

Response from a Haringey resident

Dear Sirs,

I am seriously concerned that the wrong Haringey Police Station has been selected for closure. In the debate, most seem to have considered today, not five, ten or more years hence. I have tried to address this.

Until recently it has been easy to divide the borough into two different personalities, the one on the east and the one on the west. This is comparable with north and south of the River Thames. Going back well beyond the riots on Broadwater Farm (1985) most crime and disorder has been on the east side of Haringey. Coping with the problems on the east have been Wood Green, Hornsey, Tottenham and St Ann's Police Stations. In the west there has been Muswell Hill.

The eastern side has had a wide range of issues including black / white racial and cultural tensions, Greek / Turkish feuds being brought into the borough from their home countries, unemployment, poverty. There are over 90 languages spoken in the area. The policing has been at times heavy handed or simply misunderstood, all ingredients for the area to be a melting pot for tensions and crime. Both internationally and locally the Greek / Turkish tensions have reduced enormously. With Turkey on the verge of joining the European Union, much angst has gone and relationships continue to improve making the east side a more settled and desirable place to live.

The west of the borough has been very different. Largely white, middle class overall largely law-abiding, police supporting with much lower crime. Also the officers working out of Muswell Hill Police Station have been outstanding from the most senior officers to the Home Beat constables. With no regard to rank, all officers got out and about in the communities. The police made concerted efforts to learn who were the trouble makers, the criminals and the vulnerable. They even brought the communities into the Police Station through well attended meetings. There were a host of topics covered, these ranged from crime prevention to the latest policing methods and strategies. Eventually Muswell Hill Police Station became a victim of its own success. It was seen to be doing so well successive Borough Commanders were content for it to maintain its course, almost without supervision, quietly confident that standards would be maintained. This allowed their attention and resources to be put towards the then more problematic areas, the east side. In other words, Muswell Hill was standing alone on the West whilst there was the cluster on the East.

After a specific period be it six months or a year it will be possible to gauge what effect the new Wood Green Police Station will have.

Making the suggestion of reducing the front counter opening hours reductions at Tottenham well before the conclusion of the Mark Duggan case was not the best course. The painful memories of the riots, the disorder, and all other forms of crime are still too fresh. However with the building of relationships between the police, the broad communities and especially the youth, it may be possible to make changes, just not in the immediate future.

In the not too distant future Wood Green Police Station will be fully manned and equally fully functioning. This will be alongside Tottenham and Hornsey. This means there will be three front counters in one small area and none in a large expanse. And it will be a large expanse. If Muswell Hill is to close there will be a massive hole. A hole that will stretch between Wood Green and Golders Green (Borough of Barnet).

The make-up of Muswell Hill is changing. There are now properties valued at a million plus in some pockets, yet in neighbouring streets there are sheltered housing estates for the elderly and those with special needs, soup kitchens and night shelters. Once large family homes are now being divided up and turned into multi-occupancy dwellings. The independent shops and even some large chains are no longer able to keep a presence. Empty shops do the Broadway. There are growing problems around the pubs and night clubs. With Alexandra Palace looking to increase the number of bustling events and introduce a massive hotel (possibly with casino) into the site there will be a range of increasing pressures. Property developers are also buying up land plots and building homes. If there is no strong presence in the area, crime, be it low level anti social or at the higher end of the scale will increase.

How will crime in this area be reported? Haringey has over three hundred Neighbourhood Watch schemes. I am led to understand approximately 15% of coordinators do NOT have access to the internet. If the rest of the residential population are considered, a small number of elderly do not have their own telephone landline and a larger number of this growing age group are intimidated by the internet. To travel from Muswell Hill to Wood Green Police Station will take approximately 50 minutes for a reasonably fit middle aged man to do. It will take a similar amount of time to get to Golders Green Police Station. What are those in the pensionable age bracket supposed to do? These are one of the most vulnerable groups and possibly the most frequently targeted by criminals.

In service terms Muswell Hill could be vastly improved at little cost. The station could house several Safer Neighbourhood Teams. These are Fortis Green, Muswell Hill, Highgate, Alexandra Park and East Finchley (Borough of Barnet). The East Finchley SNT currently works out of a building which offers no public access. The Met is presumably paying for a lease yet ten minutes brisk walk away they could be inside a building where the public could go. The front counter is staffed by well trained volunteers most of whom now have more than enough experience to cope with just about anything. If a situation is outside their sphere of expertise, they know how to get it and fast!

The building also offers a car park ideal for operational vehicles. With this entrance being in a quiet road, it is possible for officers who need to work discretely to come and go.

Having run some pilot test, the government wants to introduce suites into some police stations. These suites will be for witnesses and / or victims to give evidence through live links to courts. Muswell Hill would again be ideal for this. The east side of the borough is rightly or wrongly for many, very intimidating. It seems reasonable to assume that whoever is being considered for giving evidence this way is already terrified, going to the Wood Green area is not going to give reassurance, instead it may increase the levels of fear. Muswell does not have that same effect.

There are two main places where it has been assumed terrorists may attack, Tottenham Hotspur Football Club and Alexandra Palace. Wood Green with Tottenham as a satellite will cover the football club, Muswell Hill the other. The uncertainty and unrest continues to grow in the Middle East, synagogues and Jewish burial grounds will also become prime targets.

If the cost of keeping Muswell Hill open was shared between the boroughs of Barnet and Haringey it would become a more viably financial option than keeping Hornsey which could be sold. In geographic terms, it is also better situated. For policing, there are probably better routes for police vehicles to get to scenes easily and certainly offers fast access on to the North Circular.

It is believed that one in ten women will suffer some form of domestic violence. Although the number of men suffering in similar fashion is much smaller it is still a serious problem. With the

population in and around Muswell Hill / East Finchley growing where will these victims go?
These and sex offences need to be reported in a safe and private place, where better than a police station.

There could be further cost cutting if the personnel working in Sanctuary House will be brought into the new Wood Green building. This will be one less lease payments.

In conclusion. It will be far from popular but with changing circumstances and looking towards the future, sell Hornsey Police Station, eventually reduce the hours at Tottenham, keep Muswell Hill Police Station with its already restricted hours.

Thank you for your consideration.