

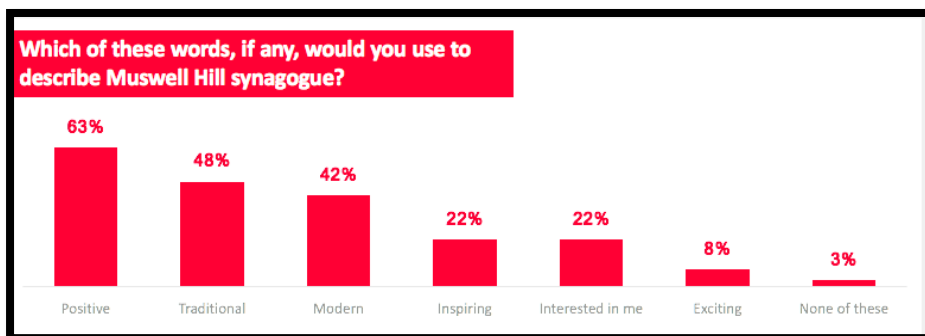
## Muswell Hill Synagogue Strategy 2018

The aim of this strategy paper is to set the agenda for the next phase of the community's development as we enter an exciting time in our history with a new building project ahead of us and a growing membership. We are planning over a three-year timescale, but recognise that many elements of any strategy will have to remain fluid and open to debate. The proposals here arise from an extended strategy meeting of the Board of Management on Sunday Nov 5<sup>th</sup> 2017, from previous discussions of the Executive and of the Board of Management, and from the community engagement survey carried out in 2017 to inform the strategy day.

### Background

Our community survey was commissioned as a source of data to feed into the board strategy day and has provided some useful insights into the views and level of engagement of the community. We do take into account that the survey was completed by a mainly engaged group of members, but there was a viable sample of 78 members, (approx 10% of the community) with 54 fully completing it. There was a female skew (56% versus 44% men) and it was dominated by the 46-55 year old age bracket, followed by the 66-75 year olds.

It is worth noting that the survey reveals that most members feel positive about MHS.



This survey fed into our board strategy day where we also developed a Purpose and Vision for Muswell Hill Synagogue. We agreed that the key values that feed into our purpose include,

- Not judgemental
- Irreverent
- Meets you wherever you are

- Unorthodox Orthodox synagogue
- Traditional values with modern refinement
- Push boundaries within Halachic constraints
- Inclusive
- Caring

## **Vision and Purpose:**

The Purpose of Muswell Hill Synagogue as an organisation describes our current position, and answers the question, “Why does Muswell Hill Synagogue exist?”

The Board described our current purpose as:

*Muswell Hill Shul exists to provide a space for Jewish people in the wider Muswell Hill area to come together and engage in a traditional, inclusive, modern and outward looking community.*

Our Vision describes where we would like to be in 5 years time:

*BY 2023...Muswell Hill Synagogue aims to create a modern, vibrant hub with a choice of activities engaging people of all ages to pray, learn, socialise and volunteer in a traditional Jewish environment*

The strategy and proposals that follow all aim to further that vision and help us fulfil our current purpose:

## **Policies and Procedures**

1. As the community has grown over recent years there is a need to move away from an informal system based on people just knowing how things work and relying on information being passed on through members, to a more formal system of written policies and pathways. During 2017 policies were written to formalise the process for Bar and Batmitzvah date allocation and arrangements for the simcha day, the welcome pathway for new members and our policy on food and Kashrut. We have also developed a procedure document for bereavement dealing with eventualities when the office is closed or the Rabbi away.
2. **Proposals**
  - a) **We will set up a shared cloud based community calendar for key staff and the exec to access.**
  - b) **We will explore whether there are other areas that would benefit from a written procedure.**
  - c) **We will ensure that all policies are shared with the community to allow for openness and transparency.**

## Membership

3. Membership has grown recently to an all-time high of 697 individuals, approximately 400 paying members (very loosely understood as ‘families’). We have had 40 “units” join since 1 May 2017 representing 67 individuals of whom 5 are TCM (Tribe Community Members). The highest proportion of our members (411 in total) are from the age categories 31-60, with over 70’s totalling 171 members. Despite the relative youthfulness of the community, there remains a sizeable number of older members, many of whom have a long standing connection to the community and are vital members of the community. As the community has grown this has raised new challenges in terms of catering for the community at peak times. First day Rosh Hashanah 2017 was incredibly busy with over 800 people in the building and many men particularly needing to stand for large portions of the service.

The welcome number of new members also raises a further issue with allocation of seating. The shul has run out of seats to allocate. We have 697 adult members and only 504 seats to allocate. 97 male members and 112 female members do not currently have an allocated seat. Nor do any of our 83 members between the ages of 16-20. Since we are not planning to add seats to the shul but we are planning for continued modest growth in membership we can expect this situation to get worse rather than better over time. Whilst this may not be a practical problem as there are only very few occasions during the year when there are not enough seats for everyone to sit on, it is an ideological one, in that we are in a position where we have created a two-tier membership, where some members are allocated a seat and therefore a place to store their personal items and some members are not.

This strategy is particularly concerned with not just membership numbers, but with positively engaging more members to be involved in whatever part of communal life they connect with. For some this will be the religious services, for others volunteering in the welfare committee, attending a learning session or volunteering in social action activities such as our new Winter Shelter. In 2018, we developed a clear written pathway for new members laying out their journey from the day they express an interest in joining the shul to ensure that they feel welcome and knowledgeable about how to engage in community life to whatever level they would like.

### 4. **Proposals:**

- a. **We are exploring solutions for fairer allocation of seating for all members, there will be a full consultation with the community before any solutions are formalised.**
- b. **We will actively promote the community both internally (through better communication with current members) and externally by keeping the web site as up to date as possible and utilising social media channels.**
- c. **We will continue to use find ways to engage as many current members as possible through initiatives such as the Volunteers Shabbat and social action projects.**
- d. **We will roll out our new pathway to involve new members and continue to evaluate if it can be improved or built on.**

## Finances

5. The community's finances are reasonably stable, but whilst there is a sizeable reserve at present of over £71,000, there are many potential claims on it. Most of the activities of the community aim to do no more than break even and may require subsidies.

Fundraising began in 2017 towards a building fund led by a dedicated fundraising committee. This has reached a total of £350K pledged and will continue once we have a fully costed building plan later in 2018. We will continue to talk to the US about how much they will contribute to the project both in terms of a loan and a grant.

Our most significant other cost at the moment is in staffing. In 2015 the decision was taken to employ a Community Events Director. This was funded 50% through a US fund and 50% from a donation from a generous community member. This funding will end in August 2018. The Executive and Board have decided that due to the ending of this funding and in line with our strategy of empowering members to engage in community life, we will now change this role to a Community Events Coordinator to support community members with the logistics needed to put on events. The other staff costs, excluding the Rabbi and part-time administrator are for our youth director and teenage assistants and a very small amount of cost for a part-time welfare administrator.

### 6. Proposal:

- a) **To formalise our fundraising for the building once we have the final costing and plans and to continue to keep the community in the loop of the progress made towards reaching a total.**

## Synagogue Building Project:

7. Upgrading the synagogue building is a key priority for the community. The building does not match our vision of being a 'modern, vibrant hub' and it has a substantial backlog of improvement and maintenance work. Given that building work on such a large and (now) aging building will be expensive there is an important question as to how best to tackle this critical challenge.

Strategy work led by the Board during 2016 identified a number of priorities. In no particular order these were (1) creating a flexible larger Bet HaMidrash; (2) renovating the Rose and Harry Epstein Hall (3) improving the lobby and circulation (4) upgrading the kitchen (5) redesigning and securing the side entrance; (6) improving classroom space and (7) adding a rooftop play area for the nursery.

We then embarked on a community-wide consultation to ensure that as many members as possible had opportunity to express their view on these ideas. The consultation ran between January and July 2017. Some important feedback was gathered. This fell into five main areas:

- The community wants the project be looked at as a coherent whole. The design should look to create a consistency and optimise flow between all the important common spaces.
- Furthermore, the project should be ambitious. This is the first major renovation project that has been proposed since many current members joined the shul and there is a clear appetite to go beyond individual projects and into a more comprehensive refurbishment.
- Some moderate renovation of the main prayer sanctuary itself should be brought into the remit.
- We run a wide range of activities in the building, and this is growing as the community expands. So flexibility should be paramount in our thinking.
- The basic utilities of the shul should be looked at as part of the process, notably ventilation, heating and lighting.

The board has taken these as the guiding principles to develop a building project that can be recommended to the community and the United Synagogue.

Work with a small team of professionals working mostly on a pro-bono basis has now begun. This team is led by the Board Co-Vice-Chairs and is being advised by community member Murray Levinson, an architect with the established and international architectural firm, Squire and Partners. We have also held extensive discussions with the United Synagogue to

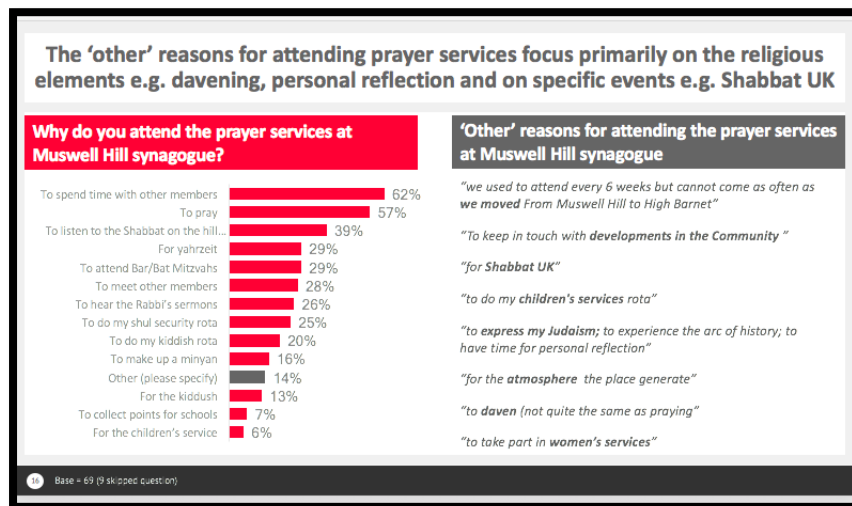
update them on our progress and plans, and to begin developing some financial scenarios that might work for both them and us. These discussions are progressing well.

## **8. Proposal:**

- a) We will continue to refine the ideas further until they form a single, fully costed, coherent and detailed plan that can be presented to the community and United Synagogue for approval.**
- b) This plan will be informed by:**
  - Our Community Vision and Purpose**
  - The seven ideas developed by the Board in 2016 (see para 2 above)**
  - The five principles that resulted from the 2017 consultation (see bullets above)**
  - Level of affordability commensurate with expected donations and shul finances**

## Religious Life

9. On the whole, the minyan is sustained for Friday night, Shabbat mincha and weekday services, but this continues to require significant work and has been helped by the creation of a WhatsApp group to promote attendance. Our 2017 survey shows a slightly lower attendance across a month than in 2007. In our current survey, when asked what they enjoy most about the service, the following reasons were given.

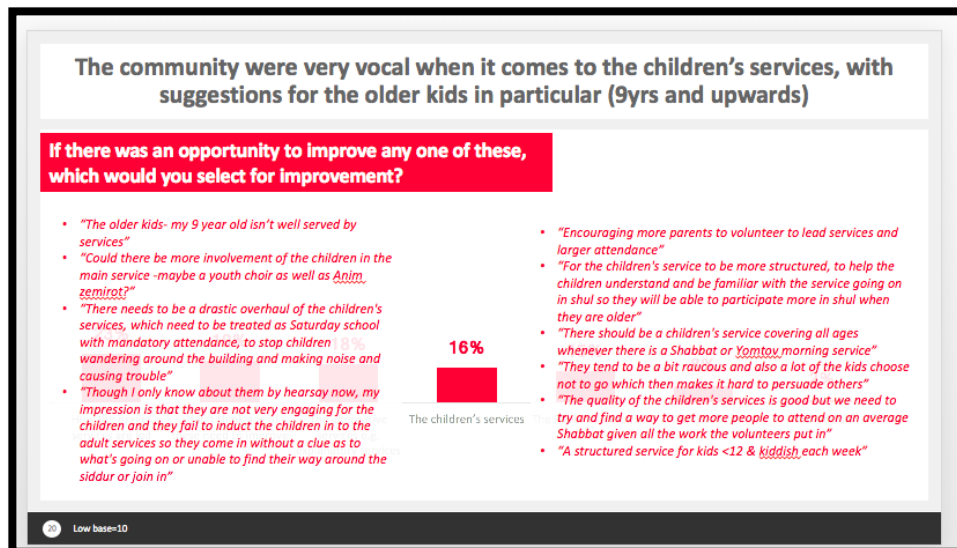


The development of a Muswell Hill and Highgate eruv is now in the planning stage, progress is steady but slow. This might have a significant effect in making it possible for religiously observant young families to stay in the community.

The survey revealed support for more explanatory and alternative services beyond the chagim.

Children's services received some attention in the survey, with many suggestions for improvement. These have not been well attended in recent years, with a struggle to find enough volunteers to sustain them. A new group of volunteers have become involved and relaunched the older children services in Jan 2018.





## 10. Proposals:

- a) There is strong support for the continuation of the Shabbat on the Hill initiative, both as a way to enhance the Shabbat morning religious services and as an element in our adult education programme.
- b) Other ways will be explored to engage more people in the service, through other events such as alternative services, discussion groups or other Shabbat morning activity.
- c) Point b) will be looked at in conjunction with proposals for Rosh Hashanah 2018 to use the Rose and Harry Epstein Hall for more of the morning for learning activities or interactive services to ease the pressure on seating in the shul.
- d) The children's services need constant attention to make them engaging and interesting for young people and hopefully an experience they enjoy. There will be ongoing work to encourage more people to get involved in volunteering to run them.
- e) Improving the experience of religious services for women is a priority for the community (see below).

## Women in the Community

11. As in the United Synagogue as a whole, the community's approach to providing a fulfilling role for women is a major challenge. Important progress has been made in recent years and many girls are now choosing to learn to Leyen for their Batmitzvot; The Rabbi has been very supportive of these innovations around women's participation, and is working on a guide for families planning a women's service for a Batmitzvah. Girls and women in the community are now also able say the Prayer for the Royal Family adding to their involvement in a family Simcha. The addition of a women's role as a liaison with the wardens has been a positive development and has led to the reintroduction of the Callat Torah scheme to honour women in the community. Women reciting Kaddish is now the norm, although more work could be done to enable women to feel more confident in saying it. Benschung gomel is also an addition to the service that women can participate in.

Our downstairs seating area for women was introduced in 2016 in one section of the men's area. It was agreed to make this area available for Shabbat on the Hill weeks and special events such as Simchat Torah. The physical arrangement of the seats in the area used means it takes up the whole section to the aisle which is larger than is needed. Due to the occasional use of the area and no real regularity in the dates in which it is available, it is also difficult to build a momentum and women have reported not being aware of when it is there and when it isn't and thus not sitting there when they may have otherwise chosen to do so. These issues have all led to a lower than expected take up of this area, although it must be noted that on weeks that it is there, counts have shown that 20-25% of the women present on average choose to sit there, (approximately 6-8 women out of 30-35 total attendance) this amounts to a significant minority for whom it is important to be able to sit downstairs and be more involved in the service. On one recent Shabbat on the Hill, the Rabbi emailed a few days before to remind women the area would be there leading to a significantly higher take up.

12. **Proposals:**

**a) We will continue to develop the women's services and explore more ways for women to be involved in services. The hope is that the guide being developed for families planning a women's service will lower the barrier of entry to this activity and make it something more families can choose if they wish to**

**b) We will initiate a programme for women to give a sermon/dvar Torah on certain Shabbat weeks to increase the involvement from women in the service.**

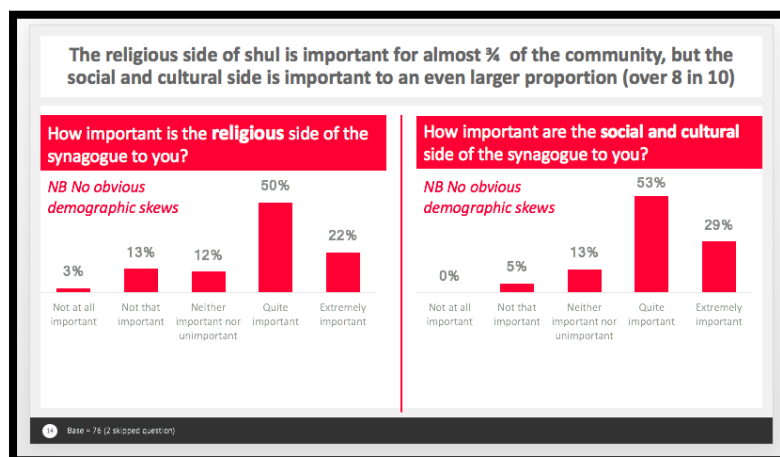
**c) We will explore ways to make the downstairs women's area more appropriately sized for the amount of women who wish to sit there. We are exploring the development of a smaller but permanent area as an inclusive space for those who actively prefer to sit downstairs or who are not able to access the upstairs area.**

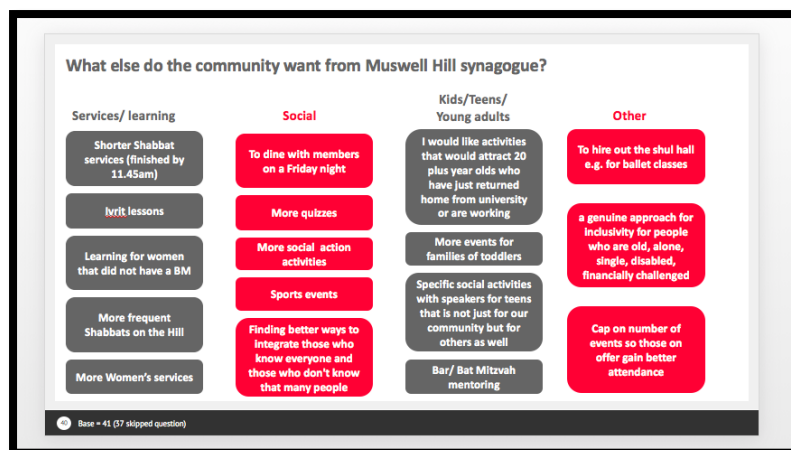
### 13. Education and Communal Activities

The survey shows that the social and communal offering of the shul is incredibly important to our members. The creation of the Community Events Director has allowed us to offer a wider range of programming ranging from an exhibition about human rights, to a panel on mental health and community wide events for Yom Ha'atzmuut and Shavuot. Harmony and Humour continues to be the biggest social event of the year, with a new seating arrangement in 2017 allowing more people than ever to attend. In 2018 this will be a two evening event.

Our strategy for 2018 is to encourage cross generational events set up by our members and supported by the professional team.

Our weekly community email newsletter, Ethos continues to be the main way to communicate with the community. 63% of survey respondents report that they receive it and read it regularly with a further 34% saying they receive it and read it occasionally. In 2017, we have explored finding new ways to be open and transparent with the community and keeping them in the loop of board activity. These include a board in the foyer with pictures of the board members and staff, using blogs on the website and more use of email to explain new initiatives such as the progress on the building committee. Social media, in particular Facebook is also being used more as a way to share updates, photos and videos with the community and to create a place to share ideas and conversation. The Rabbi, along with the Community Events Director have explored using video to share short teachings each week about the weekly Parsha. The Rabbi has also started using a Whatsapp group to share thoughts with the community.





## 14. Proposals

- a) We will continue exploring how we best communicate to members, a working group has been set up to look at how we communicate and who we communicate to.
- b) The website will continue to be developed and updated as a portal for useful information and resources for the community.
- c) Digital tools will be explored as a way to engage with new audiences who may not want to come out to a talk during the week but may want to engage in bite sized learning experiences.
- d) New social events such as a Film Club and Bridge Club are being explored. These have been initiated by our Community Events Director with the aim of community members taking them forward and running with them in the longer term.
- e) We will run more Friday night dinners which are a popular way for the community to meet up.
- f) We will continue to develop other ways to engage more people in setting up and running whatever activities they are passionate about.
- g) We will set up groups of members to develop events for festivals and other calendar moments.
- h) We will develop support mechanisms to help community members set up events.
- i) We will explore whether there is a demand to offer more to retired members of the community

## Children and Youth

15. Although Yeladenu is a separate company, the Rabbi is its Principal and there are very strong links with the synagogue. In terms of the 'offering' to the community it remains important to have a thriving nursery provision.

The Friday play group for pre school children continues to run every week. This could be exploited more as a good way to engage with young families. Cheder has faced some challenges in recent years. After a large period of growth, numbers have fallen with the current roll standing at 44. This can be mainly attributed to more children attending local Jewish schools such as Eden. The Cheder relaunched in 2017 as Rishon with new staff and a new strategy. There are ongoing issues with financing Rishon with a smaller cohort and in planning for its future, however the current reception/year 1 class has 8 pupils which is a good size for long-term sustainability. In conjunction with the Cheder a pre Bar and Bat mitzvah programme for young people has been running for 19 students in conjunction with ORT. This includes a trip to Eastern Europe and has been a popular addition to the offering for young people.

Our weekly youth group for children in years 7&8, and 9&10 reopened in October 2017 as R-Club. Over the years we have tried various models including 2 live in youth directors living in a cottage near the shul, 2 live out youth directors and this year we have made the decision to staff it with one paid part time youth director and 6 young people in years 12 and 13 assisting.

An active committee of volunteers has been working hard in 2017 to set up events for younger children, particularly those from pre school to years 3. They have run successful events which included storytelling and a decorating the Succah activity, which were well attended.

For the first time in 2017, an event was arranged by volunteers, in conjunction with our community events director to engage with young people in year 13 and students with a talk from the organisation Hope not Hate, to equip them to deal with challenges on campus

There is less on offer for children in school years 3-6 who are not really catered for at the moment by the communal activities at chagim and by R-club.

### 13. Proposals

- a) **We will explore new ways to engage with young people for whom there is currently little offering – eg those in years 3-6 of primary school**
- b) **We will explore more ways to engage teenagers in the community as young leaders, including involving them in running activities for younger people in the community and at chagim.**
- c) **We will develop a more joined up approach to young people in our community, looking at cheder, youth and younger children as one strategic piece.**

## **Welfare**

14. Welfare provision was identified as a priority over recent years and considerable progress has been made. This has included the recruitment of a large and active volunteer group and also clarification of the Rabbi's welfare role. A part time administrator was recruited to manage the database and organisation of the growing welfare offering. The initial post holder left in Dec 2017 and a new member of staff has taken over. The current team consists of a board member managing the welfare administrator and other lead volunteers responsible for managing teams offering bereavement support, hospital visits, food and befriending.
15. **Proposals:**
  - a) **We will have a more proactive role in contacting the community to discover where more help is needed.**
  - b) **We will develop a closer relationship with professional communal welfare organisations such as Jewish Care or Jami and to signpost to these organisations when needed.**
  - c) **We will continue to explore new ways to engage more volunteers, particularly as befrienders which is always a more challenging volunteer role to fill.**

## **Social Action and Interfaith work**

16. Social action projects offering support and help to the wider community have increasing become a priority for many Muswell Hill members and it is an area that engages both new and older members and helps them meet new people and develop a connection within the community. An active social action committee was established by the Rabbi in 2016 and has worked hard to continue initiatives such as Mitzvah Day and to set up new projects. We now have an active volunteer involvement with the local Trussle Trust Food Bank who were also a beneficiary of our Kol Nidre appeal. In 2018 we joined other local faith groups and through the charity All People, All Places offered the shul building as a Winter Shelter for 6 nights in Jan/Feb. We would hope for this to become a regular project every winter. Our cooking club continues to run regularly to cook for local charities and the community.

The Rabbi has done an enormous amount of work to create interfaith links within the borough. Our annual civic service continues to run successfully, with attendees from across Haringey's Faith community and civic leaders. Rabbi David has created and nurtured excellent links with civic and faith leaders across the borough. Our other main interfaith work is in the growing programme of inviting local primary school children for tours of the shul led by members.

## **17. Proposals**

- a) **Muswell Hill aims to position itself as a leader within the US community in the field of social action and interfaith work and we will continue to explore and develop new projects in this area in partnership with external charities and the US Chesed team.**
- b) **We will explore how to build this into our communications plans to ensure that potential new members are aware of this unique part of MHS's offering.**
- c) **We are aware that although the Civic service is incredible well run and popular with those who come, it does not attract a large cross section of the community. We are exploring how to develop and improve the Civic Service to engage more members including younger members.**