

Islington

Gazette

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Thursday December 8, 2016

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COMMUNITY NEWS

'Let us develop old fire station'

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Charity bosses are "completely perplexed" after being repeatedly knocked back in their bid to buy the Clerkenwell fire station site.

Little-known Water Incorporated wants to move from Barnet closer to central London and says the building is "perfect" – but the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) says it's no longer on the market.

The charity is backed by Dutch benefactor Wolf Barleugh – a former solicitor with a love of historic buildings – and would have no problem stumping up the millions required for the Rosebery Avenue station, which was the oldest in the UK before Boris Johnson named it as one of 10 to be shut in 2014.

Its future has been a major talking point since then, not least because taxpayers have shelled out more than £264,000 paying for maintenance, security and utilities while it sits empty, as revealed by

the *Gazette* earlier this year.

So trustee of Water Incorporated Peter Ulrich cannot understand the snub, particularly as they have vowed to meet all the criteria of Islington Council's planning brief for the site.

The charity says it will preserve the Grade-II listed building and keep it open to the public with a museum celebrating the station. The flats above would be student accommodation and the charity said it would also build affordable housing at the back.

"We have made numerous approaches to Sadiq Khan and LFEPA in the past two months but have been met with a brick wall response," said Peter. "Our proposals satisfy all the planning requirements and meet the community's wishes, but LFEPA will not discuss." Peter added the charity was even refused permission to ask a question at a City Hall meeting by LFEPA, which deemed it "frivolous".

A City Hall spokesman said the mayor was determined to get to grips with the housing crisis and develop sites owned by the GLA.