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Monday, 6th June 2022

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## **A 20-second drive away: Fury of owner of house wrecked by blaze close to shutdown fire station**

Thursday, 17th March 2016



THE owner of a house destroyed by a major blaze says he may not have “lost my whole life” had politicians not shut down his neighbourhood fire station.

The man, who asked not to be named, praised the “amazing” fire brigade’s response to the incident at Antrim Grove, Belsize Park, after they were able to rescue some of his family photos from the smouldering building in the early hours of Sunday morning.

But he told the New Journal he had nothing but contempt for London Mayor Boris Johnson and brigade chiefs who agreed the closure of Belsize fire station – just a few blocks away from the fire in Lancaster Grove.

He said: “If Belsize was open, the response time would have been quicker. There is not even a conversation about that. It’s a 20-second drive away. Maybe the fire would have not been out of control and they would not have had to fight it from the outside, and could have gone inside sooner. Maybe I would not have lost my whole life. I want to praise the firefighters but criticise the politicians that closed Belsize.”



### **The blaze took hold in Antrim Grove in the early hours of Sunday**

Some of the 72 firefighters attended from as far away as Edmonton, Hillingdon and Soho to tackle the fire and then dampen down the property. There were no injuries and neighbours were safely evacuated.

The homeowner was away for the weekend and said it felt “surreal” to return to a scene of total devastation, with fire trucks and officials swarming around the smoking wreck of his semi-detached house. He has lived in the property for eight years.

He said: “I cannot tell you how amazing the fire service have been. As I watched on Sunday there were firemen looking around, pulling out pictures that they knew were down in my basement. Without them I would never have been able to save some of my pictures. At first, they did not realise we weren’t home – they were inside the building looking for us.”



### **Belsize Fire Station was closed in 2014**

He added: “This is the first time I have ever experienced a fire. My neighbours have been fantastic. There has been no electricity, no water. There has been massive damage. I do feel very strongly about the station. If it had been there they could have saved more of my property.”

In a statement, watch manager Winston Douglas, from the London Fire Brigade, said that “fire crews have worked really hard to stop fire spreading even further into adjacent properties”, adding that a fire curtain was installed in the next-door property in a “unique situation” for the fire brigade.



### **Officers damp down the buiiding on Sunday afternoon**

A London Fire Brigade spokesman said: “All too often we see the devastating effects fire has on people’s lives and our sympathies are with the owner of the house on Antrim Grove. However, it is not the case that the outcome of this fire would have been different had Belsize fire station still been open. Firstly, the first two engines got there within five minutes and 35 seconds, which is within our target of a six-minute average for the first engine and eight-minute average for the second.

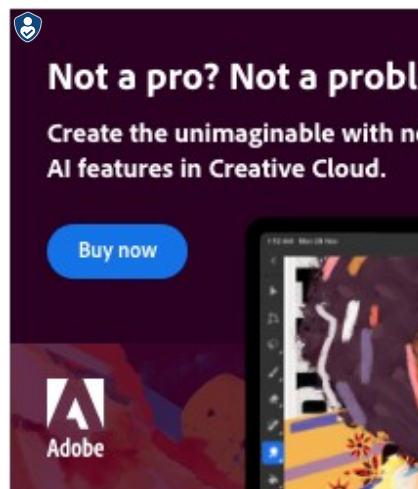
“We have yet to finalise our fire investigation report but our preliminary investigation has found that nobody was in the property at the time and the fire appears to have been burning for some time before we were alerted.”



### **Engines from Hillingdon, Hornsey, Edmonton and North Kensington were summoned to Belsize Park**

He added: “We plan emergency cover on a London-wide basis, so if fire engines are unavailable, for whatever reason, whether it is because they are already attending another incident, crews are training, or because of staff availability, we still have enough resources in place across the capital to deal with whatever we are called to.”

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