

Rival group sets up to save Town Hall

Caroline McClatchey

Breakaway group says car parking not big issue

BATTLE lines have been drawn in the campaign to save Hornsey Town Hall.

A maverick group of Crouch Enders has been set up to form a rival campaign to reinstate the historic building as a civic centre.

Known as Friends of Hornsey Town Hall, the 15 members say they are taking a different approach to the Crouch End for People campaign, which organised a mass public meeting in Christ Church two weeks ago.

The Liberal Democrat councillor for Crouch End and one of the founding members of the friends Dave Winskill said: "We want to encourage open dialogue and find common ground and share ideas. I feel ideally there should be one campaigning group and it must be a single-issue campaign."

The group is opposed to the idea of moving Hornsey Library into the Grade II-listed building to make room for a primary school and say the focus on car parking is a distraction

from larger issues.

Cllr Winskill said: "The idea that Crouch End for People discussed seemed to revolve around car parking. It's an important issue but much further down the hierarchy of decision making.

"One idea that has been looked at carefully is a community trust that would act as a guardian angel for the town hall but it's fairly inevitable we will have to use external experts for the marketing and management of it.

"Any development ideas must spring from an overall vision."

The cross-party group held several informal meetings during the summer and includes art groups and people involved in the initial 1996 campaign to reclaim the town hall.

The Labour councillor for Hornsey Richard Milner said the campaign's strategy was different

to that of Crouch End for People.

"The thing that unites the two groups is the push to keep it as a civic amenity but I think more work needs to be done on how we interpret the meaning of a civic building," he said. "I think our roles are slightly different but I accept once we have got through the first hurdle of securing the town hall, we will have to have conversations about how to mesh the plans together.

"Both groups have sent a clear message to the council about what the people want."

Stephen Morpurgo of Crouch End for People said: "We have always said the best way forward would be for the Friends to join our campaign. With our public mandate and their technical knowledge, we would complement each other.

"We haven't committed ourselves to anything but we think the car park would play an important role - we need to

cater for people coming into Crouch End to use the facilities."

Using Hampstead Town Hall's Interchange Studios as a model, the friends think offices at the town hall, which are soon to be vacated by council staff, could be a potential source of income. Ideas for the landmark building include a cinema, theatre and meeting rooms for community groups.

The friends are not planning to consult the wider public until Haringey Council has published its accommodation strategy and conservation plan for Hornsey Town Hall.

The report, due out in January, will seal the fate of the 1930s building but the council has made it clear that the public hall, which can seat more than 1,200 people, will be kept as a performance space.

broadway@hamhigh.co.uk