

# Council's £175k consultations bill

By Rachel Bishop

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Richmond Council spent £175,000 on non-statutory consultations from the 2011-12 budget.

The money included costs for publicity, advertising and creating consultation material.

The consultation on the

retention of Heatham House cost £1,242, which proved fruitless for the council's intentions to move the youth facility, after young people said they wanted to keep the Grade II listed building as it was.

Lord True, leader of Richmond Council, said: "While I was disappointed and will always feel some of the organised campaigners against a

new centre should be ashamed of denying the young people of Twickenham a great facility, we honoured our commitment to listen to what was said and scrapped the idea of a new youth centre.

"Yes - the consultation came up with a result we did not expect, but finding out what people really think is the whole point."

The Catholic school consultation cost £11,784, which may have to be carried out for a second time if the judicial review rules in favour of the opposition.

More than 4,200 people took part in the consultation, with 67 per cent of respondents saying the site should be used to establish a new, Catholic secondary school.

Lord True said there were many issues involved in the debate over a new Catholic school in the borough.

He said: "To ensure these issues were addressed in detail and to honour our commitment to listening to the views of residents we went the extra mile to carry out a consultation, allowing people to make their views known in a clear and open manner.

"The results of this consultation fed into the decision making process and all feedback



Youth vote: Campaigners at Heatham House last September during Ken Livingstone's visit to the youth centre

was taken into consideration. I'd rather be guided by the gathered voices of 4,200 people than one-sided press releases from the single-issue campaigners."

There were also two consultations on the Twickenham Area Action Plan, together costing £33,000.

A council spokesman said: "They represent two different statutory stages in the plan making process. An essential part of recent legislation is that there needs to be greater involvement of local people in planning for their areas.

"As such, the issues/options stage of the AAP allowed for early consultation with the

community to identify the issues and challenges for Twickenham town centre that need to be addressed in the AAP."

After granting permission to Solum Regeneration for Twickenham station, many residents accused the council of ignoring their views. This has extended to people criticising the council for carrying out too many consultations - but not delivering what they are proposing.

But Lord True said: "We are listening to what people want and involving them in making decisions.

"More councils should do the same. The All in One was central to this. The cost per

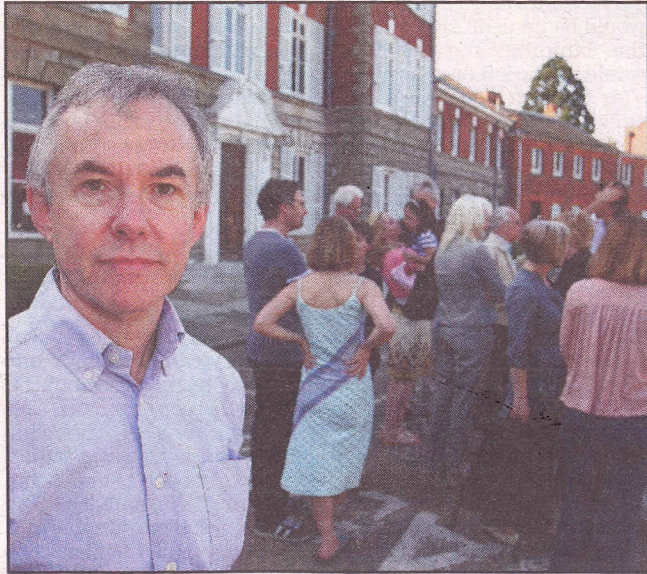
household was less than the price of my daily bus ride to the town hall, but the information given to us was invaluable.

"It has provided a clear understanding of people's priorities across the borough."

The All in One was the biggest consultation cost in the 2011-12 budget, costing £117,578 of the £175,667 total spent on consultations.

The survey was also a big cost the previous year, and was widely criticised at the time.

A further £12,063 was spent on the budget consultation, which looked into residents' views on the council's approach to current financial constraints.



Expense: Anti-Catholic school campaigner Jeremy Rodell. The school consultation cost £11,784

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