

# To Bee or not to Bee?

## The answer is in the local WhatsApp group

KATE KUPER

Sitting at my COVID home desk in the living room, my ears were assaulted by a sudden whoosh and then roar outside the window to my right. Turning away from my umpteenth zoom meeting for the week (being Friday afternoon), I watched with horror as a swarm of bees flew in synchronous formation around my small garden. Exponential horror as in less than 24 hours there would be 10 guests sitting outside for our first summer BBQ!

In moments of anxiety my brain fortunately punches out its emotive side and summons the fixer within. The fixer knows no resource is more effective than our local Whatsapp Group. Yes, we were a friendly and helpful neighbourhood pre-COVID but boy did we go into top gear during the pandemic. Within a week or two of Lockdown we had flyers through the doors of Rotherwick, Middleton and a few on Finchley Road nearby. Within 48 hours there was a growing group – first 12 or so, then 30, 40 and eventually 50 members and more. Some of us already belonged to the larger WhatsApp group (now 91 participants) that also includes Corringham Road, but it was time to get even more local. During COVID the group really delivered true neighbourly support – collecting meds, sharing grocery runs, helping the local food banks, dropping off food to sick neighbours – in addition to the usual invaluable tips on everything from dog walkers to nannies and tradesmen. There

is literally nothing that can't be solved through this magical portal! The bees were just the next instalment.

So I posted my need for emergency bee removal and within literally a minute I had replies from both the local WhatsApp groups that we had resident bee experts in each of Rotherwick and Corringham Roads! An hour later I found myself wearing a bee protection suit, looking like a scruffy Astronaut, and acting as helper to the extremely calm and well equipped Benedict Roth who methodically took us both through the hive removal operation! The hive, more than six metres high up, required various implements

and some vigorous shaking and clipping until it finally fell into the fit-for-purpose container Benedict had brought along. With the queen safely in the box (we hoped), the worker bees (also mostly female – of course!) were likely to fly in and settle down for the evening. I would leave my garden gate open during the night so Benedict could then return under cover of darkness to whip the box and its slumbering inhabitants out of our garden.

And indeed the next morning I opened my blinds to see a garden sans bee box and very definitely sans bees, just a few hours before my guests arrived. What gratitude and relief I felt! According to Benedict several people in the Suburb keep bees, and finding a home for them would not be difficult. Who would have guessed?

It's a source of much amusement that you can find anything and everything you need on our local WhatsApp groups. The Amazon 'everything store' of community support is alive and well in NW11. I couldn't be more grateful to live in such a remarkable neighbourhood (particularly as an immigrant to the UK), and even more so during a time of floods, pestilence and plague!



Photo: Adam Spitz

# Entrepreneurial competition won by Suburb residents

(l-r) Dejan Mitrovic, Clare Brass, Thomas Leech (Photo: Department 22)



Local Suburb entrepreneurs Clare Brass and Dejan Mitrovic, together with their colleague Tom Leech, last week carried off the first prize in the Commercial category of the 2021 Entrepreneurial Barnet competition with their new start-up, Bulkify. Set up and run collaboratively by Barnet Council, Middlesex University and Barnet & Southgate College, the prize aims to promote entrepreneurship among the University community and across the borough. This year's competition involved three stages – a two-minute video pitch, online workshops to help entrants develop their ideas, and a final Dragon's Den style pitch to a panel of four judges.

Designer, trainer and consultant Clare, who set up cross-disciplinary sustainability initiative SustainRCA at the Royal College of Art, serial entrepreneur Dejan and design engineer and tutor Tom, previously ran circular economy consultancy Department 22 together.

Bulkify is all about making sustainable, ethical food more accessible and affordable, to stimulate the kind of agriculture that is planet-positive. Organic and agroecological farming systems work hard to combat, and even reverse, the worst effects of producing food – sequestering CO2, restoring biodiversity and improving our health (read more on the Bulkify blog page at [bulkify.co/blogs/bulk-blog](http://bulkify.co/blogs/bulk-blog)). The pandemic has highlighted the importance of good food to our

health and immunity, and more and more of us want to 'do the right thing'; but when it comes to checkout, we are often put off by the substantial price difference.

A year ago, the Bulkify team had an idea: what if you could harness the power of neighbourhoods, allowing people to buy together to benefit from bulk discounts? After some tests, they put together a web-shop, available to people in the Barnet area, where every week you can find the tastiest, most ethically produced food – organic raw honey, single-origin coffee, fairtrade chocolate and a range of artisan, London-made products – at discounts of up to 40%.

Bulkify works by grouping nearby orders and deliveries, allowing customers to discover nearby local shops and businesses where they go to collect their orders. The Book Warehouse in Golders Green, the Garden Cafe in Temple Fortune and Moji's new barber shop in Monkville Parade are all benefiting from acting as collection points for the hyper-local Bulkify customers. Bulkify is also currently developing an exciting new zero-waste proposition using refillable containers to reduce packaging waste.

The more people join, the stronger the neighbourhood bonds become. If you are interested in signing up and becoming part of the Bulkify community, please head over to [www.bulkify.co](http://www.bulkify.co) or contact [clare@bulkify.co](mailto:clare@bulkify.co).

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## HGS U3A update

MYKE JACOBS

The AGM of HGS U3A was held in July. David Powers, chair of the meeting, paid tribute to Jack Berkovi, its first Chair, who sadly died in May 2021 (see page opposite), and his widow Daphne, who together made such a huge contribution to the foundation and running of the charity.

HGS U3A had over 70 groups running before the pandemic, and still has nearly 50 groups operational on Zoom and in person now.

Richard Abramson was confirmed as the new Chair of the Trustees of HGS U3A. It was decided to keep subscriptions for the new year which starts on 1st September at £25 each (£40 for couples). All the groups running through Covid (whose activities are described on our website [hgsu3a.uk](http://hgsu3a.uk)) will be restarting in September and all Suburb residents are invited to renew their memberships or to join up at [hgsu3a.uk/join](http://hgsu3a.uk/join). We look forward to seeing you all!