

Fire Safety at the LSE Encampment

9 June 2024

We write this update on fire safety matters and developments at the encampment in the Marshall Bloom* Building. While we have issued multiple statements ([27 May](#), [28 May](#), [29 May](#), [30 May](#), and social media posts ([27 May](#)) outlining how we have accommodated fire safety measures in the building throughout our occupation, it is necessary to set the record straight and challenge the disingenuous, vilifying, and frankly upsetting narrative that the School Management Committee (SMC) have repeatedly and most recently on Saturday 8 June presented to the LSE community about our encampment.

On Friday 7 June the encampment finally received a second fire risk assessment issued by the SMC, which had been promised since 30 May. Two consultants carried out a fire inspection on Monday 2 June and we had been waiting for this report all week. The SMC asked to meet at short notice on several occasions this week to discuss the findings of the yet-to-be-written report. We repeatedly noted our concern about the delays and were keen to receive the report as soon as possible to consider the recommendations and seek appropriate legal and fire safety advice on our side. The report was received at 7.49pm on Friday, with a demand to meet its recommendations within 4 hours. This allowed no time for us to seek the appropriate legal advice that the SMC knew we sought since Monday.

When finally received, this assessment was sent to us in two parts. The first concerns the 'safety of the occupants' and contains 6 recommendations including a re-arrangement of the tent configuration of the encampment. The second part, "Re-occupation", concerns the possibility of re-opening of the Marshall Building, against which they suggest "strong caution". This "independent" assessment was performed by two fire engineers from Ove Arup and Partners. The SMC claim that the inspection was undertaken by "two senior fire engineers", neither of whom have signed off the report. Instead the 'senior validating Director' and 'expert witness' for the Grenfell inquiry, [considered by Grenfell survivors and family members to be a cover up](#) has validated the report.

The 'Cities' MSc and PhD programmes which ran from 1994-2014 at LSE were run by Arup, and they continue to fund the Cities research centre at the university. They are also a major consultant on LSE's [new building development](#), the Firoz Lalji Hub. Further, Sir David Higgins, who is strangely copied into the assessment, [has recently worked with Arup in a personal capacity](#) chairing a "private sector group" to address rail connectivity issues. There are two answers as to why he is copied in: 1) as chair of the Finance and Estates Committee (FAC); so an intentional and perverse derailing of negotiations by the SMC; or 2) as a friend of Arup who may well have commissioned the report through his friends. On top of all of this, the fire safety assessment undertaken by Arup was done so with a complete lack of transparency. Inspectors were accompanied the entire time by SMC member Eric Neumayer, and refused to provide verification or engage with members of the encampment. This is despite being given explicit permission by the School beforehand that we could accompany the inspectors. We therefore question how independent this report truly is.

On Saturday 8 June, the SMC issued us a formal letter asking that we leave and threatening "civil recovery" of the building on the grounds of this Arup's assessment. You can read [our statement](#) from 8 June for more on this development.

It is no coincidence that the SMC's apparent concern for the health and safety of the encampment started at the same time as students began to cover the Portsmouth Street side

windows with posters and Palestine flags on 27 May. LSE security was ordered to remove the posters day after day, including removing 'fire exit' signs from the doors, citing the 'flammability' of the material covering the windows. At the same time, negotiators were told by the SMC that the posters needed to be removed to appease "the other side". These concerns were conveniently tied to fire safety. We questioned why it took the SMC almost two weeks from 14 May for fire safety issues to become a concern. Still, as issues were raised with us on 27 May, the encampment urgently implemented fire safety and health and safety recommendations and in fact expanded the perimeter of the encampment precisely because the space was crammed to the point of being unsafe. Hence, the request to reduce the perimeter of the encampment (which the second fire safety report now no longer requests) was not adhered to.

The encampment has consistently implemented fire safety recommendations to the best of our ability in response to the first fire safety report issued on 29 May, which can be seen in an email dated [3 June](#). We have maintained our position, that since Wednesday 29 May, the SMC has refused: 1) to allow the encampment to bring in an independent fire inspector in order to make appropriate accommodations and 2) to send building and floor plans for fire safety. Eric Neumayer has said that an independent fire check requested by the encampment is not desirable as it may produce a conflicting recommendation, which raises concerns about whether LSE is truly concerned about fire safety. We cannot understand why the SMC would not welcome additional fire safety recommendations. The SMC has also tied our safety to the ongoing negotiations, threatening that legal action on the false grounds of fire concerns will impact how the Council will view our demands.

We are deeply concerned that the SMC has misrepresented the situation in School-wide communications. We are publishing three emails from the encampment's Security team to SMC which extensively detail our position. Further below, we share a timeline of events which we have communicated to the SMC in writing.

Encampment emails to the SMC

[3 June 2024](#)

[5 June 2024](#)

[6 June 2024](#)

Timeline

27/05/2024

On Monday 27 May, after we were first notified about the School's fire safety concerns, we requested via email the floor and building plans of the Marshall Building from Allan Blair, LSE Director of Facilities Management. The floor and building plans are required for us to seek out our own assessment and clear fire safety advice in line with BS 0999 which Allan also notified us of. We immediately sought fire safety advice from contacts including the Fire Brigades Union. Our email request for the plans was ignored. We find it troubling that Allan Blair and the SMC refused to share the floor and building plans with us which are imperative for our own safety. This hindered and delayed the encampment from carrying out a fire inspection.

28/05/2024

On Tuesday 28 May, the SMC was informed that we would carry out our own fire safety inspection before taking any action regarding the conditions the SMC was trying to set on the encampment. The SMC wanted the perimeter of the camp to be reduced and the posters to be removed from the Portsmouth Street side of the building on the grounds of fire safety. It is obvious that a private fire surveyor acting on behalf of the SMC would issue a report with findings in line with the wishes of the SMC; thus the point of carrying out our own fire inspection was to ensure balance and a fair assessment from our point of view. The SMC were aware that our fire safety inspectors were coming the following day.

29/05/2024

On Wednesday [29 May](#), three members of the Fire Brigades Union arrived at LSE to carry out an independent inspection. However, Richard Mulcahy, LSE Security Operations Manager, and Allan Blair [refused](#) to allow our fire safety advisors entry into the building, denying us the ability to conduct our own fire risk and safety inspection. We were shocked at LSE's decision, especially since they mentioned many times that our safety was their priority. A member of the London Fire Brigade was eventually permitted entry to the building to carry out an assessment. The London Fire Brigade's checks resulted in no concerns, as Allan and Richard were informed of in person at the site by Chris Andrews. This invalidated the findings of the School's first fire safety report which states "it is likely that any visit by the fire service would result in a prohibition notice being issued." No prohibition notice was issued when the London Fire Brigade visited.

Despite obvious signs that the SMC were acting in bad faith, we again took serious steps to make our encampment as safe as possible. The London Fire Brigade recommended to disperse the electrical sockets utilised on 28th, which we did immediately. Fire exits were clearly marked out and paths through the building remain unimpeded and passable at all times in the event of an emergency. Emergency protocols were codified in the camp and disseminated as part of our standard onboarding process.

30/05/2024

The School took the decision to close the Marshall building on Thursday 30 May. This was based on their interpretation of the findings of the first fire inspection report, without checking whether the report's recommendations had been met by the encampment. We strongly believe that if the SMC had not hindered our ability to carry out an independent fire safety inspection on Wednesday 29 May, like the London Fire Brigade's verdict, the findings would have stated no reason to close the Marshall building. We therefore believe that for this reason the School closed the building intentionally to deny us the ability to carry out our own independent fire safety assessment. We informed the SMC that the closure of the Marshall building was not in the interests of the wider School community nor the encampment.

Richard Mulcahy and Allan Blair denied entry to Fire Brigades Union members and had no choice but to allow the London Fire Brigade Senior Fire Safety Officer entry after checking his ID. Despite this, the School-wide email sent on the 30 May intentionally misrepresented what happened by stating that the 'credentials' of the London Fire Brigade officer whom Richard and Allan had approved to enter the building, could not be verified, and that 'representatives' of the encampment's assessment were not putting their names to paper for 'what could amount to a separate fire risk inspection yesterday'. And yet in email they confirmed to us they had verified the officer's status. The SMC refused to accept the independent site visit of a London Fire Brigade Officer whose capacity is to carry out checks, not consultancy services.

03/06/2024

An email sent to SMC on [3 June](#) extensively detailed the ways in which the encampment has addressed and complied with the fire safety concerns raised in their first inspection report. The encampment has been deeply concerned about potential fire hazards and risks, which is why we sought an independent fire report since Tuesday 28 May, which the SMC has actively blocked in a number of ways as listed above. In the negotiation meetings with the SMC on this day, they commented that if the fire safety assessment did not deem the building safe to reopen with the encampment in its current form they would formally ask us to leave.

04/06/2024

On Tuesday 4 June, two unidentified fire safety inspectors were brought to the camp to conduct an inspection. Despite being told by the SMC that "representatives from your encampment may accompany the independent surveyor to ask questions, offer explanation, and make suggestions," we were not allowed to speak to them and they did not engage with us. We raised this and questioned the School's refusal to allow us to conduct our own fire

safety assessment in [our email](#) to the SMC on the same day. We were later informed that the School simply did not understand why we were not allowed to speak to them as they carried out their assessment, and that Arup (a company that works closely with LSE) had taken that decision themselves.

06/06/2024

In an email received on 6 June, the SMC once again denied our request to carry out our own independent fire safety check, which we had informed them of our intention to do on a number of occasions since Tuesday 28 May. They also withheld the findings of their second fire safety check while making threats based on those findings. The SMC also invited security liaisons to a meeting with 3 and a half hours notice - we declined to meet with the SMC without first receiving the report and only after seeking legal advice, noting that in previous instances the SMC had met representatives and said one thing, and then misrepresented the matter in School-wide communications. In our [email response](#), we once again requested the building and floor plans to enable us to make the space safer, a request which has yet to even be acknowledged.

07/06/2024

We received the second fire risk assessment at 7.49pm on Friday 7 June and were asked to implement the recommendations within 4 hours. The following day, Saturday 8 June, we received a letter at 5pm demands that we leave.

Health and safety as a bargaining chip

We are not convinced that the SMC has placed our safety at the centre of its actions and decisions. The SMC has used students' health and safety matters on the encampment as a bargaining chip in negotiations, and in the early days of the occupation ([22 May](#)) made the opening of toilets and showers in the basement of the Bloom Building conditional on restrictions to the protest (no posters, no enlargement of the camp, limits on prayer areas). On broader wellbeing, health and safety issues, we reported concerns to the SMC including discrimination against Muslim students, surveillance, and harassment from 22 May which were finally acknowledged on 5 June.

From 29 May, the prospect of a second fire risk assessment with a potentially favourable outcome has been used as a carrot to reward us if we complied with the SMC's core demands - removing posters from the Portsmouth Street side of the building and reducing the perimeter of the encampment. If we had reduced the perimeter of the encampment, the second fire report would have had a favourable outcome. We refused to play games and allow the university to use our safety as a bargaining chip, and for this reason disentangled the day-to-day operation concerns of the encampment with our negotiation meetings. A common strategy used by many universities is to simply wait and let student and staff protestors get tired of being there, and if the SMC allowed us to feel comfortable in the back corner of the Bloom Building, that would clearly be a sign that our protest is not working. For these reasons, we have refused to move - and indeed in many ways that was successful, from 28 May onwards it felt like the university finally started to take us seriously.

We hope that this statement goes some way in addressing the misrepresentation of our encampment and setting the record straight. For weeks now, the university has wasted our time by forcing us to engage in alleged fire safety issues, logistical matters, and delayed negotiations. We have been clear from the beginning: the dismantling of the encampment is entirely in the SMC's hands - resting on good faith engagement with us on our demands, most pertinently divestment. Now, we face suppression simply for carrying out our right to protest. It won't stop us. We refuse complicity in genocide and we demand better from our university. We believe that Palestine will be free. And when that day comes we will not forget the excuses, the lies, and the cowardice of this university and the SMC.

The LSE Liberated Zone
9 June 2024

**Renamed in memorium after Marshall Bloom, a US anti-apartheid and anti-war student activist who was suspended from LSE for leading the first student occupation in the UK here in 1967 against LSE's complicity in Rhodesian apartheid. Bloom subsequently committed suicide following his draft call into the Vietnam War. The building is formally (and now formerly) known as the Marshall Building, but the students condemn any official association of LSE with Sir Paul Marshall, the major owner of GB News and exposed racist, for whom it is named.*