

Downshire Hill Residents Association

Minutes of meeting on Sunday 3rd February 2019, 7pm

Present: Stephen Ainger (chair), Andrew Neale, Christabel Dennis, Mark Dennis (treasurer), Tony Gordon James, , Stephen Gross, Sally Minto, Peter Tausig, Todd Berman (Observer), Teddy Bourne, Patricia Morison (secretary)

1. **Minutes** of the meeting on 2 December were approved.
2. **The Old Police Station: EFSA/Abacus School's new planning application for smaller school**

(i) The Public Consultation – report on points raised

A number of committee members and Downshire Hill residents had attended the public consultation held by the Council on 30 January at Pax Lodge at which the EFSA and the Abacus School presented the revised plans for the smaller school for 210 pupils. **[See Mins for 2 December 2018.]**

A large number of families and school supporters also attended. The meeting was disorganised and a rather unsatisfactory forum for discussion of the complex issues as parents were disruptive. Plans had unfortunately not been available, and slides shown were restricted to location of other schools and details of the catchment area.

As Andrew had obtained some of the plan drawings from the developer he outlined changes that he was aware of from the previously submitted plans. The entrances will be separated, younger children entering on Downshire Hill, older children entering on Rosslyn Hill. The listed staircase will be retained, and only minor changes will be made to the main building. A single floor hall was planned for part of the carpark. No explicit statement was made about the section house: informal comment suggested it will be sold. Andrew noted that as no one had seen the full set of plans further changes could yet be made.

Abacus' headmistress insisted that the school will be for 210 pupils, not more. However, there it was clear from answers to questions that there is no legal limit enforcing that number is not exceeded over time. For example the surplus space could be changed to a nursery school, this is a key issue for DHRA.

The Head of Governors of Fleet School spoke about the real damage that will be caused if the Abacus School moves to Rosslyn Hill, which is outside its Belsize catchment area. The government allocation per pupil is £4,000. The

2018 survey by Camden of school places show that there is a surplus of primary school places across the borough, which was not the case even three years ago. Therefore Abacus will draw away pupils from other schools in this catchment area. Fleet School estimates the resulting loss in pupil income could equal the salary of a teacher which makes their school less viable.

Stephen referred to the recent Camden Council survey which found a surplus of places in every primary school. The committee was reminded that Camden's policy is not to have any more schools, as there are 55 in the borough.

Abacus had claimed the school will be a quieter neighbourhood presence than the police station, which had been busy with police vehicle movements and bustle. Stephen Gross had disputed this view. He has lived next to the police station for 30 years, and it had always been a very quiet neighbour.

Todd commented on the increased congestion on pavements which will result at school rush hour from the movement of 210 pupils, plus 30-40 staff, plus parents/carers.

Air pollution. Abacus recognised that the school will be on a road with high pollution and hence nitrogen dioxide emissions, potentially damaging to children and staff. Therefore there will be air-conditioned classrooms in the front where the pollution level exceeds EU limits but not at the back.

Commercial use of the building. Abacus intends to let the considerable amount of surplus space, which should prove highly profitable. Abacus said that all rent will be kept and managed by the school. The DHRA view is that eventually, however, the excess space could be used to expand the school numbers.

Traffic. This remains a key objection to the Abacus plan. The experience of other schools is that on average 30% of pupils are driven, irrespective of there being a recognised and approved traffic plan in force.

(ii) More suitable locations for the school

The HRDC committee (Stephen, Andrew, Todd, Stephen Grosz, Alex, Nigel Steward) have explored other sites. They reported on The Hoo in Lyndhurst Road, a vacant property. They have repeatedly asked EFSA/Abacus to consider it, but received only unconvincing responses as to why the Hoo is not an option. It is within the catchment area. An architectural survey should be carried out to examine its suitability.

(iii) The planning appeal and preparing the DHRA case

It is expected that Abacus will resubmit in **early March**.

As authorised at the October meeting, Andrew has started to brief consultants to readdress key issues of traffic, noise and air quality. £2.750 has been expended. Mark said the estimated cost is around £15,000 (including VAT). With a £5,000 contingency, £20,000 will need to be raised. This was the amount raised last time. After some discussion the committee agreed that Andrew could commit to a spend of up to £15,000. Any additional spend, or commitment to spend, above £15 k would have to be approved by the committee in advance.

Camden Council needs to be convinced that it is appropriate to turn down the planning appeal, in the light of its policy of allowing no more schools, and in terms of the harm which will be caused to other schools, the neighbourhood, and people living nearby.

Residents in streets close by will be canvassed and asked to write if they are against the proposal. The HRDC will distribute another flyer.

(iv) Discussion of possible alternative use

There was discussion of what the police station could be used for if Abacus is refused planning permission, and if they go to appeal and are finally unsuccessful. It could be used for housing for key workers, or for community purposes as it is the last large building available for that purpose. Or it could be luxury flats , possibly 15, and a restaurant. There would not be parking.

3. The Rubbish problem outside the surgery/Killik's office

This continues to be a serious and highly insanitary problem, and apparently insoluble, despite several committee members' best endeavours over years, taking photographs and contacting the council. The root problem now is Air BNB flats above Killik's whose tenants are told to leave rubbish on the street. The committee was disturbed to hear that there is evidence households in Downshire Hill instruct their cleaners to dump bags on the pile.

It was agreed that another person needs to take up the cudgels. An architectural solution could be the answer, involving establishing the ownership of the two possible sites where bins could be located.

Stephen Ainger

Chair