

Hornsey Town Hall panel chooses football over town hall

Haringey Council's Hornsey Town Hall Advisory Panel made its commitment to the town hall's future clear when last Monday's meeting was cancelled – because of the football.

Nearly half of the panel's 20 members sent last-minute apologies of absence to the monthly meeting – which clashed with England's 7.45pm kick-off against Croatia – with the result that the meeting was cancelled.

The panel was put together by the council to look at alternative proposals for the future of the

town hall, which had been due to be sold to a developer. In February the council agreed to delay the decision on the town hall's fate for six months to allow town hall campaign group Crouch End for People (CEfP) to come up with an alternative financially sustainable plan to keep the town hall as a community facility, and to consult with the public.

When asked why the monthly meeting – which is only due to meet on a total of five occasions – was cancelled, a spokesperson from Haringey Council said: "I think you can be pretty safe it was the football. So many people rang up with their apologies it was ridiculous to have a meeting. It wouldn't have been very representative."

The cancellation has added fuel to the flames for CEfP.

Sally Kendall, the group's press spokesperson, voiced her disgust: "They're in a privileged position to be debating the town hall and that's what they think of it!"

The meeting's cancellation is particularly ironic because the panel's membership was due to be clarified during the meeting, following objections to the panel's make-up by CEfP and Hornsey Historical Society. The groups want to know the interests of those listed on the panel minutes as 'local resident'. They also want an independent chair, and CEfP believes it should have more than one representative on the panel because more than 3,000 people have signed its petition to save the town hall.

But Cllr Bax rejected this claim in a recent interview, saying that having so many signatures on a petition did not carry the same weight

as being a member of an organisation.

The meeting would have been the first time CEfP has come face to face with the panel since Cllr Bax in the same interview stated that CEfP seemed determined to work against the council, adding that council staff have been very helpful to CEfP.

But CEfP claims the opposite is true. Sally Kendall said: "We're certainly striving to encourage the council to work with us in the handover of the site. We've always been of that mindset but the truth of the matter is the council are given opportunities to demonstrate their willingness to acknowledge views of the community and continually they let us down."

One of CEfP's major bugbears is that with less than three months to go until the council decides on the town hall's future, the group hasn't been able to get access to sufficient information that would help them produce an accurate proposal. According to members of CEfP who were present at April's public meeting about the town hall, Leader Cllr Charles Adje said he would run an open-book policy at that meeting.

These assurances were made after council had criticised CEfP during the meeting for inaccurate figures in their draft proposal. Specifically, CEfP wants access to all of the reports made by surveyors Donaldsons who were commissioned by Haringey Council to investigate the costs of renovating and repairing the town hall.

At present CEfP has only had access to some of these reports and has not been able to see those parts which relate to the potential cost of renovating and repairing the town hall – a factor which has strong

implications for the accuracy of their plan.

Earlier this month, consultant chartered surveyor Tony Westbrook, who is giving up his spare time to help put together CEfP's plan, asked David Bond, Project and Development Surveyor at Haringey Council, for a meeting to discuss access to the Donaldson report and any other financial information. He was told that a meeting was not appropriate and that "information from Donaldsons will be made available in terms that are acceptable to the council".

"It doesn't seem like an open-book policy," said Mr Westbrook.

It was also made clear to Mr Westbrook that the council is setting a slower time scale, despite CEfP's concerns that time is running out to produce a viable alternative plan by September.

Mr Westbrook added: "Every week that goes by is another week we haven't got to look at the data they've got."

The group is concerned that the council may grant access too late in the day for them to work it into their proposal. Sally Kendall said: "Our worry is that it will all be revealed at the very last minute when it's too late. We won't have time to amend accordingly and our proposals will be rejected."

At the time of going to print CEfP has not been given access to further information. Despite a request by *Avenues* for a council response to CEfP's claims that it did not have access to information, the council declined to respond, saying that all of the issues will be dealt with in a forthcoming newsletter.



Leader of the Council Charles Adje (centre) listens to a local resident at the recent open day at Hornsey Town Hall