

9 January 2022

To the Board of Governors of Middlesex University

Dear Governors,

Since we began the Hendon Residents Planning Forum over two years ago it has grown to a group representing almost 2000 residents of Hendon, all of them concerned about protecting our community.

The central purpose of this forum has been to enable residents to openly discuss the Barnet Council/Middlesex University programme of development, which will irrevocably change our neighbourhood, including the historic centre of Hendon, and have a devastating effect on our local community and the quality of our lives. As a result, residents have participated in numerous online and in-person consultations with Barnet Council, many also attended by representatives of Middlesex University.

Residents duly submitted their well-reasoned objections to the SPD, Hendon Hub and now to the resulting planning applications. Many objections included suggestions for compromise and alternative development ideas. Despite this, residents were rebuffed by university representatives and there were no substantive changes made to any of the planning documents, the SPD or the Hendon Hub Business Case, all of which were approved at Council, even in the face of universal opposition from the community.

But most egregious of all is the behaviour of the University and its representatives. We were approached by your Corporate Communications and Stakeholders Manager, Laura Norton, to assemble a group of concerned residents to meet with Vice-Chancellor Nic Beech and COO James Kennedy, Andrew Dickie and others (via Zoom) to discuss the plans. Residents were hopeful that the university would make sincere efforts to engage with them, and James Kennedy and others did meet residents in person to visit local areas of particular concern. However, these meetings were largely to address problems that Middlesex University should already have dealt with, for example drug dealing/taking activity and anti-social behaviour in the neighbourhood.

During the zoom meetings residents were assured that the university sought a positive relationship with residents and wished to provide a positive role in the local community. Vice-Chancellor Nic Beech expressed that he would rather have good relations with residents than see the university take over the library. But, despite all the willingness to engage with residents and hear their concerns, not one single, reasonable argument could be proffered for moving halls of residence from Wembley into a densely populated, largely residential area of Hendon. It is simply insulting and farcical for James Kennedy to suggest that one bus journey is too difficult and time consuming to reasonably expect students to undertake, particularly when he admitted to one resident that he himself lives in Epsom and enjoys his daily commute by train. When asked why students might not commute, Kennedy's response was 'it's not nice for them'. Laura Norton admitted that no senior members of staff live in Hendon and as far as we know, Nic Beech is still living in Scotland.

What is now clear is that the university have been dishonest and acted with a complete lack of integrity, putting forward meaningless olive branches such as use of the Paddock, while asset stripping our community. Senior executives have offered no meaningful compromises whatsoever and are intent on seeing the campus expand into residential areas at the expense of family homes and lifestyles, turning what was once a lifetime, multi-generational community into a transient one.

Residents are absolutely appalled by the behaviour of the university and disappointed that they wasted their time on what was evidently a tick-box exercise. Professor Beech has since avoided any contact with them and has failed to respond to alternative proposals including some sources of capital funding that have been successfully tested by other universities and municipalities. Neither Barnet Council nor the university has been able to demonstrate a single community benefit. Residents are now so discouraged that the University's own 'Residents Forum' has managed to attract only two members, with these members reporting that their proposed agenda items are routinely refused, and the university only wishes to discuss areas where 'positive' improvements have been made.

The tragedy is that residents overwhelmingly support the university's ambitions to provide high quality education to students, including modernising the campus to improve teaching facilities. Barnet Council would have you believe that we are student-hating 'NIMBYS', but members of our residents group include teachers, lecturers, doctors, lawyers, architects, screen writers, artists, surveyors, professors, film makers, town planners and those who were not able to benefit from a university education. Many of them were students once, are currently students or have children at university. They believe it is possible for Middlesex University to improve its campus while taking into consideration residents' concerns for their neighbourhood and its heritage. That is why so many gave up their valuable time to meet with, and provided information to, both the Council and the university, to suggest the basis for a new community development plan.

It has been noted by Councillor John Marshall and local MP Matthew Offord that when Middlesex was given permission to consolidate its campus in Hendon in 2014, further to application H/04180/14, this agreement was made on condition that there would be no further expansion of the campus.

And yet there is an even worse situation to consider. Barnet Council has attempted to ride roughshod over planning law and even their own constitution to make sure these planning applications are passed as quickly as possible. Many residents believe they are acting unlawfully. One has engaged an expert legal team to file an application for judicial review; three other residents have launched major challenges in UK courts, and with appeals bodies. Another has alerted the Council's auditors, BDO, to alarming discrepancies which expose the Council to great risk, including potential bankruptcy.

The contempt with which the Council has treated residents is palpable. Council Leader Dan Thomas stated in reply to one resident, 'The project is based on existing student numbers, not an increase in numbers. The university has no current plans to increase student numbers.' A response which conveniently ignores the fact that the number of students domiciled in Hendon will increase dramatically.

In response to a question asked by London Assembly Member Councillor Anne Clarke with regards to the Council's own figure that 88% of respondents to their surveys were in opposition to the development, Thomas stated, '88% of respondents is not 88% of residents', a statement so arrogant and anti-democratic that one can barely believe it was made by the leader of Barnet Council.

Hendon ward councillor Mark Shooter's recent column in the Barnet Post declares that the Hendon Hub is a fabulous idea, demonstrated by the new 'Savers' shop on Brent Street, no mention of the absolute wholesale destruction of the community, over population and decline in property prices, just excellent news for local property developers who wish to snap up family homes at bargain prices

to turn them into HMOs for the countless students who will be unable to afford the new accommodation being built in Hendon.

We have now reached a point where the university and residents are due to come into conflict. The planning applications that will be heard on Monday 10 January have received 97% comments in objection in total. We now know that 100% of responses from residents were in opposition to plans endorsed by Middlesex University and Barnet Council. In fact, only four comments in support were submitted, after the closing date. Three of the four supporters are in fact employees of Middlesex University and the student's union. The fourth, a representative of the African Cultural Centre. We have reviewed their arguments in favour of expansion, which we find unconvincing. Sadly, we have reached the conclusion that Middlesex University, which has a duty to respect the neighbourhood in which operates, is complicit in the destruction of our community and is preventing local democracy contrary to the public interest. As a governor of a higher education institution this should be of deep concern to you.

We call upon you to halt this process immediately, so that Middlesex University, Barnet Council and residents may re-engage meaningfully in the re-development of – and conservation of – Hendon. Middlesex University should inform Barnet Council that it wishes to withdraw from these damaging plans, which in any event were designed for a different landscape, pre-Covid, and before substantial cuts to higher education were introduced. We ask that you request Barnet Council to defer the Hendon Hub planning applications for 12 months, to allow for proper and meaningful consultation, and consideration of a community development plan that reflects the interests of key stakeholders, above all the residents of Hendon.

The Hendon Residents Planning Forum