



Promise to rebuild community centre destroyed by arson

By Janet Maitland

Barnet Council has promised to rebuild the Somali Bravanese Community Centre in Muswell Hill which was burnt to the ground in the early hours of Wednesday 5 June. Police have confirmed that the fire was started deliberately.

"I have no intention of leaving a hateful scar on the landscape," said Richard Cornelius, leader of the council.

The letters EDL, the initials of the far right group the English Defence League, were found daubed on a wall in the remains of the building. Officers from the Counter Terrorism Command are leading the investigation. Tommy Robinson, the leader of the EDL, has denied responsibility.

Community resource

Local people have been deeply shocked and disturbed by the attack. "It was such a warm and welcoming community resource, not only for the Somali community but for others too," said Rachel Abedi. "Its destruction affects the whole community."

The centre has received widespread support from community groups, politicians, unions and religious organisations. "We were always welcomed there and made many friendships," said Rabbi Jonathan Wittenberg. "Across all Jewish communities there's a very strong wish to support the centre in any way we can."

London-wide support

Hundreds of people from all over London came to a vigil outside the burnt-out building organised by Unite Against Fas-

cism shortly after the fire. "This shows that we are not divided," said Abubakar Ali, the centre's chairman. "We are all together. There is no difference between any religions. We are all one community."

The investigation has been hampered by the discovery of asbestos in the ruins, but police have continued to gather forensic evidence alongside information from individuals and CCTV footage.

Barnet Borough Commander Adrian Usher spoke out against media coverage of the fire. "To discuss whether or not this is part of a wider debate on immigration is completely missing the point," he said. "This is not a debate, it is a crime. If you know anything at all about what happened here, then please get in touch with me, even if it's a rumour. It seems to me that the phrase 'All that is necessary for evil to succeed is for good people to do nothing' is true in this case."

If you have any information call the incident room on 020 7230 2299 or ring Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111 if you want to remain anonymous. Police are particularly keen to find out whether the letters EDL were seen on the building before the fire.

Arson attack: Library is haven for Somalis

East Finchley Library is being used by members of the Somali Bravanese community made homeless by the arson attack as a temporary office space until their centre is rebuilt.

Barnet Council has offered representatives of the community wide-ranging use of the library after 5pm on weekdays, Saturday afternoon and all day Sunday.

Cllr Robert Rams, cabinet member for customer access and partnerships, said: "After the heinous attack we've received many offers of support from residents, businesses and other faith groups. We've evaluated the offers and feel that a temporary solution at East Finchley Library is the best option. "I'm delighted at the way every-

one has pulled together in the face of such a cowardly crime and that our offer of a temporary new home will secure the centre's future in the heart of the community." Abubakar Ali, chairman of the Bravanese Centre, said: "We're very grateful to Barnet Council for the temporary support of an administrative office and meeting rooms, and to local schools and communities who have stepped up to host our after-school and weekend learning activities."



The mums and babies meet up at the Clissold Arms

Network for new mums... and their babes in arms

By Nick Young

Antenatal care for expectant mothers is widespread and prevalent, but what support is there after the baby has arrived?

Elise Mendelle and Gemma Frenchman are two experienced mums who asked themselves that question. To seek answers, they started their own support group, which has become Nurturing Mums, a six-week course based at the Clissold Arms in Fortis Green aimed at addressing the concerns and needs of new mums in north London.

"We were both exposed to an abundance of antenatal support during our pregnancies," they explained. "However, once our first babies were born, we felt alone and left entirely to our own devices."

The course includes guest speakers, a professional photographer and an 'indulgent pamper morning'. The main focus, though, is to offer new

mums a non-judgemental and supportive environment where they can share their experiences and make friends.

"We set up our first group in November and had four mums," said Canada-born Elise, a chiropractor and culture blogger based in North Finchley. "Most of them came to us through Netmums, an online parenting website with local classifieds. Our next course was in January,

and we were fully booked with 10 mums. We are currently running our fourth group and are looking to start running them more often and in different areas."

Elise and Gemma says the Clissold is a nice open space that is baby-friendly and where mums can breastfeed if they like. For further information, see the website: www.nurturingmumsuk.com

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