

Future of Muswell Hill Library - Response to Haringey Council's Feasibility Study

Dear Member,

By now most of you will have seen the council's so-called Feasibility Study on the options for Muswell Hill Library. In this study, all options relating to extending or improving the library were ruled out on cost grounds. The council's position is that the only viable ways forward are simply to leave the building as-is, with no improvements regarding accessibility, space or facilities - or to move the library to the Green Man site at 54/56 Muswell Hill. As you will know, the council is proposing the latter option citing the need to sell off our wonderful community asset to raise funds.

I have put together a Friends of Muswell Hill Library response to the Feasibility Study, and I include it below. We would be delighted to hear any feedback that you may have. The Committee and I wish you a Happy Easter.

Kind regards
George Danker
Chairman

The committee is calling for a ground floor extension, starting from the rear of the library, taking in all of the currently unused land (400 m²). We would suggest building one floor of flats above this - perhaps 10 1-bed flats, each of size 40 m². Given current market prices the likely capital receipt from the sale of these 10 1-bed flats would likely be in the region of £5,000,000. If half of the flats were designated as 'affordable housing' this would reduce to £4,500,000. With total costs of up to £2,000,000 the

Council would be left with a very significant capital gain of at least £2,500,000. In fact, the Council's profit on this venture would be far larger than if they simply sold off the land (valued at £1,750,000 in its current state). Not only this, but the community would receive a vastly improved library with space to increase IT facilities, buggy storage, accessible toilets and an exhibition/meeting space for local arts and community events - with no capital expenditure required. The council would be also making a step towards tackling the acute shortage of housing which exists locally.

We are extremely surprised and disappointed that the feasibility report did not cover this option - especially after we were assured that this would be covered - by Councillor Jason Arthur in an informal meeting with our Chairman in July 2015. We strongly urge the Council to reconsider its position on this option, and we call on Councillor Arthur to issue a public apology for providing misleading information.

The committee has reviewed the cost breakdown of the options set forward in the Feasibility Report. We have found that the vast majority of the budgeted costs are for unnecessary work. For Option 1 (costed at £385k), the unnecessary costs include: £83.3k for heating and ventilation, £72.5k for lighting and alarms, and £29.3k for fixtures and fittings. Removing these three costs would also reduce the need for £42k of 'preliminary work' and would bring the cost down well below £200k. This would then be within the council's proposed budget and hence should be consulted on.

The committee is astounded that the proposed new site at 54/56 Muswell Hill ('The Green Man') has not been subject to a feasibility report. This is a major omission on the part of the Council and we call on them to put this

right immediately. It would be an outrage for some options to be dismissed as unfeasible after months of research while others are deemed to be feasible without being subject to scrutiny. We have had a large number of library users come to us claiming that the accessibility to the existing building is far better than at the proposed new site - due to its position on a very steep hill, amongst other reasons. We have also had no guarantees from the Council that the provision of other services will not be squashed in to any future site. We know from the experience at Marcus Garvey Library that the Council is in favour of adding 'Customer Services' into newly built libraries, at the expense of extra space.

The library building is listed - so no changes may be made without the prior permission of English Heritage. This would no doubt cause problems and long legal battles with any new private owner. The building is of great cultural and architectural significance in Muswell Hill. It is well-loved and well-used, and the vast majority of members of the public who we have spoken to would be very upset to lose it from public ownership. Haringey Council made it clear that they have already invested time and money looking into how to discharge the covenant on the building so that it can be sold off - and that they will be purchasing indemnity to protect themselves from legal challenges. We see this as a very offensive strategy and we call on the council to respect the wishes of James Edmondson, one of the founding fathers of our town, who donated this land for public use only.

In summary, the Friends of Muswell Hill Library reject the feasibility report on the grounds that:

1. The most beneficial option for all parties has not even been considered

- 2. The responsible Councillor (Jason Arthur) provided misleading information on the scope of the feasibility study**
- 3. The costed options have been bloated out with over £200k of unnecessary works**
- 4. More streamlined options would have fitted within the council's budget, so should be consulted on**
- 5. There has been no feasibility report conducted into the proposed new site, yet there are serious concerns**
- 6. The council should respect the wishes of Edmondson and the community regarding public ownership of an important cultural asset**

George Danker

Chairman, Friends of Muswell Hill Library

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