

INFORMAL NOTES OF AN EXTRAORDINARY AREA ONE MEETING RE: WANSTEAD POLICE STATION

FRIDAY 14 SEPTEMBER

Attendees: All the Snaresbrook and Wanstead Councillors, Stewart Hill Acting Commander, Kathy Nixon Chief Community Safety Officer, Keith Prince Leader of the Council, Steve Grayer Lead Officer, John Cryer MP, Roger Evans GLA Member.

The Petition

AW said that the Councillors had received 1,182 signatures to date. This would be added to other signatures being collected. 2,148 signatures have already been handed in to the Council in order that a debate could be raised at the next Council meeting. It is anticipated that over 3,000 signatures will be obtained.

On 20 September there will be a debate in the Council Chamber about Wanstead Police Station and also a motion put by all 3 party leaders.

Stewart Hill A MPS review of the estate of 800 buildings, 300 of which are operational, is taking place. The results have yet to be reported to MOPAC and so no decision has been made. Once the decision is made, the Met will engage with the public as soon as possible. The decision is not being made by the Met but by MOPAC.

Cllr Athwall [Leader of the Labour Councillors] Lessons ought to have been learned from the past, when national institutions have been ruined. Accountants cannot understand the service which police stations provide. What will happen once the family silver has been sold? We must all work together to put opposition to Boris Johnson.

Greg Eglin [Chairman of Snaresbrook labour party] There are 2 issues: 1. The Building – the Localism Bill could offer some protection as it could be designated as a community asset. 2. SNTs are part of the community or neighbourhood – this would not be the case if they were stationed at Leytonstone or Ilford. Volunteers are needed to help in the fight.

John Leicester We all want a police presence but are fighting a losing battle. The Mayor wants to cut the police budget by quite a lot of money. A compromise would be to use a public building in Wanstead – the Wanstead Clinic would have room for a police station. Boris needs to change his mind.

Mr B West The public meeting is merely to pacify us as the decision has already been made. Policing is a borough service. I am scared to go out when there are crowds on the Green. A newsagent has asked me not to go in between 3:00 and 4:00 pm as he has trouble with rowdy schoolchildren. We need to be safe in our neighbourhood – what have we paid all this money for, for all these years? After a burglary in my house it took the police 1 ¼ hours to arrive and ambulances will not attend until the police are present. The attendance at this meeting shows the level of concern.

Stewart Hill I agree, I have not seen the report but note your concerns. There will be a business plan when the decision is made. We must consider 'what if?'

Mr Smith The police article in Redbridge Life says that SNTs are at the heart of the community – how without a police station here? Paul Stevenson is concerned about today's policing. Some crimes are written off as 'undetected' as there are no witnesses. There is a danger that the prime purpose to save life, combat crime and keep the Queen's peace will not be kept. Wanstead police station needs to remain operational at the heart of the community to make good the Met objectives.

Mr Donald Stevens [aged 79] Someone's bag was snatched in HSBC a few months ago; I took chase but tripped and fell but saw the thief run to the top of Grove Park where he was driven away. The police came and took statements but nothing happened. I was outside the United Reform Church when 2 traffic wardens put a ticket on a car. The driver threatened to return and knife a traffic warden. If half a billion pounds has been underspent at the Olympics, could this money be used to maintain police stations?

R Justin McArdle When the Met sold the Evergreen Field, they were not acting in the interests of local people. If they must cut costs, then cut police pensions. The A406, A12 and 2 underground stations provide easy access and escape for criminals – we need an operational police station.

Peter French Police stations do not prevent crime, we need a business plan to deliver effective policing. We need police on the street, not in a police station: we ought to push for more telephone lines, not the police station.

Max Rose [A police sergeant in Newham] Redbridge response times are good but we need proactive police officers. There is insufficient coverage on the wards and officers are often used for other duties eg talking in schools – officers are needed on the beat. Reducing our 2 sergeants to 1 is an injustice – more intrusive supervision leads to better policing. It will be more difficult to hold on to police officers in the future: don't be baffled by police reports in policing. There are more traffic wardens on our streets than police officers.

Valerie Sayers [Wanstead Society] This is all about cost cutting. Why not use Wanstead as the hub rather than Barkingside or Leytonstone? Communications are easy here. The police station is a physical presence. When will the police station on Wanstead Flats be dismantled. The Met central call centre personnel have no local knowledge. Not only the elderly need protection, everyone does. If the police station is sold, another part of the character of Wanstead will be lost and new development built.

Helen Zammett [WASRA] The following questions are copied from my document. RESIDENTS FEEL THAT WANSTEAD IS A TARGET FOR CRIMINALS FROM NEIGHBOURING AREAS – LEYTONSTONE, MANOR PARK, FOREST GATE. IF THE POLICE STATION CLOSED WITHOUT THE DETERRENT WHICH POLICE PRESENCE PROVIDES, WE FEEL THAT WE WOULD BE SITTING TARGETS.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION OF WANSTEAD POLICE STATION IS KEY. WITHOUT THE CAR PARK THERE, HOW WOULD RAPID RESPONSE CARS GET TO EMERGENCY CALL OUTS IN TIME? A PREVIOUS COMMANDER, COMMANDER GRANT TOLD ME THAT IT WAS ESSENTIAL TO HAVE CARS STATIONED IN THE WEST OF THE BOROUGH, AS THE A406 IS A HUGE BARRIER TO GET CARS ACROSS. WHAT IS THE AVERAGE TIME FOR A RAPID RESPONSE CAR TO GET FROM ILFORD TO WANSTEAD?

PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN CURE. A DETERRENT AGAINST CRIME IS THE KEY ISSUE HERE. ONCE A CRIME IS COMMITTED IT CANNOT BE 'CURED'. A POLICE VISIT, A CRIME NUMBER AND A POSSIBLE CONVICTION DO NOT 'MAKE IT BETTER'. WHAT PEOPLE WANT IS FOR THE CRIME NOT TO HAVE

HAPPENED IN THE FIRST PLACE. THEY WANT THE POLICE ON THEIR STREETS, NOT AT THE END OF A CENTRAL POLICE CALL CENTRE PHONE LINE.

WHEN WANSTEAD POLICE STATION WAS CLOSED LAST SATURDAY, AN ELDERLY RESIDENT WAS ROBBED WHILE TAKING MONEY FROM AN ATM AT 11:00 IN THE MORNING. THE POLICE VISITED HIM AT 7:00 PM THAT EVENING – AN UNACCEPTABLE DELAY. IF HE HAD GONE TO ILFORD POLICE STATION HE WOULD HAVE HAD A LONG WAIT BEFORE BEING ABLE TO SPEAK TO A POLICE OFFICER THERE. THE WAITING TIME THERE IS NOTORIOUS – USUALLY THERE IS A QUEUE OF 10 PEOPLE.

Peter Arben [Wanstead Society] There is a rumour that the Commander of Waltham Forest Police does not want to have our police stationed in Leytonstone police station. SH I have not heard the rumour. On my first visit to Leytonstone police station there was a sign saying it was closed due to operational difficulties. On my second visit the shutters were down so I rang the external phone to get Scotland Yard! The shutters came up – the person at the desk was new and did not know the opening times, suggesting I look on the internet!

Scott Wilding [Wanstead Society] If our police are based in Waltham Forest, they may regard much of our local crime as not important and so not pay much attention to it.

Roger Evans [GLA Member] Boris has budgeted a shortfall of £500 million for the Met. In the past 2 years the GLA has bailed them but using a surplus from the Fire Service. It won't be easy to make up this shortfall. Some police stations may be saved but it is not possible to save them all. The Met is already closing police stations – eg in Havering 3 have been closed which were not in use anyway. I will represent you – not my political party and use the precedent of the rise in crime in 2001 when the police station closed.

John Cryer [MP] This issue is in the hands of the Mayor's office – keeping this police station is not guaranteed. There is a long history of closing police stations, which inevitably leads to a loss of police presence no matter what the political line is.

Deborah Selner [Chair of the Joint Snaresbrook and Wanstead Ward Panel] The police station is the heart of the community – the SNT's work begins here. Leytonstone and Barking are not in the heart of Wanstead. Our population is growing – what will happen in 10 years time if they need a larger police station? The Met needs to think long, not short term.

Peter Arben The buildings at the back of the police station are an operational centre – what operations are carried out there? SH Apart from 2 SNTs, there are specialist crime units. Later someone said that apart from the specialist teams, the Rapid Response team uses the car park – Wanstead police station is not just a community station but a support station. PA the flow of the comings and goings is important and must be kept.

Cllr Nick Hayes When the police station was closed years ago, were the wards adequately policed? SH I worked here 16 years ago as a junior officer and can see the value of Wanstead police station.

Neil Zammett The message is clear, we need police in our community with the presence of a police station this is an integration of symbols and locality. SH needs to get the message over that if this decision is made to close the police station the first casualty will be the relationship between the community and police following by a loss confidence in the Met.

Someone said that the police station is not keeping to its stated opening times, particularly over Saturday opening.

R Garfield What happens now? Will we be able to speak to the Mayor's office? We will write to the Mayor's office and we have over 3,000 signatories.

John Cryer The turnout tonight is indicative. I have received a letter from Boris Johnson this afternoon, which repeats the statement which the Met is putting out – I will e mail or post a copy if anyone wants to see it. It says that the Met is conducting a review which includes police stations in Redbridge. Wanstead police station is currently underused with only 20 people working there, while being costly to maintain. The review is about the future and will involve changes to front counter policing, improving access and improving the estate. I do not believe this, I think the decision has already been made but hope there is sufficient scope to reverse the position. I do not want a downgraded police presence: criminals will come here to have a go if they know there are fewer police officers. What will happen is that as there is a low foot fall in the police station, the police will go out into the community – eg a police van in the street once or twice a week, this will gradually dwindle in the frequency until it disappears. The test of a public service is its proximity to the community. In 2001 when the police station closed, crime increased by 23%. Leytonstone police station is forbidding and not accessible, unlike Wanstead police station.

Roger Evans I am happy to present the petition at County Hall, with people to join me to do it. I have 3 concerns: 1. Response times. The SNT team patrols from the police station in Wanstead. If they begin their patrol at Barkingside or Leytonstone, there will be a time gap before they get to our wards, leading to longer response times. Redbridge is a large borough, there is a danger that Redbridge will lose police officers to smaller boroughs with higher crime. 2. Open police stations. The new Met Commander Hogan Howe, favours replacing police stations with a new Met switchboard. A lot of work has been done on this but it is as yet untested. Elderly people are less comfortable with central Met switchboards and computers. A number of functions take place in police stations eg handing in documents, some of these could be handled in other public services, making them more convenient for the public while giving the police more time for policing. 3. Deterrent. Police stations have a deterring effect on crime in the immediate area, how far from the station is questionable. The focus needs to be on Wanstead, not budget saving. The Olympics did save £500 million but that would only make up the shortfall for one year. There is good cross party support in Redbridge and we will push all the buttons to save the police station.

Keith Prince [Leader of the Council] £500 million pound saving – I can see the logic of having policemen on the beat rather than buildings, but to lose the building leads to losing police presence. I met the Borough Commander and had a long conversation. She did not have much to say – she does not control the budget – that is done centrally. Woodford and Chadwell Health police stations are also threatened. The Borough takes crime seriously and is paying for 14 extra police to work on the borough eg in the parks and a squad to deal with hot spots. They will agree a burglary active plan as the Council know that there is a problem here – smart water, gates, covert cc tv and more cc tv, with help for victims after burglary as it is know that burglars often return to the premises.

I will meet with Stephen Greenhalgh, the Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime: we meet on a regular but not frequent basis so I shall push for an early meeting. Apart from pressing to keep Wanstead Police Station, I shall stress that Redbridge has more crime per officer than officers in any other part of London. We need more police, we are not getting our fair share.

On police presence, I am not prepared to have Wanstead SNT work from Barkingside or Leytonstone – far too much time will be lost in their reaching the community. If necessary we will find a room for the police to use out of Borough funding. This would not be to provide a police station with a front desk – it is the Met's responsibility to pay for this.

Cllr Chan How can the policy priority of ASB, burglary and theft from motor vehicles be dealt with if they are not stationed here? ATMs are targeted in the High Street. Police travel times to get to Wanstead would be doubled by either the Green Man roundabout or the Gants Hill roundabout, hundreds of working hours would be lost. In the longer term as the police station is at the wrong end of the Green, a new location could be found.

Peter Arben If alternative premises were sought for the police, rents in Wanstead are high - £20-30,000 a year and there is the problem of car parking.

Someone added that the sale of the police station would be a one-off payment but the cost of housing the SNTs and crime units would be ongoing – what savings would really be made?

Cllr Nolan Tonight's attendance shows the strength of feeling. It was Wanstead residents who saved the Evergreen Field. We are totally opposed to losing Wanstead police station – if it went we would be totally exposed the west of the borough is always the part to suffer. Without the police station we will lose our community spirit. Why not upgrade the building and use it?

Cllr Wilson We have covered a lot of ground, the 1st duty of the police service is to protect citizens – community policing is important. The issues are travelling times, road roundabouts, public access, visibility and deterrence.

Superintendent Hill I understand your concerns, they are personal as well as professional. I will talk to Sue Williams and the take them to Scotland Yard.

The councillors recommendations in the meeting papers were adopted.

There was a short discussion about residents and councillors demanding a full public consultation before any decision is made. SH will go to Commander Hogan Howe with this request.

Helen Zammett
14 September 2012