

NEWS

Labour MPs divided over renewal of Trident

Labour MPs were divided in the vote to renew Trident as the bill easily passed through the Commons on Monday.

Hampstead and Kilburn MP Tulip Siddiq and Hornsey and Wood Green MP Catherine West both opposed the replacement of four nuclear submarines, but Holborn and St Pancras MP Keir Starmer voted with the government in favour of renewal.

Ahead of the vote, Mr Starmer, who recently resigned from Labour's front bench team, said: "I want a world free of nuclear weapons and believe that multilateral disarmament is the most likely way to achieve this. Therefore I will vote to allow the renewal plans for Trident to continue at this stage."

Ms West, a shadow foreign office minister and long-standing critic of Trident, said: "Use of such weapons of mass destruction would not only constitute the most serious breach of international law, it would most certainly slaughter thousands upon thousands of innocent civilians."

Ms Siddiq said the estimated £31 billion cost of renewing Trident was a key consideration in her decision: "At no point in yesterday's debate did the PM or defence secretary outline the through-life costs of Trident."

"I believe vast sums will be spent on Trident would be better invested in conventional armed forces and redoubling our international aid efforts."

Duo told to stay away from vicar and his flock

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Two campaigners accused of spreading discredited claims of a Satanic paedophile ring have been cleared of plotting to intimidate a vicar and his parishioners.

Neelu Berry, 57, accused Reverend Paul Conrad of being in league with the devil after storming into a service at Christ Church in Hampstead, it was said.

Despite being found not guilty at a judge's direction, Berry and co-defendant Sabine McNeill, 71, were hit with restraining orders preventing them from harassing Rev Conrad and his congregation.

Berry was charged with intimidating witnesses after a trial collapsed in October, when two witnesses failed to attend.

Prosecutors claimed the self-styled "campaigner" deliberately schemed to scare them off with blogger Sabine McNeill, 71.

The alleged plot involved witness statements – which contained the parishioners' names and addresses – being scanned and uploaded onto McNeill's blog about "child-snatching and satanic crimes".

The pair denied one count of conspiracy to intimidate witnesses, rejecting accusations that there was an agreement to upload the documents or to scare the complainants.

McNeill accepted that the files were sent to her but claimed: "While I believe I published the article in question I don't remember any details at all."

"I'm surprised it took the witnesses 10 months to let me know of any intimidation caused."

Prosecutor Steven Attridge said Rev Conrad was "shocked" to see his statement appear on her site, which includes articles such as "Lucifer [Satan and the Devil] is the Secret God" and links to



■ Neelu Berry, left, and Sabine McNeill, right, were acquitted of intimidating witnesses.

antisemitic blogs.

Mr Attridge said: "He felt that the statement was being used to blacken his character."

"He found it very intimidating knowing that they were for anyone to see, especially as they were alongside allegations of child abuse on the same site."

Church warden Paul Goss and his wife Valerie said the publication of their statements made them fear for the safety of their family.

"She felt that people might take the law into their own hands, such is the heat of what has occurred outside Christ Church," said Mr Attridge.

Parishioner Sophie Dix said she felt she was being "driven away from her home" and withdrew her statement saying: "I don't wish it to go any further because I'm so concerned about my own safety."

But Berry and McNeill did not accept that any intimidation had been caused. Judge Daniel Worsley directed the

jury to find them not guilty after a five-day trial at Blackfriars Crown Court, but they were both issued with restraining orders barring them from harassing Rev Conrad and his clergy.

In March 2015 Mrs Justice Anna Pauffley told the High Court the claims were 'utter nonsense' in a damning judgement which found that "evil" mother Ella Draper had "tortured" her two young children into making the allegations against the "blameless" parishioners.

Berry, of Peel Drive, Clayhall, Ilford, and McNeill, of Goldhurst Terrace, West Hampstead, have both been issued with restraining orders which bar them from harassing Rev Paul Conrad, Paul Goss, Valerie Goss, or Sophie Dix and her children.

The orders, which will remain in place indefinitely, also bar them from harassing any other member of clergy at Christ Church or any members of staff or pupils at Christ Church Primary School.

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Call for planners to support school move bid

Parents have thrown their weight behind plans to convert Hampstead's former police station into a school.

More than 400 signatures have been collected in a petition calling for Abacus Belsize Primary School to move into the Rosslyn Hill building.

The plans will be considered by Camden Council's development control committee next Thursday. Parent Mary Shepherd, who lives in Hampstead, said: "The perception seems to be that Hampstead residents don't want this new school but it's simply not true."

"I have been speaking to hundreds of local people who think that the former police station would be the perfect home for Abacus."

And she continued: "We hope Camden Council will support us, and support a state school which



■ Parents have backed the Abacus Belsize Park School bid.

Picture: POLLY HANCOCK

provides outstanding, secular, inclusive education for the borough's children."

It follows concerns raised about traffic in the surrounding area.

School headteacher Vicki Briody said: "We do understand that local people have concerns about traffic

as a lot of people seem to drive their children to school in Hampstead."

"I want to reassure the local community that we are a walking school."

She said demand for school places hugely outweighs supply currently.