beauty of the Tube to be the availability and professionalism of its staff. Ticket office staff not only provide the necessary support to customers unable to use the machines. They discourage people from fare-dodging by jumping the gates, as happens in Paris, boost the Underground's brand image by offering face-to-face assistance to stranded passengers and can help TfL keep innovating by collecting ideas from customers.

There are massive opportunities to cut costs on the network, staff costs

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**Etienne Soumoy**

being one factor. In TfL's mind it seems some jobs are more valuable than others – but happy customers are priceless.

**Etienne Soumoy, business consultant**

WE love the Tube: its architecture, design and presence in London can be fascinating to people with autism. We support the idea of getting ticket staff out from behind the glass but we do want staff numbers maintained.

Under the planned fully automated approach to ticketing, all the passengers who already need staff assistance will still need it, and the demands of the new system will mean more people need attention. The announced staff cuts also reduce the number of job opportunities for disabled people, at a time when there is increasing pressure on benefits.

**Roger Kelly and Claire Lindsey, Thoughtistic**

ALL-night travel and getting station staff out from behind desks are imaginative steps to improving the

Tube experience. A further, bolder step towards driverless trains would require substantial extra investment in safety devices.

While the RMT is perfectly justified in raising real concerns, such as late-night safety at suburban stations, it is very unwise to resist the Mayor's bold initiative on principle. By playing things right, TfL employees could gain from increased use of the Tube network in terms of job security and pay. A purely negative approach will not be appreciated by Londoners, for many of whom the city skyline never sleeps.

**L Shackleton, University of Buckingham**

THE huge congestion during yesterday evening's rush hour at Bank proves we need more staff not fewer, and we need station supervisors who know their job rather than having to reapply as London Underground plans. We are already struggling to manage a major Underground station like this safely with the staff we have.

**Tube station supervisor**

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The idea of there being insufficient space for new homes in London comes up regularly. Look for a few moments at a large-scale map of central London and see all the railway tracks and sidings. The Dutch have been building homes over and around train stations for years. The added benefit is that it saves people time travelling in to work.

**James Gardner**

Encouraging more women to pursue careers in science and technology is critical to reducing the gender pay gap. Huge progress has been made in increasing the number of women in medicine, law, finance and accountancy. With the right support, more younger

women could have rewarding and well paid careers in IT too. London's competitiveness also stands to improve.

**Sally Prentice**

You picture Ben Watson's children being transported by their father in a "cargo bike". Watson wears no bike helmet, and although his children do appear to wear helmets, they are so far on the back of their heads that they are no more protected than he is. A cycle helmet not worn correctly is nearly useless.

**Gerald Cohen**

Chris Haley's question to Rosamund Urwin (Mon), "would she prefer we reduced the deficit by cutting benefits to

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pensioners, or should we borrow more and put a greater burden on today's youth?" is typical of Tory dogmatists, a false choice between two evils when there are, in fact many options. Why not plug tax loopholes that allow firms to make millions in the UK then register in a broom cupboard in Bermuda or, better yet, stop off-balance-sheet accounting for public infrastructure?

**Julian Self**

Approval of the Westfield regeneration project will be welcome news to Croydon residents. However this is only half the story. The reason we need regeneration in the first place is due to the riots and the slow but steady disintegration of

Croydon as a pleasant place to spend time. We need a greater police presence in the town centre – and a tougher stance on criminals – for residents to truly reap the benefits of this scheme.

**Shamir Khimji**

A proper interchange between Crossrail and HS2 is a great idea, particularly putting passengers direct onto the express local line. However, the real question is how many HS2 trains will stop there? Witness Stratford International, Ebsfleet and Ashford International on HS1, which have almost no stopping services in order to keep city centre to city centre journey times down.

**Mike Snowden**

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