

As the instigators of the 'Protect Biggin Hill RAF Chapel' on-line Petition, currently signed by 23,300 concerned members of the public, we are responding to the open letter issued on 16th May by the BHMM Trust, to correct their claims of 'misinformation'.

The first item to address is that Bromley Council used their muscle to push aside the Biggin Hill Battle of Britain Supporters Club, whose Museum design had gained unopposed planning permission from the Council, who then 'bulldozed' their own controversial plans forward, despite huge public opposition at all stages. The Chapel's future had been secured by a grant of £1m from the Treasury Libor funds 'to keep the Chapel doors open' (as confirmed by documentation) in response to pressure generated by local MPs, Mark Nicol of the Mail on Sunday and the first on-line petition instigated by Biggin Hill resident Martin Mitchener.

We have never stated that the bricks now being used to build the 'Visitor Centre', (the description now being used by official bodies to describe the inadequate BHMM Museum) were made in Germany or Austria. Wienerberger AG have bought up and established so many plants throughout Europe that logically these bricks originate from somewhere on the western side, could well be the Netherlands. We do know that they arrive in the UK at Purfleet and Hull docks. The argument has always been why not British bricks at such a sensitive site, a memorial to airmen who gave their lives defending this country against the Germans. Instead the Council and its BHMM Trust chose an imported mass-produced machine-made 'Euro-brick' manufactured by this huge Austro-German company, a thoughtless disrespectful decision made worse by recent research which has revealed that this company was involved with Jewish forced labour in the 1930s and during World War 2.

If they were genuine hand-made (as promised) bricks made by an independent manufacturer in the Netherlands, that would be another matter and difficult to argue against, but that could not be further from the truth. When Jim Matthews of H G Matthews Bricks, Chesham, Bucks, heard of the bricks being used, because of his high regard for the RAF, he immediately offered his bespoke hand-made bricks for free! Only a few of the Wienerberger bricks had been laid at that point and at the expense of only a week's construction time, Jim's bricks could have been used, but despite the growing public condemnation, the Council and its Trust chose to push ahead using the inferior Wienerberger brick!

Jim also pointed out that had this project been publicized within the UK construction materials industry, most likely all the materials would have obtained for free - such is the affection for the RAF.

Can anyone imagine Winston Churchill countenancing the use of these imported bricks when British bricks were available and amazingly without charge!

It is nonsense for the BHMM Trust to say they haven't destroyed trees planted in memory of deceased RAF servicemen, the photos clearly show the destruction that has occurred. During the years since 1951 an oasis of tranquillity had been created by members of the RAF community who sadly are most likely now dead themselves! The person who ordered the cutting down of the flowering cherry (in bloom) which had to be about sixty years old, was heartless, and those who then acted out the order mindless, to put it mildly! These trees and shrubs have appeared in photographs, paintings, even Christmas cards, for the past fifty years! The Council before submitting their planning application, spent a fortune of rate payers money on reports written by consultants such as Donald Insall Associates who clearly stated the Irish Yews 'should remain'. Yews have always been synonymous with Churches and do not have damaging root systems. If someone were to visit say Downe Village and suggested that St Mary's Church, which in common with the RAF Chapel is Grade Two listed and in a Conservation Area, should be returned to how it was built circa 1500 by removal of any later additions and all trees and shrubs, they would rightly be classified as lunatic! As for claims of removal of plaques, this has never been stated by us - may we suggest it is a figment of someone's imagination in a desperate attempt to create mischief?

The wording of the BHMM letter implies there never was a Vestry to demolish, an extraordinary and deceitful implication. They need to look at the original drawings for the Vestry (in the Council's own planning archive and reproduced in the BHMM planning application by their own expensive consultants) where it is clearly marked 'Vestry'. Ask any member of the Choir whether there was a Vestry or ask the numerous RAF families whose wedding photos were taken in front of the magnificent arched Vestry doors with the Aircrew Association stained glass window above. Now the backdrop is just a plain white windowless brick wall, the finish of which is such that apparently it is being considered whether it should be painted. What of the Vestry doors and the ACA window? The doors may be made into 'planters' by Biggin Hill Men in Sheds and the fate

of the ACA window is unknown - a round stained glass window in the square windowless Visitors Centre, we think not. The Council did not even have the decency to contact the ACA to inform them of their planning application to demolish the Vestry containing this unique window - that was left to us! Biggin Hill was chosen for the location of this window in 1997, it honours the sacrifice of aircrew from all Commands, Bomber Command alone lost more than 51,500. Air Commodore Jack Broughton OBE DL, head of the ACA, has politely asked for the window to be returned so that it can be safely placed in the ACA archive at the Yorkshire Air Museum in perpetuity.

The Council's and its BHMM Trust's lack of empathy and knowledge of the history of the Chapel has been evident since they first took charge of the building. The first example was their refusal to support the campaign to retain perhaps the most important item in the Chapel, the 92 Squadron Standard. This Squadron, one of the most famous of the Squadrons in the Battle of Britain forever to be associated with Biggin Hill, and of course the Squadron Geoffrey Wellum flew with during the battle. Once the Standard had been secured on the word of Air Marshall Sir 'Baz' North, no less, the BHMM Trust then had the audacity to issue a press release that anyone new to the issue would read as claiming credit! Whenever the BHMM Trust is 'found out' they make fallacious statements as is happening now, we are sure they may 'fool some of the people some of the time, but not all of the people all of the time'

Such is the claim of 'two phases' to the project. We don't remember there being two at the time of the so called 'Consultation' meetings and that at the time of the 'Grand Opening' there could be an unfinished part at the rear of the building. No, it only became two phases when it was apparent that they would not have the funding to complete the building! London Borough of Bromley Report No DRR17/032 July 2017, which can be downloaded, tells the truth, but not until the last pages, which few people or councillors would read, where it states the shortfall to be £600,000. On page one, which people will read, it fraudulently states: 'The development of the Biggin Hill Memorial Museum project is now complete and all funding is secure'.

Unfortunately, we have no legal knowledge, but to bulldoze ahead with such a divisive scheme involving demolition of part of a Listed Building that is also a Listed Memorial, in a Conservation Area situated in the Green Belt whilst

claiming all funding is secure, when clearly it is not, surely must be judged as highly dubious?

The Trust ask in their letter why people continue to complain (and not just roll over) about the travesty that has occurred and continues to occur at the St George's Royal Air Force Chapel of Remembrance Biggin Hill. Is it not obvious? We use the full name for the Chapel because we suspect the Trust may even try to rename it at some point! They won't be happy to be told of the hundreds of emails we have received from the RAF community who continue to spur us on, the word coming up time and time again in these messages is **desecration**. Some tell of scattering their relatives' ashes quietly and unannounced under the Spitfire and Hurricane or the Battle of Britain Window at the end of the St George's Room, between the Irish Yews. One message recently brought tears to our eyes as it related the sender's enduring memory of his father who had been a Medical Officer at Biggin Hill at the time of the Battle of Britain. It was as a boy watching his dad standing in front of the reredos sobbing inconsolably reading the names of his dead comrades – the likes of whom have been sorely let down by this Council and their BHMM Trust. They are rightly being criticized, this was not their place to vandalise, his final sentence reads: "On his behalf I urge you on, Bromley Council seem to be idiotic despots".

The stark truth is that there are only a handful of people who support this project and are dictating to thousands who despise it. They post on social media under pseudonyms such as 'Biggin Hill Girl' 'Gypo Joe' and so on, some we suspect are Trust members themselves. Please note that those of us who truly care for the Chapel always put our names to what we write and are contactable.

Regards

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