

**COUNCIL MEETING**  
**WEDNESDAY 25<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2008**  
**DEPUTATIONS AND PETITIONS**  
**AGENDA ITEM NO. 5**  
**REPORT OF THE SERVICE HEAD,**  
**DEMOCRATIC SERVICES**

**SUMMARY**

1. The Council's constitution provides that a maximum of three deputations and three petitions are received at any meeting. These are taken in the order notice is received.
2. This report sets out the deputations and petitions submitted by members of the public for presentation at Council on 25<sup>th</sup> June 2008.
3. In each case the members of the deputation/petitioners may address the meeting for no more than five minutes. Members may then question the deputation/petitioners for a further five minutes. The relevant Lead Member or Chair of Committee may then respond to the deputation or petition for up to three minutes.
4. Any outstanding issues will be referred to the relevant Corporate Director for attention who will respond to those outstanding issues in writing within 28 days.
5. Members should confine their contributions to questions and answers and not make statements or attempt to debate.

## DEPUTATIONS

Three deputations have been received as set out below.

### 1. **Deputation from Mr. Roberto Foth, the Save Bethnal Green Centre Campaign and others about the threatened future of the Bethnal Green Centre**

“Adult learners at Bethnal Green Centre face major disruption, not least the closure of all day classes, if Tower Hamlets Council use it to temporarily accommodate local Year 10 and 11 Bethnal Green Technology College pupils. What is more, statements on the record by the Corporate Director, Children’s Services, indicate that the Council plans to sell Bethnal Green Centre after the 2-year refurbishment period.

[See East London Advertiser of 5 April. It reports that, in a letter to George Galloway MP, the Corporate Director wrote: "Yes, there are plans for the future use of the Bethnal Green Centre and for eventual disposal of the building."]

#### **The Save Bethnal Green Centre campaign wants:**

- the Council to devise an alternative re-housing scheme, one that does not include using the Bethnal Green Centre
- the Bethnal Green Centre to remain open and for ALL adult classes, incl. day classes, currently running to continue to do so WITHIN the Centre
- guarantees from the Council that the Centre will continue to be an adult education centre, now and beyond the 2-year interim period.
- representation on decision-making bodies re: the future of Bethnal Green Centre

#### **Questions to be put to the Council:**

- Why has Bethnal Green Centre been chosen over other alternatives (e.g. Rich Mix) to temporarily re-house local pupils whilst refurbishment work is being carried out? Would it not be better to find an alternative venue that does not displace an existing group of learners and that requires less structural modifications (and capital expenditure)?
- Even if the pupils cannot be temporarily re-housed elsewhere, something we dispute, we want the Council to give guarantees that adult day classes will continue at Bethnal Green Centre. Can arrangements be made and guarantees undertaken?
- Will the Council publicly deny that it plans to, in the Corporate Director’s words, “dispose of” Bethnal Green Centre once the refurbishment work at the local school is finished? And can the Council give the local community cast-iron guarantees that the centre will continue to function as an adult learning centre beyond 2011?

**2. Deputation from Ms Runa Begum, M. Shahin and others asking the Council to recognise and establish a policy on Faith and Religion**

The full text of this deputation request is attached at Appendix 'A'. The deputation calls upon the Council:-

“To acknowledge and accept this deputation from the residents of Tower Hamlets.

To commission relevant officers to create a clear policy on religious activities and facilities with the following in mind:

- That the policy will help the community to have some flexibility to create religious facilities as and when needed
- That it will help identify the need of religious facilities through the various Tower Hamlets future improvement plans, i.e. master plans and stock transfers”

**3. Deputation from Lynda Keen and others of the Four Estates Steering Group about Island Homes**

“We the residents of Island Homes, call on the London Borough of Tower Hamlets to fulfil its role as an overseer by:

- a) Investigating the actions and failings of both the Managing Director of Island Homes and of the ‘Parent’ One Housing Group.
- b) Instigating a process of mediation between One Housing Group/Island Homes and the residents’ groups mentioned in the Offer Document (estate management organisations)
- c) Suspending partnership activities with One Housing Group pending a successful outcome of mediation.”

**PETITIONS**

Three petitions have been received as set out below.

**1. Petition from Mr Iqbal Hossain and others about traffic calming and safety measures on Abbott Road, E14**

“We the undersigned, residents from Abbott Road area fully endorse the following statements and demand that urgent action be taken.

- That we welcome the restriction imposed on heavy vehicles through Abbott Road. However, we deem the measure is too little compared to the intensity of the problem;

- That the scale of traffic is simply far too great on Abbott Road, a local residential road, where hundreds of vehicles produce exhaust/fumes that residents inhale almost round the day (especially during 6am to 10pm);
- That still some heavy vehicles (apart from those that require access) ignore the 'no entry' restriction sign;
- That the speed ramps on the road are apparently ineffective in slowing down the traffic, therefore the traffic from both directions approach the zebra crossing (by the dead end of Aberfeldy Road) in a frightening speed;
- That almost 4 out of five (80%) vehicles ignore pedestrians readily waiting to cross the road at the zebra crossing;
- That particularly the westbound traffic may misjudge the position or, fail to get proper view of the pedestrians readily waiting to cross the road as the crossing is positioned at the bend;
- That a couple of hundred of pedestrians, mostly young school children, use the above zebra crossing in constant fear of life threatening risk on a daily basis;
- On 28 February 2007, a traffic survey from TfL, witnessing the level of danger the pedestrians face, shared his deep concern with some of the residents over the safety issue of pedestrians that use the zebra crossing by the dead end of Aberfeldy Road;
- The constant tremors due to heavy vehicle movement are causing cracks, weakening the structure of houses on Abbott Road; and
- That in the last 15 years, one child has died and another has been seriously injured in two separate fatal road accidents on Abbott Road (the recent accident happened on Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2006). In both cases, the paramedics rushed to the spot by helicopter."

## **2. Petition from Mr Noor Uddin Ullah and others about the management of community projects in Stepney**

"We residents of Stepney, wish to speak to Councillors regarding our serious concerns about the management and regulation of community projects and premises in Stepney."

## **3. Petition from Mr Khales Uddin Ahmed and other residents regarding parking on the Crossways Estate**

"It has recently been brought to our attention that Swan Housing Association has sold some parking spaces to shareholders on Stephenson Close. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2008 we received notification that as of Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2008 bays '1-15 Stephenson Close will have parking enforcement in place'. However, if one walks around the estate it becomes clear that not all of the aforementioned parking slots are actually on Stephenson Close. In fact the bays have been marked out on Rainhill Way. This is creating confusion amongst the residents of Rainhill Way who have been promised in the past assurances that the parking on Rainhill Way will be allocated to the residents of Rainhill Way.

Swan have stated that they were going to provide the existing residents of Crossway Estate with parking bays. However, this has not happened as of yet. Instead Swan have gone ahead and illegally sold parking bays to new residents who were not previously Crossways residents (leaseholder and tenants), completely ignoring the existing residents. This is not the first time that Swan have acted in an inappropriate manner. They had built an illegal building which they had to demolish.

We have complained to Swan, Tower Hamlets Council and our local councillors. Consequently Swan's proposals to being parking restrictions have been postponed until residents are consulted properly. However this is a temporary solution. We are looking for your intervention so that we can come to a satisfactory permanent solution to this issue.

The residents of Crossways Estate also would like to bring forth other grievances and queries.

1. There was no consultation with existing residents before giving parking spaces to 1-15 Stephenson Drive.
2. We all need parking bays. How do Swan plan to provide this? If they cannot provide this to existing residents, then this should not be provided to a select few new residents.
3. The exact number of disabled and visitors bay needs to be thoroughly investigated.
4. We wish a sub-committee to be created to look into this matter and consult the estate. I have attached with this petition with the names of residents of the Estate in protest against Swan's actions. Please ensure that this matter is looked in to."

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Full Text of Deputation (2) – from Ms Runa Begum, M. Shahin and others, asking the Council to recognise and establish a policy on Faith and Religion**

#### **Introduction:**

This document describes the importance of a policy that caters all faith groups, particularly religion. The policy will have a holistic approach to all communities with religious belief. By adopting such policy the residents and faith community groups will benefit in various ways.

This policy will have an unequal impact on particular group and community that are currently excluded in developing themselves, its function will be to establish and promote religious facilities and activities as and where needed.

#### **Current situation:**

The council currently does not have a policy to promote any religious activities or to cater towards facilities that are desperately needed in the community. Most of the religious activities are carried out at neighbourhood or community centres under the banner of so called community programmes and activities, which are subject to the premises managers' discretion and will.

The managers (or facilitators) are most of the time reluctant to provide accommodation for these particular groups as they fear from being biased or singled out from the council and mainstream government, their funding and so-forth. Most of the facilities are out of reach and those that are operating in the community centres may not able to continue in future as there isn't any strong commitment from these centres, councils or the government.

Currently if a community wants to establish a religious facility through the council planning procedure it would be classified as D1 and most of the times these application would be turned down as they may be in a residential area or seen to be changed from their current type of use. But the reality is that these facilities need to be in a residential area. Not only on the council level but also on an individual merit applications are turned down as they provide religious activities.

Currently the council recognise some activities of religion under its "culture" strategy; however religion and going to mosque, synagogue or church cannot be part of culture.

Currently there is only one such facility namely the East London Mosque (Which is actually registered as London Muslim Centre); this facility provides religious activities which no other organisation can match. The local community has hugely benefited from this. But there is no other such facility in the borough, thus people have to come from far of distance to take its service's. This facility has become a hub for the community with a particular religious belief.

No other religion facilities are recognised as they should be (i.e. Mosque or temple) rather than the Christian and Jewish religious facilities which is registered and known as “Church” and “Synagogue”.

The charity commission recognise the importance of these groups and do allow registration to them, but due to the lack of council initiative and policy these groups cannot pursue their activities at a full extent.

None of the “Church’s” in Tower Hamlets are registered with the Charity Commission or Companies House; but any other religious facility or group are expected and asked to be registered with the mentioned bodies. This clearly identifies a bureaucratic discrimination among one religion and another.

### **Summary of benefits:**

A policy on religious activities and facilities will help these communities to engage and practice with their religious belief. It will help identify the need of facility in the area depending on the demography of that particular area. The policy will encourage all faiths to establish their own unique facilities and promote harmony between communities.

It will truly identify the aspect of religious activities rather than cultural activities (Going to church and playing football is not the same).

The policy will enable to identify the need to deliver the appropriate facility for that area depending on the ratio of the population in terms of religious belief. It will be implemented on master plans, the LDF and other small area based developments i.e. stock transfer.

It will promote community cohesion in the borough and promote tolerance among different faith groups.

Such policy will recognise the cultural barriers and will able to promote social inclusion.

Such policy will encourage creating more social and community hub’s locally at a smaller scale.

Such policy will encourage isolated women in the society in their perspective area to engage with larger community without fear of prejudice and discrimination.

Such policy will help create activities in the facilities, catered towards hard to reach young people especially for women that want to engage with women only activities.

Such facilities will engage older people locally and promote health and wellbeing.

This policy will recognise the religious needs of the various communities in the borough and will foster greater understanding and tolerance of interfaith relations.

That the borough can be the champion and could be recognised as a beacon by creating such policy.

Religion is part of life which will be recognised by this policy and uphold the values of all faith in terms of individual religion.

The policy will allow flexibility of creating religious facilities and activities in the borough.

### **Sustainable community:**

As all religion are based on common platform of social inclusion, compassion, tolerance peace and respect; therefore such policy would bring forth these common beliefs and uphold the values across the multi faith diverse communities and lead to a sustainable community.

It will help to diversify the social mix of a deprived local community. It will provide access to new economic opportunities for local people, as well as local social and community facilities to help achieve a more sustainable neighbourhood.

The policy will help to define the economic role of the area, and secure a complementary balance of economic and social functions.

### **The council notes:**

That the council promotes community cohesion

That it promotes healthy communities

That it encourage to include, excluded communities that do not engage in any cultural activities under the councils definition.

That the council should adopt policies that foster greater understanding and tolerance of interfaith relations.

That there is a need to separate “Culture activities” and “Religious activities”

### **We call upon this council:**

To acknowledge and accept this deputation from the residents of Tower Hamlets.

To commission relevant officers to create a clear policy on religious activities and facilities with the following in mind:

- That the policy will help the community to have some flexibility to create religious facilities as and when needed
- That it will help identify the need of religious facilities through the various Tower Hamlets future improvement plans, i.e. master plans and stock transfers