

Downshire Hill Residents Association

Minutes of Committee meeting held on Sunday 8th November 2015

Attendees:

Stephen Ainger (Chair), Bob Buhr, Fiona Neale, Patricia Robins, Tony Gordon-James, Peter Freeman, Redding Thompson, Mark Dennis, Peter Tausig, Nicola, Sinclair

Apologies:

Margaret Rodgers.

Attendees

Sophie Marple

Attendees from Abacus School

Jonathan Kendall

Tom Smith

Prior to the meeting and as a result of the October meeting DHRA had sent several questions and these are listed below with the discussion on the night.

1. Overview of the school and admission criteria/ethos of the school

- Original need identified in 2009 by local parents who noted that there were not enough junior schools in Belsize Park
- After the May 2010 elections, local authorities could no longer set up free schools so Abacus concept was developed as a 'school you can walk to'.
- Partnership developed with CFBT in 2011 and Abacus worked with FA to find sites.
- Abacus spent two years in the Town Hall bldg, and is presently in Kings Cross and hopes to occupy the Police station in September 2017.
- School is for 'all faiths and none'
- The School is currently at 90 Students and is building towards a two form entrance for pupils for ages 4 to 11 (7 grades) and hence an ultimate size of 420 students.

- Acceptance criteria will be based upon state school model but a lottery is also used so that it is 'location blind' within its catchment area. The catchment area at the moment does not include Downshire Hill and at the moment only goes as far north as Lyndhurst Gardens. Abacas said that consultation on the catchment area would be regularly carried out which could mean that Downshire Hill could be in the catchment but when asked could not say what the criteria for participating in the consultation would be and whether Downshire Hill would be part of the consultation.
- School has been rated 'outstanding' by OFSTED

2. What is the expected scale of the school – how many pupils (and therefore cars) and the expected pace of building up to this level?

- Abacus (under contract to CFBT) will be tenants in and operators of the building and EFA has total control over securing planning permission and developing the building. Abacus will be 'consulted' by EFA.
- There is a feasibility study underway at present. This is being conducted by Kier Group (contractors) and Watkins Grey (architects), both under contract to EFA. Pre planning discussions with the Local Authority are also under way and include discussions with Heritage officer and Traffic Planners (but again by EFA, not Abacus).
- Jonathan and Tom acknowledged that likely funding available from government for EFA to build out the school will not cover the full cost and this is now being dealt with.
- Abacus plans to have two classes per grade (= 60 students per grade) and 7 grades by 2023 (= 420 students total).
- They do not plan to accept further students in higher grades yet as they are seeking continuity for the students with seven years at Abacus (but they will look at admissions strategy at least every three years) as above.
- They will engage consultees such as DHRA all along the process to the extent they have such control.
- The house next to the station might be used as an admin centre.

3. What are the plans for the existing side car park area?

- These are not yet decided but it is thought that Abacus needs 5000 sq ft more than the building presently has so part of the 'C' void might be filled in with a school hall with playground on top. They said it would not be overly high as it would be "no higher than current roof level of the Police station"

4. Where will be the drop-off area and what are the traffic management plans for DH and Rosslyn Hill?

- There are no plans yet for what area might be developed
- Abacus intends to severely discourage students arriving by car but acknowledge that many parents presently do this at many schools in the area which see more than 50% of pupils arriving by car. They are very sensitive to increased traffic in the drop off zone (wherever it ultimately is located) catchment area and the tailback, rat run, and safety issues that it entails.

5. Will there be a playground (noise) and if so, where?

- The school is very much committed to outdoor learning as well and hope to use Heath to maximum extent possible.
- Playground options on site are limited but might be in tarmac area or on roof deck. Tom noted that in his view roof deck play areas actually disperse and attenuate noise quite well.
- Noise management will be an important part of the planning application

6. How will the external appearance of the current building be protected?

- Regarding the facades to Downshire Hill and Roslyn Hill there will be minimal change. All changes will be at the rear.

7. How will knock-on issues (e.g. children on cycles, skate boards) be handled?

- Not yet decided.

Actions

There were two actions

- They would get back to us on the criteria for the catchment consultation
- Introduce us to the architects so as consultation can take place.

The chair thanked the representatives from Abucus for giving their time and answering all the questions, it was much appreciated

The meeting closed at 8pm

29th Nov 2015