

£8.45m site 'a good deal for borough education'

By Rachel Bishop

rbishop@london.newsquest.co.uk

Richmond Council spent £8.45m to buy Clifden Road from Richmond Adult Community College (RACC), it was announced this week.

RACC decided to sell the Edwardian school to help finance the development of its Parkshot site in Richmond.

Contracts were exchanged earlier this year but final completion was subject to a number of conditions, including RACC obtaining necessary Skills Funding Agency consent and the college getting approval for additional floor space at its extended site in Parkshot.

However, the decision for the use of the site is mired in a feud between Richmond Council, the British Humanist Association (BHA) and Richmond Inclusive Schools Campaign (Risc), which is to be heard in a judicial review at the High Court.

The council wants to lease parts of the site to the Diocese of Westminster for the use of a new Catholic secondary school and a new Catholic



Bought: The Edwardian school in Clifden Road

RT59660

primary school, but BHA and Risc believe the schools' admissions policy is too exclusive and should allow more non-Catholics in.

The issue being argued in court, however, is about the assessment of desire for new school places or the need for new school places.

Risc supporter and parent

Gaurav Mathur said: "After a year of hiding the costs, the council has said it spent £8.45m of taxpayers' money on the only currently available secondary school site in the borough.

"We should all benefit from this significant investment – the site should be used for an inclusive school that will definitely be needed in the coming years. Instead the council has decided to lease it, for 125 years at no charge, for exclusive, state-funded Catholic schools."

But, deputy leader of the council and cabinet member for finance, property and resources Councillor Geoffrey Samuel said the site would enable wider diversity of education in Twickenham.

Coun Samuel said: "This is a good deal for the council,

a good deal for the college but most important of all a good deal for education in the borough."

As part of the conditions that went with the sale, the college will rent part of the site at a peppercorn rent for two years and to assist RACC's move to Parkshot, the college will rent a part of Old Deer Car Park to help their construction works.

RACC's acting principal Gabe Flint said: "The current economic climate caused us to review our services to ensure that they meet the learning and personal development needs of Richmond borough and surrounding areas.

"The sale of the Clifden Centre, an Edwardian school, has given us the resources to develop our flagship site at Parkshot, Richmond, and create specialist learning environments within an accessible adult learning campus.

"Over the next 18 months, we will be building on our strengths and extending the facilities and services we offer to the local community.

"Our adult mission is central to our vision for the future and although the Government is reducing funding to adult education, we want to make sure that fees do not present a barrier to those who need and want to learn."

Adult learning will continue at the Clifden site until the Parkshot site is completed by the summer of 2014. Courses will then move to Parkshot and continue at centres in the community.

□ For more on Richmond Council's consultations, turn to page 12.

anchor

Parvis Road | West Byfleet | Surrey | KT14 6EY



A luxurious care home that