BISHOPS HILL UPDATE





Bishops Hill Action Group (BHAG) is a small group of residents and past users of Bishops Hill College who got together in June 2025 to protest at Essex County Council's decision to suddenly close Bishops Hill College (ACL) on the Rayleigh Road, in Hutton, without any future plans or consultation. BHAG created a petition which gathered 4,200+ signatures, including those of Alex Burghart MP and many Brentwood Borough Councillors, and which resulted in ECC agreeing to review its decision. **Our aim has been to save the heritage building for educational and community use, and to prevent its decay or disposal to private developers.**

In the past year BHAG has acted as a 'community voice' and has explored many ways to get the College reopened. It has contacted numerous funding organisations and charities, and members have met councillors and ECC officials and our MP, Alex Burghart, plus representatives of a Special Schools Trust. We have hit a brick wall in identifying any funding streams to enable us to progress our ideas for repurposing the college as a special school or a vocational training centre or an FE college.

The Essex County Council new administration has now proposed an entirely different solution, which it envisages will be financially viable.

At the ECC full Council meeting on 13th October, ECC and Brentwood Cllr Quirk announced that ECC planned to restore and repurpose Bishops Hill for residential and community use.

Its preliminary proposals indicate that it will:-

- preserve the exterior heritage of the Bishops Hill building, but deny public access to it, and future use of the Great Hall.
- redevelop Bishops Hill site primarily for residential uses, including conversion of the Great Hall into apartments
- make provision for community use in an unspecified alternative space.
- transfer responsibility for organising and funding community and educational activities from ECC to a Community Charitable Trust, which the community would need to set up and run with volunteers
- meet their social obligations through provision of some affordable housing, and flats for independent living for people with learning disabilities

- raise revenue through sale and rental of properties to cover construction costs and provide ongoing funds for ECC.
- will take 2-3 years to complete, cost in the region of £17-£18 million, and work will be undertaken by Essex Housing - the housing development arm of ECC.

Bishops Hill Action Group welcomes having had some advance notice of these outline plans and of being invited 'to help shape this vision'. It has started to feedback which aspects it supports, but also has voiced concerns as it wants to ensure the plans still make proper provision for community and educational use, and that heritage is valued.

BHAG has never claimed to represent the breadth of local opinion but has always argued for a public consultation once definite ECC proposals were known. As no public consultation is currently planned, BHAG has created a Facebook page so that anyone can feedback their views on the proposals outlined so far. Its purpose is to help BHAG to gauge local views and collate public opinion.

Please do help shape the future and use of the Bishops Hill site by sending BHAG your comments and ideas. In particular, tell us:-

- **what community & educational activities do YOU think our community needs space for in the future at Bishops Hill?**
- **is it important to you that the historic Great Hall is reopened for public use?**
- **are the ECC plans what you want to see for the future of the Bishops Hill site?**
- **what are your alternative ideas for the BH site if you disagree?**

The ECC plans for the future use of Bishops Hill are at an early stage of design, ahead of going forward for planning permission.

THE COMMUNITY NEEDS TO STATE WHAT IT WANTS TO HAPPEN NEXT TO THE BISHOPS HILL SITE TO SHAPE ITS FUTURE BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE.