

MEMBERS OF Lambeth Council might not be feeling so zen about the sale of the iconic Beaufoy building in Kennington to Diamond Way Buddhism if they had researched the buyers more carefully, writes Megan Welford...

A closer look at the organisation and its controversial leader Lama Ole Nydahl suggests that its influence on the community may not be entirely benevolent.

Contracts have been exchanged with Diamond Way for the building, subject to planning permission, and with developers Bellway Homes for the adjacent ground known as the carpark, in a deal worth £9million, with £7.2million going to the council and £1.5million to the Beaufoy Trust. There are already two Buddhist centres in the immediate area – Jamyang on Renfrew Road and the Kagyu Samye Dzong on Manor Place.

Diamond Way is controversial within Buddhism because it represents a split from one of the four main Tibetan lineages,

Controversial Buddhists



following a spiritual leader, or Karmapa, not recognised by the Dalai Lama or mainstream Buddhists. Its leader, Lama Ole Nydahl, a Dane who converted to Buddhism after an early life as a drug smuggler, has a reputation for being an aggressive self-promoter whose speeches are infused with racism and islamophobia and who allegedly sleeps with his students.

One Buddhist teacher said he was seen among Tibetan lamas as a “disgrace” and a student who lives among Diamond Way

followers said: “He’s not a lama, the term doesn’t apply.”

An academic co-ordinator from Copenhagen, who preferred not to be named, went to see Ole Nydahl speak as he does, regularly, to audiences of hundreds.

She told the *Weekender*: “He talked about how we in the West were the lucky ones, that people who had behaved well in a former life were born in rich countries and in poor countries people were being punished. It was shocking.”

Vauxhall resident and Danish Buddhist Mette Heinz wrote to her councillor warning: “Ole Nydahl often speaks out publicly against Muslims, something that isn’t consistent with other Buddhist schools, and seem possibly harmful to the multi-cultural way that we live in south London.” She is awaiting a reply.

Independent religious information network Inform said in response to

our questions: “[Ole Nydahl] is publically critical of Islam and its treatment of women, and members of the Diamond Way were reported to have been involved in a March 2010 demonstration against the building of a mosque in central Warsaw.”

Klaus Eiden, a social worker who set up the Bodhicharya Buddhist centre in Berlin next to a Diamond Way centre, said: “He’s very charismatic. He’s like a Buddhist pop artist, he has groupies. When we would invite him to our centres in 1980 he would spend the night with students he had met that night.”

When asked by an American newspaper if it was true he had sex with students, Lama Ole replied: “There’s no teacher-student relationship involved in that. They’re Diamond Way Buddhists, but they’re not my students in that moment. They’re equal partners.” Diamond Way’s proposal for the

Beaufoy Building includes free meditation classes for locals, a peace garden and a café. A spokesperson added: “Diamond Way Buddhists have also been involved in many community activities as diverse as palliative care, education, art workshops, science debates and even local transport campaigns.”

Local people, above all, would like to see the building used for community purposes. Reverend Angus Agard, Team Rector of the North Lambeth Parish: “I am now concerned that the proceeds from the sale of the school are in part used for the benefit of locals in our area particularly young people and educational issues as that is what the Beaufoy was built for.”

The Beaufoy Trust will surely choose to invest in the community in this way. £200,000 has also been ringfenced by the council for local community projects.

brixton

Fears mount over random attacks after brutal killing

THE BRUTAL murder of a seventeen-year-old student sparked fears of revenge attacks and an escalation in random gang violence last week, writes Oliver Pugh...

Kwame Oforu-Asare was stabbed to death in Brixton as he walked through an estate with a friend on Friday March 2. But police were investigating whether the attack was linked to five stabbings on February 25 and two others since then, including one on the upper deck of a 432 bus in West Norwood on Friday.

Commander David Zinzan, the man in charge of policing in south east London, said: “We can’t clearly link them but we believe there’s been an escalation in gang violence, might be of retaliation type attacks.

“We are very concerned with the escalation and the severity [of the attacks] over the weekend.”

Extra police officers were drafted in to Lambeth to deter any further violence, with one police spokesperson admitting it was “all hands on deck.”

They were hunting the two black men who were said to have killed Kwame, from Catford, as he walked with a friend in the Moorlands Estate.

Investigating officer, DCI John McFarlane, said: “Kwame was an innocent young man enjoying himself on a Friday afternoon when he was pursued and attacked by two knifemen.

Anyone with information should call the incident room on 020 8721 4205; if you wish to remain anonymous call Crimestoppers on 0800 555111.



CHOOSE WELL

The Lambeth Choose Well campaign aims to point you in the right direction to get the help you need for your healthcare needs. Please only use A&E services when you have a serious injury or life threatening emergency.

Dr Adrian McLachlan, local GP and Chair of Lambeth Clinical Commissioning Committee said “We all pay for the NHS and want to know if we are ill or any of our family is ill that we can get the care we need quickly. Unless you have a really life threatening emergency, obviously need hospital admission or investigation, have broken bones or serious injury, the best care is not always hospital.

“Your local pharmacist can provide lots of advice and treatment, including information about common conditions such as minor infections, aches, colds and allergies.

“Your own GP, has years of experience of dealing with all types of medical problems and has your medical records to hand and is often a better choice than a busy casualty department.

“For self care at home you can visit www.nhs.uk and for any help or advice, you can always call NHS Direct on 0845 4647.”

For more information on Choose Well in Lambeth, visit www.selondon.nhs.uk/lambeth

