

From: Cyrena Fink [REDACTED]
Sent: 19 June 2019 08:37
To: Fowler, David [REDACTED]
Subject: Objection to Abacus School

Mr David Fowler
Principal Planning
Camden Planning
5 Pancras Square
London N1C 4AG

Dear Mr Fowler:

As a long time resident of Camden I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed redevelopment of the Hampstead Police Station as a school for the Abacus Belsize Primary School. I am also requesting that you and other members of the Camden Council actively oppose this scheme for the following reasons:

- **Already Deemed Unsuitable by Its Own Trust:** The Hampstead Police Station has already been assessed by the CfBT Education Trust as inappropriate and not viable for the Abacus school. Chris Tweedale, Chief Executive of the Trust, wrote to parents and prospective parents on 15 January 2015: "...the police station site was also being carefully considered. However, having balanced the convenience of the site for parents with the key objective of providing the pupils at the school with a physical environment that is appropriate for high quality teaching and learning, it was found not to be a viable option – it would have compromised our mission of providing an excellent learning experience to your children."
- **Poor CfBT Trust Performance:** There is real doubt about the ability of the CfBT Education Trust to manage its current operations: Ofsted inspectors warned the CfBT in September 2015 that "standards in its schools are "too low", adding that many of its most disadvantaged students are not making sufficient progress." The inspection letter adds: "The Trust did not have a clear rationale for the selection of schools, a strategy for creating geographical clusters or a plan to meet academies' different needs. As a result, standards are too low";
- **Lack of Management Experience:** Abacus lacks the proven experience and expertise to manage another school. Abacus is a new school with approximately 59 pupils as of its most recent Ofsted review. There is no basis for assuming they have the capability to manage a school significantly and allowing them to magnify the management risks by granting them a landmark heritage building outside of their catchment area in a designated Conservation Area is an unacceptable risk;
- **Lack of Consultation:** Abacus have failed to properly consult with local residents, the vast majority of whom are strongly opposed to the Abacus proposal. There was virtually no local consultation prior to the submission of the proposed plans despite the very high impact nature of the plans and the change of use. If approved, there will certainly be legal challenges and judicial review because of the lack of consultation. It should not be for Camden taxpayers to have to subsidise the costs of defending what is a patently awful scheme. Abacus' lack of ability or willingness to follow basic consultation standards undermines any local confidence in its ability to manage such a large school on such an important site;
- **Traffic Congestion:** The local area already suffers from terrible vehicle congestion and the proposed school would be among the largest in the Hampstead area, resulting in a significant and damaging increase in traffic. While Abacus professes a "no cars" policy, virtually all of the schools in Hampstead do also yet there is no sanction on parents for driving and many simply choose to do so. Increased traffic damages local businesses; increases the risk of road accidents to the children as well as local residents; materially increases air pollution in the area; and hinders the Ambulance services from the Royal Free Hospital just around the corner responding to emergencies. Quite importantly, it will be simply awful for local residents who already suffer

from dramatic increases in traffic congestion from the twice daily school runs from the many existing local schools;

- **Air Pollution:** Hampstead already suffers life threatening air pollution, in some cases double the legal limits imposed by UK and EU law, and that schools are one of the three primary causes of air pollution. For local children and residents, the increase in air pollution will be highly damaging and, frankly, quite dangerous;
- **Unacceptable Design:** The proposed design violates virtually all principles of good heritage design practices and is inconsistent with the landmark character of the Grade II listed building, both exterior and interior, and the Conservation Area within which the Police Station sits. The Heath & Hampstead Society and all local residents' associations have come out strongly opposed to the Abacus scheme for many reasons but the negative impact on the unique heritage of the building and the area has been critical;
- **Excessive Costs:** We live in an age of austerity but the costs of the Abacus scheme would put the school among the most expensive school builds in the entire United Kingdom, in an area of London where there is no discernible need for a new school and when Abacus itself has failed to fill its existing places. How can this possibly be justified? Today, Abacus has 60 pupils but this development is costed on the basis of 420 pupils and even on that basis it far exceeds other schools' build costs. Putting another extremely high cost school in Hampstead where there is no need simply cannot be justified;
- **Damages Existing Local Schools:** Abacus is being given an expensive landmark building outside of its catchment area with the clearly stated intention of drawing in additional pupils. Roughly 50% of Abacus' current pupils aren't even in Belsize but rather commute in from Cricklewood, Kilburn, Regent's Park and other areas. By siting yet another school in Hampstead it will only serve to cannibalise pupils and budgets from our existing schools -- many of which are opposed to the Abacus scheme -- thereby undermining the investments we have already made in local education. Abacus hasn't even established local need in Belsize; there is certainly no local need in Hampstead;
- **Better Alternative Uses:** The Police Station is a unique local asset with numerous potential uses: Social housing for nurses from the Royal Free Hospital; or social housing for police and their families as in the past; or as an outpatient wing of the Royal Free Hospital. Hampstead needs more key worker accommodation, not another school!

I have reviewed the Abacus plans in detail and agree with the vast majority of my neighbours, as well as the panel of experts we have retained, that the Abacus proposal would be extremely damaging to local residents, to the local community and its heritage, and to the broader community in Camden.

Please do all that you can to prevent this clearly harmful proposal from going forward.

Kind regards,

Cyrena Fink
Geoffrey D Fink