

Public Questions: Assets, Regeneration & Growth Committee, 8 September 2014

No.	Questioner	Question	Response
1	Mr Gerrard Roots	As it was obvious at the time (April 2013) that Barnet's initial offer of Church Farm on a four-year lease to Middlesex University would be unacceptable, why has it taken Barnet 18 months (during which time the Council has wasted tens of thousands of pounds on paying a security firm to 'protect' the building) to come up with a more realistic proposal?	<p>Initial quotes were based on an estimate for general refurbishment works which was converted to a proposal for a four year lease term. However, before entering into a formal agreement more detailed investigations were carried out which included intrusive surveys and liaison with English Heritage. This detailed survey work took time and revealed higher costs of ensuring the building will be refurbished in a manner appropriate to its listed status. Therefore, various other options have been investigated to ensure that the Council is able to re-consider its opportunities for the building in the near future. Middlesex University have also had to seek agreement to the new cost structure.</p> <p>So a more complex agreement has been negotiated which has required consideration and verification by both parties, hence the timescale.</p> <p>With regards to the point about 'wasted' resources, please see the response to your question on savings made.</p>
2	Mr Jeremy Teare	Church Farmhouse was purchased by Hendon Borough Council in 1945, in a substantially run-down condition, at the expense of Hendon ratepayers. The Borough Council carefully considered what might be done with the building and, having restored it in 1954, no doubt at very considerable expense to the ratepayers, it was opened as a "House Museum". Since then, considerable sums of money have been provided by the ratepayers/council	<p>The Council does not intend for the building to be used as a museum. In these times of public spending restraint, the Council needs to avoid the sort of considerable expenditure you state happened in the 1950s.</p> <p>The proposal put forward in this report will ensure that the building is improved and maintained to a high standard, and will be put back into use to provide an educational facility with the opportunity for</p>

		<p>taxpayers to maintain this building. Following its restoration, it was listed in the relatively new planning process as a Grade II* Building. So this building is the unique gem in Barnet's architectural heritage; it belongs to the council taxpayers of the borough. Many very wise and well educated people have considered to what use this beautiful property could be put; despite much research, no one has been able to envisage any other viable use for the property than as a House Museum. So, when does Barnet Borough Council intend to restore this beautiful property to its rightful owners, the citizenry of Barnet, as a House Museum?</p>	<p>community use.</p> <p>This has enabled the council to retain the building and the ability to consider the opportunities available for an improved building on expiry of the initial term.</p>
3	Ms Janet Lacey	<p>The management of assets and provision of public services have conflicting objectives in terms of financial gain and operating for profit or commercial interests which SAMP cites as an objective of the council's remit.</p> <p>The lowering of incomes in relation to the cost of living; welfare reform and unavailability of adequate infrastructure and remunerated secure employed work have lowered living standards for some people in the borough along with the increase in population and other demographic changes.</p> <p>How will the regeneration programmes resolve this polarisation effect if at all?</p> <p>How will the Localism Act principles of social responsibility and consultation with residents be put into</p>	<p>The Regeneration Strategy for Barnet (agreed on 14 September 2011 and restated in February 2014) sets out the following strategic objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance Barnet as a Successful London Suburb through delivery of quality new places and neighbourhoods in the areas of the borough in greatest need of investment and renewal. • Deliver sustainable housing growth and infrastructure, and improve the condition and sustainability of the existing housing stock. • Ensure residents in all areas of the borough can share in Barnet's success while taking responsibility for the well-being of their families and their communities. • Promote economic growth by encouraging new business growth while supporting local businesses and town centres. • Help residents to access the right skills to meet employer needs and take advantage of new job opportunities.

		<p>practice when policies like Welfare Reform discriminate by socially cleansing the lowest income people from social housing into displacement by design, destitution or in the worst cases, death.</p> <p>http://www.change.org/p/david-cameron-hold-an-inquiry-into-benefit-sanctions-that-killed-my-brother?recruiter=52130838&utm_campaign=signature_receipt&utm_medium=email&utm_source=share_petition</p> <p>Does leveraging for profit only mean that the institutionally poor have in reality no place and no rights in a London Borough with an objective to produce through a public organisation what is ultimately a privately focused outcome?</p> <p>The public and private objectives are parallel lines which will never cross. Where is the surplus from the private commercial supply going to be used to subsidise the shortfall from public revenues and how can public demand be met when it requires some level of control for the commercial equation to be viable and for enterprise to survive.</p>	<p>The four Priority Regeneration Estates (West Hendon, Grahame Park, Stonegrove Spur Road and Dollis Valley) have delivered a total of 479 units of affordable/social housing up until the end of 2012/13 (Source – Annual Regeneration Report, February 2014).</p> <p>All the estates regeneration schemes are based on the rationale of re-providing the estates with sustainable mixed tenure communities, and not repeating the mistake of developing large, single tenure social housing estates. However, all the estates in Barnet will provide a minimum level of social housing to re-house all the secure tenants currently living there.</p> <p>Given the constraints on public spending, redeveloping these areas in partnership with the private sector makes good economical sense. Indeed, it is the sale of private homes in these schemes which is paying for new, modern social and affordable housing.</p>
4	Ms Theresa Musgrove	<p>I note that the report wrongly names what was in fact the Church Farmhouse Museum, and wrongly implies the building has only been vacant for a couple of years, when in fact the doors were closed to the public in March 2011. This inaccuracy is fairly typical of the indifference and lack of care demonstrated by the authority in regard</p>	<p>The building was known locally by a number of different names over the years and colloquially known as Church Farm Museum. The formal name is Church Farmhouse Museum and this will be used in all further references to the building.</p> <p>The Council made a saving of just over £100k per annum when it</p>

		<p>to its duty to protect what it agrees in the report is an Important Heritage Asset.</p> <p>I would like to know why, when the rationale given for closing this museum was cost, we are now being expect to hand more than a quarter of a million pounds to Middlesex University, in order for our Tory councillors to save face and avoid admitting that they have seriously betrayed the best interests of the museum and the residents who for so many generations have enjoyed the benefit of one of the best local museums in the country?</p> <p>Why did the original proposals for the sale of this precious building fail to produce an accurate survey of costs associated with their proposals?</p> <p>Why has there been no consultation with residents over the future of this Heritage Asset?</p>	<p>closed the museum. The Council always had the liability for refurbishment of the building and this would have existed if the Council still ran the building. This proposal will result in a contribution from the University for the refurbishment which will see a valued asset brought back into good condition. Taking into account the annual revenue savings over the last 4 years of £100k per annum, and the contribution from the university of a substantial six figure investment (which is reported in the exempt report) for the refurbishment, this proposal represents a significant saving to the taxpayer, even after accounting for security costs.</p> <p>Should the proposal in this report be approved, consultation will be undertaken through the planning process.</p> <p>In respect of the question of the survey accuracy initial proposal are based on an estimate of the required works. It is not until the successful proposal is taken forward that a more detailed and expensive intrusive survey is undertaken.</p>
5	Mr Gerrard Roots	<p>The report states that the proposal is necessary to 'enable regeneration of an important Heritage asset that has fallen into disrepair'. Rather, the report should state that Barnet council has allowed the building to become, in English Heritage's view, 'vulnerable' to such a degree that £500,000 is now required to return it to 'a full state of repair' (Richard Cornelius, 15 July 2014). Barnet is committing itself to contributing £280,000 to the refurbishment. That sum, combined with the more than £45000 wasted on 'security', is far more than it would</p>	<p>Yes. The Council has always been responsible for refurbishment and upkeep of the building, even when the museum occupied it. This proposal will result in a contribution from the University for the refurbishment which will see the building brought back into good condition.</p> <p>The Council made a saving of just over £100k per annum when it closed the museum. The Council always had the liability for refurbishment of the building and this would have existed if the Council still ran the building. This proposal will result in a</p>

		<p>have cost the Council to keep Church Farm open to the public as a museum since 2011. Can Barnet still seriously claim that it closed Church Farmhouse Museum to save money?</p>	<p>contribution from the University for the refurbishment which will see a valued asset brought back into good condition. Taking into account the annual revenue savings over the last 4 years of £100k per annum, and the contribution from the university of a substantial six figure investment (which is reported in the exempt report) for the refurbishment, this proposal represents a significant saving to the taxpayer, even after accounting for security costs.</p> <p>Significant repairs were needed to the building at the point in time that the building was closed. The commitment to retain and share in the investment required indicates the council's long term commitment to ensuring the building is preserved, and brought back into use. The refurbishment costs include the following, which will enhance the value of the asset to the council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plaster replacement in some areas, full upgrades to the interior finishes including repainting, re-bonding • Fire Safety upgrade to meet compliance standards • Mechanical and Electrical upgrade to meet compliance standards • Level access • New WC and sink fixtures • New kitchenette facilities • Relocate or conceal boiler and other wall mounted services • Timber window casements, door frames, refurbishment and repainted • Hearth Area to be made safe • Timber floorboard work, to retain floorboard and uneven levels however to ensure safety
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6	Mr Jeremy Teare	It is reported that Barnet Borough Council proposes to spend £280,000 on repairs/renovations on Church Farmhouse: please specify those works which will be carried out for that sum.	<p>This is a contribution to the works which will include refurbishment to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plaster replacement in some areas, full upgrades to the interior finishes including repainting, re-bonding • Fire Safety upgrade to meet compliance standards • Mechanical and Electrical upgrade to meet compliance standards • Level access • New WC and sink fixtures • New kitchenette facilities • Relocate or conceal boiler and other wall mounted services • Timber window casements, door frames, refurbishment and repainted • Hearth Area to be made safe • Timber floorboard work, to retain floorboard and uneven levels however to ensure safety • Damp treatment and rectification • End of joist replacement work which have suffered rot. • Compliance with Listed Building and English Heritage requirement which can be onerous and consequently expensive. • Potential costs in respect to asbestos, beetle infestation, dry rot and wet rot treatments, damp proofing and removal of lead paintwork. • Fire engineering and protection of fire escape routes. Internal

			structural stabilisation and enhancement to meet proposed floor loadings.
7	Ms Theresa Musgrove	<p>Before the closure of the Museum, and the ransacking of our irreplaceable local history collection - described by Councillor Cornelius as being of no value - this unique and highly sensitive building served a role which was suited to its historic nature, and a real asset to the community. Unfortunately the present Tory administration has misinterpreted the definition of 'asset' as a purely commercial term, rather than as something valued by residents for its historic significance. Does the Chair not agree that this is typical of the Conservative group in Barnet, and indicative of a wider failure to support the needs of our heritage and cultural life?</p> <p>Will members of the committee admit that the closure of the museum was not only unnecessary, and a serious error of judgement, and will they now consider rejecting this ill-judged proposal to hand over the building to a tenant whose enthusiasm for the deal is clearly minimal - and commit themselves to restoring the building to its former purpose, after consultation with residents and local community groups?</p>	<p>I do not agree with the first point in this question.</p> <p>Given the amount of time and resources Middlesex University have put into this negotiation and agreement, I do not believe its enthusiasm is minimal. Indeed, the University is contributing a significant sum to the refurbishment and upkeep of the building. If it wasn't eager it would not be seeking to occupy the building.</p> <p>The withdrawal of funding for the museum was necessary considering the amount of savings the Council had to make and still has to make. I appreciate that not all savings proposals will satisfy everyone.</p>
8	Mr Gerrard Roots	The report claims that Middlesex University 'has a good reputation for handling this type of specialist building in	The Council has worked in partnership with Middlesex University on a number of projects including the refurbishment of Ravensfield

	<p>this locality'. This presumably a reference to the University's refurbishment of The Model Farmhouse site on Greyhound Hill: an unlisted and comparatively modern house of no particular architectural merit and a gutted Grade II listed late- 19th century barn.</p> <p>Is Barnet seriously suggesting that that renovation gives any indication that Middlesex has the expertise and sensitivity needed to deal with a Grade II* listed 17th Century farmhouse, with important exterior and interior features: the oldest secular building in Hendon, and, in the view of architectural historians, one of the most remarkable survivals in north west London?</p>	<p>House, and the former Health Centre on Hendon Campus. All required significant investment which was provided by the University to improve these buildings and the long term value to the council. The significant costs required to bring Church Farmhouse back into use reflects the listed status, and the need for high quality works. All will be subject to achieving listed building consent and consultation with English Heritage to ensure the status of the building is respected and the building is bought back into use which will preserve and enhance its future contribution to the locality. Middlesex University have the financial capability and as occupiers of the completed building, the commitment, to deliver a refurbishment that will result in a significantly improved building. Middlesex have also been involved in the following projects which indicate a capability to deliver the proposal for Church Farmhouse museum:</p> <p><u>Church End Conservation Area</u> - Model Farm House, the Milking Parlor (Grade II listed): restoration and conversion for University use in full collaboration with English Heritage and Barnet's Conservation Officer. The University received significant praise for this project.</p> <p><u>Hendon Campus</u> Within the campus the University has refurbished converted and continues to maintain the Grade II listed Town Hall and Town Hall Annex.</p> <p><u>Trent Park</u> - The Mansion (Grade II): External and internal maintenance and restoration, including wall paneling, doors and door- cases.</p>
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9	Mr Jeremy Teare	<p>Middlesex University have indicated that Church Farmhouse is of no interest to them because it is outside their core activity area i.e. it is on the wrong side of Greyhound Hill & they do not wish to have students or staff wandering across such a busy road. What commitment is Middlesex University prepared to make for its 7 year occupancy at a nil rent, & in particular:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Please specify the sums of money they have agreed to spend on the building during their tenure; b) Please specify the items of repair and renovation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Middlesex are committed to the project and have pursued negotiations with the Council to agree the proposal set out in this report. Under the lease they will have a repairing obligation to keep the property in repair, and therefore will be obliged to carry out the refurbishment and maintain the building in its improved condition. b) The specification of works, much of which requires planning approval and listed building consent, is detailed below. There is no 'set' amount of money that has been agreed to be spent as expenditure will be influenced by what needs repair and the

		<p>which they have undertaken or will undertake to carry out.</p> <p>c) To what level of repair will Middlesex University covenant to maintain the building during its 7 year tenure?</p>	<p>items below, as opposed to an arbitrary amount. That said, the public report discloses the Council's contribution of £280,000 towards the repairs and the full commercial details of the agreement are in the exempt papers to protect the Council's, and taxpayers', interests.</p> <p>c) The Specification of works , which much of which is subject to planning approval and listed building consent includes the works detailed below;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plaster replacement in some areas, full upgrades to the interior finishes including repainting, re-bonding • Fire Safety upgrade to meet compliance standards • Mechanical and Electrical upgrade to meet compliance standards • Level access • New WC and sink fixtures • New kitchenette facilities • Relocate or conceal boiler and other wall mounted services • Timber window casements, door frames, refurbishment and repainted • Hearth Area to be made safe • Timber floorboard work, to retain floorboard and uneven levels however to ensure safety • Damp treatment and rectification • End of joist replacement work which have suffered rot. <p>d) Middlesex have agreed to a full repairing and insuring lease.</p>
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10	Mr Gerrard Roots	<p>The report claims that it 'does not raise any issues under the Council's Equalities Policy'. Please tell me how a decision to transform a building which once housed a museum open free to all six days a week into one which, for most of the time, will be accessible only to staff and students of Middlesex University has no Equalities implications? The report mentions a very limited 'community use', yet the 'Consultation and Engagement' section is left blank. If there is indeed to be 'community use', surely the community should have been engaged in discussions on what is needed and what is feasible. Have any consultations with Barnet residents taken place, and, if not, when and in what form will such consultations take place?</p>	<p>The equalities impact of the proposal to close the museum was considered at that point in time in 2011.</p> <p>This report is to consider the opportunities for the building following the decision to close the building as a museum.</p> <p>Should the report be approved, consultation on the future use of the building will be undertaken through the planning process. Middlesex University have agreed in principle that availability for community use will be available in the evenings and consultation with residents will be undertaken when the detailed programme of use has been established.</p>
11	Mr Gerrard Roots	<p>When Church Farm was put on the market in 2012 information on all negotiations with interested parties was withheld from the public for reasons of 'commercial confidentiality'. That excuse is no longer valid, as this report underlines the fact that there are no 'interested parties' other than Middlesex University. Why then are the financial arrangements made between Barnet and Middlesex University- two publicly-funded bodies- regarding a former public building being kept secret from the public who pay to keep both institutions in existence?</p>	<p>Regardless of the funding status of the proposed new tenant (and Universities are not wholly publically funded bodies), this is a commercial agreement and as such the Council's commercial and financial interests are protected by certain information remaining 'exempt'.</p> <p>The Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, which amended the Local Government Act 1972, enables local authorities to exclude the public from meetings whenever it is likely in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings that exempt information would be disclosed. The meaning of exempt information is defined in the legislation and includes under category 3, Information relating to the financial of business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information). The information set out in the exempt</p>

			<p>report relates to commercially sensitive negotiations and has been restricted from public access under category 3, an approach which has been verified by the council's Legal and Governance services during the report clearance process.</p>
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