The Estate

A report from the External Relations & Development Committee

How does the Estate reflect our relationship with the locality? And how can our alumni's undoubted affection for the campus help us to fund its future development?

These were some of the questions discussed by the External Relations and Development Committee at their meeting on 1 June 2009 when the topic for discussion was 'The Estate' but seen in the context of community and stakeholder relationships, which is the particular remit of this Committee.

A focus of the discussion was whether Goldsmiths should remain an open campus and there was unanimous support for this, with a strong desire *not* to be seen as an 'Ivory Tower' removed from local concerns. It was felt that the current mix of manned security, swipe card access and CCTV, which could be stepped up as and when the occasion demanded, struck the right balance between openness and safety.

But how far does our desire to be seen as part of the local community go? The Head of Estates and Facilities, Michael Dick, talked about how the University of Pennsylvania, where he himself had been a student and which was based in a very underprivileged area, had been working hard to revitalise its locality by investing in local housing restoration, area retail development projects and in lighting installation for 1200 local properties. Would Goldsmiths wish to exhibit it's commitment to community involvement to this degree? The Director of Estates and Facilities suggested a first move, if this was indeed the case, was for the College to place a firm emphasis on local procurement.

External members of the Committee observed that the campus was a somewhat confusing place with scant directions from local transport links only adding to the problem. The campus' lack of cohesion was particularly noticeable around Laurie Grove and Deptford Town Hall, neither of which was clearly identifiable as being part of the College. This should improve, however, with the implementation of the Wayfinding project during the summer, when new signage, maps and a greater sense of the Goldsmiths brand would be in evidence across the College.

The addition of signposting from New Cross Gate Station to the College, about which the Head of Communications and Publicity, Vicky Annand, has been in talks with Transport for London, would be an added improvement along with the legend 'alight here for Goldsmiths' being added to the main station sign. This was warmly welcomed by the Committee who felt that New Cross Station should now be similarly approached.

Ex-students genuinely had a great affection for the Goldsmiths campus; this was testified to by both the Director of Development, David Mungall, and the academic members of the Committee. But how can this warmth of feeling be harnessed to take the estate forward? One way would be to become more aware of the bits that were most loved, perhaps through better record keeping, such as noting which Halls of Residence students had lived in for example. This information could then assist in fundraising for small development projects in future, always bearing in mind the importance of commemorating such giving in order for it to become a part of our already rich history.

Our alumni are part of this history of course and are an asset the Committee felt we seriously under-use. Publicising our famous ex-students should be a priority which would not only do much to raise Goldsmiths' profile but, the Committee felt, could instil pride in the whole community. Ideas of how this could be done included projecting a rotating array of alumni onto the library windows, a cheap but effective solution, or creating a display along the lines of what Kings College has done on the Strand, at one or both of the local railway stations.

To raise the profile of alumni relations, the Director of Development suggested the creation of an Alumni Garden, where alumni events could take place but whose main purpose would be to highlight the notion that the relationship with the College did not stop at graduation. He proposed that the quad alongside the refectory would be the ideal site for this. He also pointed out the importance of maintaining the grounds and thus promoting a sense that the estate was cared for as being important to potential donors. Needy did not always translate into funding!

On a loftier note, the Committee considered the campus as an expression of social capital and agreed that the buildings themselves could affect how people felt about Goldsmiths and how they behaved there. Although the Committee felt practical concerns about openness and safety were important, there was also a sense in which the university was more than the sum of its parts; an idea, something to aspire to, and that the built environment should reflect this, without being overwhelming or 'posh'. The Ben Pimlott building was thought to be a good example of this.

In summary, External Relations and Development Committee wishes to highlight the following points :

- A strong commitment to an open campus
- That further ways to demonstrate a commitment to the local community should be explored
- A greater feeling of cohesion for the campus was required
- The need for improved signposting from public transport links
- Our famous alumni were a much under used asset
- There should be an element of aspiration in future plans to develop the Estate

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June 09