

SAVING THE STATION

At last month's council meeting **Helen Zammett**, chair of The Counties Residents' Association, spoke on behalf of the Wanstead and Snaresbrook Residents' Alliance against the possible closure of Wanstead Police Station. Her speech is reproduced here

In the council publication Redbridge Life I was amazed to read the headline 'Changes in the Met will put police at the heart of the community'. Our police station is at the heart of our community, and they want to close it!

I'm losing my powers of comprehension: I couldn't understand Boris Johnson's statement either when I read: "... any changes to the provision... will ensure Londoners receive improved and efficient access to police, whilst taking the opportunity to improve the estate and at the same time as delivering substantial savings." People tell me that this means the Met is putting slashing costs and making money ahead of community safety.

The Met says that our Victorian building is not fit for purpose. As a locally listed building it can be gutted inside to meet current policing requirements. The station is on a prime site, but the one-off money raised will soon disappear – the inevitably rising demand will not.

Being on the western border of Redbridge, Wanstead residents feel that without a police station they would be a sitting target for criminal elements in Leytonstone, Manor Park and Forest Gate. The Burglary Team and part of the Rapid Response Team are also stationed there. Some members of the latter team told me that without having a car stationed in Wanstead, they would not be able to respond to emergency calls in time. A previous commander told me that the A406 is a huge barrier, which means that it is essential to have cars stationed in the west of the borough.

Also, with the A406, A12 and two tube stations, criminals have easy access to and escape from Wanstead. Meanwhile, hundreds of police hours would be wasted by our Safer Neighbourhood Team cycling to and from Wanstead.

Attendance at last month's extraordinary Area One Committee meeting showed the high level of concern. Many residents remember that when the police station closed in 2001, the Wanstead crime rate rose by 23%. By experience, they know

that an accessible local police station is the strongest symbol of deterrence to criminals.

A police station is the best source of reassurance that the police can give residents – you cannot put reassurance on a spreadsheet.

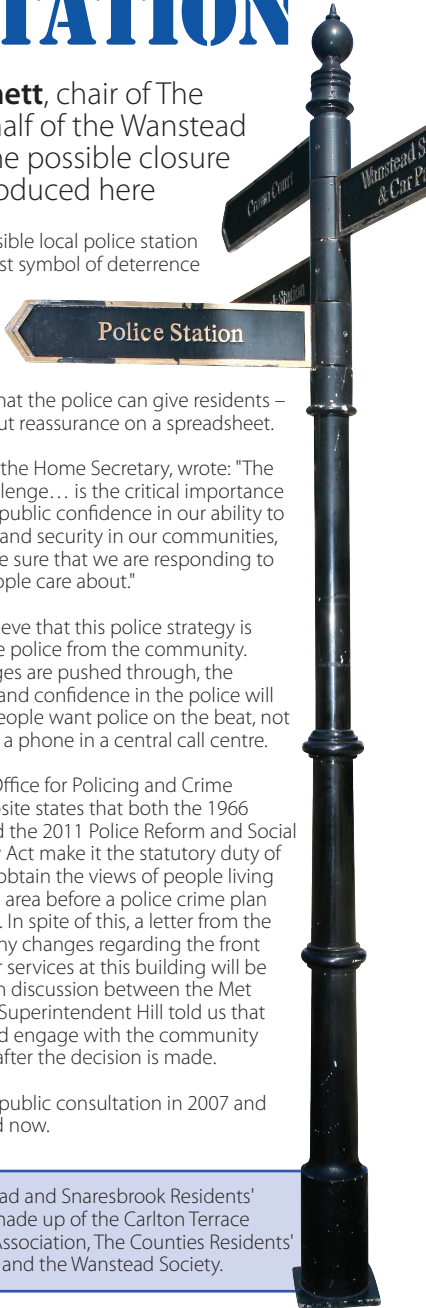
Jacqui Smith, the Home Secretary, wrote: "The toughest challenge... is the critical importance of improving public confidence in our ability to deliver safety and security in our communities, we must make sure that we are responding to the issues people care about."

Residents believe that this police strategy is distancing the police from the community. If these changes are pushed through, the public's trust and confidence in the police will deteriorate. People want police on the beat, not on the end of a phone in a central call centre.

The Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) website states that both the 1966 Police Act and the 2011 Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act make it the statutory duty of the police to obtain the views of people living in the policed area before a police crime plan can be issued. In spite of this, a letter from the Met states: "Any changes regarding the front office counter services at this building will be dependent on discussion between the Met and MOPAC." Superintendent Hill told us that the Met would engage with the community immediately after the decision is made.

We had a full public consultation in 2007 and one is needed now.

The Wanstead and Snaresbrook Residents' Alliance is made up of the Carlton Terrace Residents' Association, The Counties Residents' Association and the Wanstead Society.



Police Station