



Hair in the Community

It can be easy to forget sometimes just how lucky we are here in Wanstead not to be one of the country's many 'clone towns'. While our high street does have a smattering of chain stores, it is still predominately the preserve of the independent. Small local businesses give the area an allure that is so lacking in the more homogenised high streets. One of the businesses contributing to E11's character is Wanstead Hairdressers.

Situated on Woodbine Place, Wanstead Hairdressers is actually just off of the high street proper. However, with the openness of the green opposite, Woodbine Place feels very much like a continuation of, rather than a deviation from, the high street. According to owner Paul Michaelides, apart from a brief spell as an office, there has been a hairdresser's on the same site for the best part of 70 years.

Paul's uncle Steve bought the business back in 1969, two years before Paul was born, and the shop has remained in the family ever since. 'My uncle did such a good job with the business, it's like he never left, really. I've been here for 18 years now, so when it was time for my uncle to let the shop go I just slotted straight in. It was meant to be'.

Not only has he slotted in, he has become an important part of the Wanstead community. You see, Wanstead Hairdressers is much more than just a barbershop. For many it is a meeting place, a community centre with a difference, where some of Wanstead's more eccentric characters are made to feel welcome by Paul and his staff. 'We get more characters than most, too many to mention' he laughs, 'but, it is the banter that I love most about my job. If I was working with passing trade all day it wouldn't be the same, they're strangers. I've got generations of people that come to the shop. Blokes, who I used to sit on



a plank of wood that I put across the arms of the chairs, are now bringing their kids in to have their hair cut'. And it's easy to see why Paul holds on to his customers. Spend any length of time with him and it quickly becomes apparent that he's the sort of person that will do anything he can to help somebody out. For instance, Paul even gives one of his more senior customers a haircut in the street to save him from getting out of his mobility scooter, it's just the way he is.

Although he lives a bit further afield these days, Paul still has great affection for the area and his parents are still residents here. 'Wanstead's a brilliant place. Fantastic,

especially for the kids what with all of the sports clubs in the area. Once the parents get them involved, they all make new friends really easily. Even if you're not from round here originally, everyone is so friendly that it doesn't take long to meet new people'.

Despite the long hours, and the commute in from his Essex home, Paul Michaelides is one of the lucky few who are genuinely happy in their work. 'My missus often says "Why don't you open up a shop closer to home", but it wouldn't be the same. I know all of these people, and hairdressing's such a personal thing. I'm happy here'.

Here's hoping Paul and the chaps at Wanstead Hairdressers keep it personal for many years to come.

