

Chance to test the town hall waters

WHEN THE hidden treasures of Hornsey Town Hall were opened to the public two months ago, it seemed to mark the beginnings of at least a vague understanding between campaigners who want to keep it out of the clutch of developers, and Haringey Council, whose first instinct was to sell it for lots of money.

But what was always going to be a difficult relationship has come under considerable strain since then.

Chair of the advisory panel, Judy Bax, has come in for particular criticism from Crouch End for People. The pressure group in turn has had problems of its own with three key resignations, including that of Sheila Kavanagh, a member of their steering group and the organisation's only representative on the panel.

It will be interesting, therefore, to gauge the atmosphere when the doors open again to the public on Saturday. The first Open Day was an unqualified success in terms of bringing public attention to the proposals, and giving the public an all-too-rare opportunity to see what lies behind the town hall's rather drab and forbidding exterior.

The attraction, both for developers and for campaigners, is in its enormous potential. It already houses a 1,200 seat theatre, has ample car parking space, and an enviable location. It could, with careful planning, become the beating heart of the community, as it once was, and should be again. Successfully achieving that objective should surely override all other considerations.

Clamping your style

Haringey Council's first car pound opens later this month and it can only mean one thing – more clamping, more towing, and more misery for errant motorists, who could end up paying hundreds of pounds to recover vehicles. The penalty, of course, will usually be out of all proportion to the crime. That won't prevent Haringey from following the lead of councils like Camden and Westminster, who have turned the business of extracting millions from motorists into something of an art form – and a dark art at that. You have been warned!

Letters to the editor

Town hall is a treasure, not a political football

HOW sad it is that the efforts to save Hornsey Town Hall seem to be disintegrating into a squabble over egos and power struggles, and in doing so Crouch End for People and the council are in danger of losing the plot, i.e. to save the town hall for the community.

As an architect (retired) and local resident, I wish everybody would remember that what we have here is a unique national treasure, complete with original fixtures and fittings that should be saved, not used as a political football.

If this were a country house the National Trust would probably buy it and lavish millions of pounds on restoring it.

Sadly, they don't do town halls.

What is essential is that the town hall remains intact as an entity containing whatever arts-based commercial uses would guarantee public access and which would also generate sufficient revenue to pay for the maintenance.

The necessary but huge restoration capital costs involved have got to come from somewhere.

They are clearly not going to be forthcoming from the council and any grants will be inadequate.

Therefore, CEfP must relinquish their demand for retention of the secondary car park, the proceeds from the sale of which would contribute to restoration costs.

I know Crouch Enders are sur-

gically attached to their 4x4s and public transport is not what it might be, but the reality is that approval for a large car park would not be forthcoming from this or any other council.

The council, for its part, must realise its responsibilities as the (neglectful) building owner and allocate all profits it would make from any sale to the restoration fund.

I suspect CEfP's original starting point was to save the car park rather than the town hall, and the council's was to make money.

Both sides should meet in the middle, or it will be the town hall and the community that will suffer.

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