

Shakespeare must have foreseen planning in Highgate when he wrote “When troubles come, they come not single spies, but in battalions”, and David Richmond’s gallant Planning Group has had its work cut out for it this year.

One of our big concerns is the future of the **Mary Feilding Guild site in North Hill** which, it transpires, will not be a long-term care facility for the elderly but a (presumably expensive) private post-operative recovery unit. At a zoom meeting with the developers on 14th July, we were presented with designs for the new buildings, produced after long discussion with Haringey, who, it seems, have approved them, without giving local groups any opportunity to comment on them. We found them to be deplorably poor for their setting, and have responded with the following points:

1. We regret the loss of a long-established, valued and essential long-term elderly care facility. We do not believe the new proposals meet local needs, particularly as we learned that another local care home is proposing a similar model.
2. The proposals represent considerable overdevelopment. It will have a significant impact on houses in Yeatman Road; the current buildings keep a discrete distance from these houses, but the current proposals directly overlook the gardens of these houses and will affect daylight and sunlight to their gardens. It appears those residents have not even been consulted. Since the boundary trees between the sites are deciduous, their screening value will be limited, and they may well be harmed by the proposed new large basement.
4. The garden space has been significantly reduced, apparently on the grounds that short stay residents do not require it. Large gardens are an integral and protected part of the Conservation Area.
5. The North Hill frontage adjoins Prospect Terrace, a Grade 2 listed late Georgian terrace. While the existing building is very poor quality, any new building must be of high architectural quality, and the proposed design, reminiscent of a 1980s office block, would cause substantial harm to the Conservation Area and the setting of the adjacent Listed Buildings. Given the importance of this, it is particularly regrettable that the developers have not even used the services of Chartered Architects to ensure a competent design.
6. The proposed new building on the View Road frontage, while claimed to reflect the “traditional” appearance of the street, is a poor pastiche of the local Edwardian style, apparently encouraged by Haringey without consulting with us. A sympathetic modern building would have been far more acceptable, and historically more honest.
7. On traffic impact, while we were assured that the staff would be expected to live locally, the residents wouldn’t be driving, there will be a private ambulance and servicing will only be once a week, we see little evidence for this, not least because the large basement will accommodate 30 cars.
8. Such a large basement could also have significant implications in this area of complex and poorly understood hydrology and geology. An independent basement impact assessment is essential.

Although the developers told us that it has been approved by an “independent architectural panel”, we find that the Haringey Quality Review Panel actually expressed very similar concerns on its design, stating that “The massing and detail of the roofscape could be improved, along with the architectural expression of the scheme. For example, the roof line of the two wings fronting onto View Road, could be lowered by reducing the roof pitch... or by using a flat roof or mansard roof. This would... break up the bulk of this important façade, while also reflecting the approach to massing within existing adjacent buildings on View Road. Introducing a different tone of brickwork in these side wings could also help to distinguish them from the central block. The panel would support further refinements to the View Road elevations.”

Unfortunately the meeting was clearly not to engage with us, but to simply read from a prepared statement about how the proposal is “appropriate” and making it quite clear there was no intention to take on board our comments or make any amendments and an empty aspiration to “liaise with you over the coming months”. This approach, by both the developers and Haringey, is unacceptable and completely contrary to the intention of community engagement, and we will press for it to be considered by Haringey’s Planning Committee in order to try to persuade Councillors that it must be rejected on grounds of poor design.

There is a depressingly similar situation at **Cranwood House**, on the corner of Muswell Hill Road and Woodside Avenue, where Haringey propose to demolish the current uninteresting but low-scale home for the elderly and replace it with a high-rise block of flats. While technically outside our area, it has a potential impact on Highgate Wood, which it abuts, and is vigorously opposed by large numbers of local people for the execrably clumsy and overbearing design of the buildings. The Catch-22, as it were, is that the development – and the poor design - is Haringey’s own.

While we support an appropriate scale of new housing here, particularly affordable and social housing, we have had to object strongly on grounds of design. It is particularly disappointing that the comments made at the public consultation earlier this year have been almost entirely ignored and virtually no improvement has resulted. The scale of is very overbearing and highly damaging to the Muswell Hill Conservation Area. Our main points are:

1. The clumsy and bulky design completely ignores the character the surrounding area and would be far more appropriate for the centre of a new town.
2. The 6-storey main block overwhelms the neighbouring houses and Conservation Area, and the drawings actually are misleading by showing the eaves level of those houses higher than it actually is. It may well be visible from Highgate Wood, yet Haringey have not even consulted with the city of London at any time during the design process to ensure minimal impact on Highgate Wood. We have asked that no decision is made until the City of London have indicated that they are satisfied that there will be no adverse impact on the Wood.
3. There appear to be significant errors on the drawings showing the heights of the individual floors, and the front cover image of the PR brochure appears to have been taken with a wide angle lens, making it look lower than it will actually appear.
4. The loss of the mature tree screening on Woodside Avenue and along Muswell Hill Road is unacceptable, and its replacement by a short row of trees inadequate. It is particularly important to retain the trees which will screen the highest block, not least to mask the poor architecture.
5. The bulk could be reduced, and more accommodation secured, by such measures as reducing the excessive size of the lobbies and circulation space, which seems very high compared to the habitable space.
6. The current proposals are not Zero Carbon, making it impossible for Haringey to achieve Zero Carbon for their buildings by 2050. While it is claimed that Passivhaus principles are being used, Passivhaus is an absolute standard and the label should not be used unless the standard is being met.
7. It immediately abuts the important Prehistoric and Roman site in Highgate Wood, so it is equally regrettable that no discussions have been held with Historic England, who, following our approach, have recommended a strong archaeological condition for any permission.
8. Despite Haringey's inexplicable reluctance to bring even important developments such as this to Planning Committee, it is clearly essential that it must be considered by Planning Committee and local people given the opportunity to speak, not least because 180 objections were received long before the consultation ended.

A third current major issue is the future of the early 18th century **Shepherd's Cottage, 36a Highgate High Street**, threatened by a gross over-development weakly allowed by Haringey despite strong objections from local groups and national Amenity Societies. However, following our pressure, Haringey have conceded that the failure to require a Listed Building Consent was an error and have now requested one; we have, as you know, appointed a top Planning barrister to advise us when it finally appears. We are grateful to our members, and others, for helping us achieve our appeal for donations meet our costs; but, should Haringey make the grave error of granting permission for the Listed Building Consent, we will have to consider seeking a Judicial Review of the decision, which will require a significantly greater level of fundraising. As I write, we learn that the application will be submitted during the week of November 8th. ***Please check the Society's website for the application number and support us by writing to Haringey urging them to reject the application; it will be essential to maximise the number of objections to press Haringey to take it to Planning Committee for decision.***

In addition, recent correspondence has revealed that the London Fire Brigade's lack of objection to the development was based on erroneous information. It appears that Fire Engines cannot access Townsend Yard and, if the development proceeds, Shepherds Cottage will be unreachable by fire equipment, and we have asked them to revisit their conclusion. And, of course, should the development go ahead, the Omved Gardens site will be completely cut off for long periods.

Yet another disappointing decision by Haringey was to allow the demolition of **Branksome**, one of the last remaining C.B.Quennell houses in Courtenay Avenue, despite the number and strength of objections, including from the Ancient Monuments Society and the 20th Century Society, and its replacement by a pastiche, another of a long series of decisions which has fatally undermined the integrity of this part of the Highgate Conservation Area. Despite all the comments made supporting the existing house, it appears that no site visit was made by the Case Officer; and, dismayingly, the Conservation Officer supported it.

Worse, the decision cites all the policies which we argued to justify refusal, but then uses them to argue the opposite:

- Despite conceding that "Original houses along Courtenay Avenue were predominantly by CHB Quennell", it argues against itself by stating that "The original character of the estate has been eroded over the years by a number of contemporary large houses" and "Courtenay Avenue has largely changed in

character over the years". This is unsurprising, since most of them were allowed by Haringey, despite our objections and their own policies, their comments that "it is increasingly difficult to recognise the consistent and special character of the conservation area along this street" being a something of a self-fulfilling prophecy. It then says "Within such a fragmented and altered historic context, the conservation effort has been focused on the retention of those best exemplars of original houses which can reveal the almost totally lost original character of the estate" – so why allow this one to be demolished?

- "conservation effort has been focussed on the retention of those last examples of original houses which can reveal the almost totally lost original character of the estate" – except, it seems, this one;  
- it cites a 1998 public inquiry into Three Oaks nearby, using a derogatory quote on Branksome by the developer's architect, on which the Case Officer clearly saw fit to place more credence than the arguments of the current objectors, despite its irrelevance to current policy, and then goes to considerable effort to denigrate Branksome. It concedes it as "one of the original, most modest houses in the area," once more inexplicably citing the 1998 appellant's argument - without any evidence - that "it is a low-cost scheme, designed in 1930 by an in-house draughtsman in Quennel's Estate office [and] an architectural nonentity", calling it "an asymmetric building featuring a pastiche mix of Arts and Crafts and Neo-classical architectural language further weakened by a number of alterations." And surely "the now overgrown and unkempt rear garden" can be remedied easily, as can the damage caused by the defective roof". How these can lead to the conclusion that "these considerations highlight the very limited intrinsic quality and value of the existing building" and that "its retention and reuse are unviable and would generate a further pastiche and low quality building" is bewildering. They then rub salt into the wound by suggesting that "the proposed three storey building is imaginatively inspired by the typical materials forms and features of the original Arts and Crafts architectures and will be complemented by a high quality landscape design" – i.e. it's a pastiche. It then openly describes Haringey's pre-application discussions with the applicants to produce a pastiche, without any local consultation, and maintains that it will enhance the Conservation Area. A condition imposing an archaeological condition, which GLAAS required following our approach to them, is scant comfort.

The final admission that "the proposal has been extensively discussed with officers and its design has been carefully developed on the basis of a sound understanding of the surviving character of the conservation area" and that the replacement is "an elegant statement building which will be harmoniously inserted within its challenging, inconsistent setting... which sets a positive precedent to bring the desired change[sic] to the area while complementing, reinstating and strengthening the finest Arts and Crafts character of the conservation area" is worthy of Private Eye's Pseudos corner at its best.

We despair, and therefore await with trepidation their decision on an application for metal gates and a sliding gate system at the front and removal of three trees from front garden" at **Tree Tops, Compton Avenue**, an area where the installation of railings and entrance gates and the felling of trees probably surviving from the original Bishops Wood from the front garden will not, according to the Neighbourhood Plan, be permitted if they have a detrimental effect on the street scene, or result in the unnecessary removal of trees – in this case to facilitate vehicular access. Compton Avenue already has a security gate at its entrance. In addition, the application answers "No" to the question "Will any trees or hedges need to be removed?"

What a contrast with **90 Highgate Hill**, in Islington, where developers Artform Group approached us for our views on their housing scheme on the site of Old Crown Car Park. We told them, in a friendly but frank manner, that we didn't think it was very good, made some suggestions, and were delighted to learn that they had accepted our ideas, changed their architects, and come up with revised proposals with which, with a few minor reservations, we are happy to support. If only the process could be like this all the time; there would be not more conflict and objection, but more, and better development.

More success, too, in our approaches to Haringey's responsive and efficient Enforcement section on two breaches of planning control; in one, securing the removal of an incongruous glass terrace built without permission the roof of **87c Southwood Lane**, achieved a replacement of the garish red plastic shopfront fascia installed against Conservation Area policy by Shelter at **58 Highgate High Street** with a much more elegant one. Following our objection to a proposed internally illuminated sign on the frontage of the old Barclays Bank building at **54-56 Highgate High Street** - a no-no in the High Street – the application was changed to a non-illuminated sign.

A victory, too for common sense; as we go to press we learn that Camden have listened to the many representations made to them, and have approved the removal of the controversial, and completely pointless, experimental "**no right turn**" restriction from **Swain's Lane onto South Grove**. They have decided to retain the similar restriction from Swains Lane into Bisham Gardens, but that is acceptable.

While the original closure of the Listed **former Rose and Crown at 86 Highgate High Street** was regretted, and few would oppose its return, some features of an application to change the current use back from a café to a pub have given rise to major concerns from local residents, whom we are supporting in their efforts to get the proposals modified and have submitted a detailed objection. In particular, the proposed 2.5m high aluminium Pergola covering almost the entire garden, with 2 x motorised retractable roofs, integral LED lighting and external heaters – surely highly unsustainable - is a substantial construction which would loom nearly 1 metre above the adjoining neighbour's fence, the application drawings failing to show this. It contravenes policy requiring garden land proposals to relate sensitively to the surrounding area and safeguard privacy, amenity and security for adjoining owners, and policy requiring extensions to respect the setting of listed buildings and preserve the village character. Indeed, a 2003 application for constructing a conservatory in this garden was refused for these reasons, which apply equally here.

Concerns focus on using the pub garden pub for eating, drinking and smoking until 12.30am Monday-Saturday, which will cause unacceptable disturbance for neighbours and the amenities and wildlife of the Highgate Bowl, currently a dark and quiet space with little light or noise pollution. There should be an Ecological Study to assess the impact. Also, the garden is currently covered by the spread of two substantial trees, which will have to undergo substantial pruning, but there is no arboricultural report. While the existing license covers the whole premises till midnight, the previous use, Le Pain Quotidien, closed at 7pm; yet the application claims that “there will be no adverse impact on the amenity of existing residential properties,” while the neighbours’ consultants consider the Acoustic Report does not adequately representation the expected noise levels. In addition, the proposed operators concentrate their activities on drinking craft beer rather than dining, so there will be a radical change in the existing type and period of usage in the garden, which should be controlled by suitable conditions.

Another approval which we consider seriously flawed and supported neighbours in opposing was to replace **37 Lanchester Road** and replace it with a much larger basemented one. Despite strong opposition, it was approved under delegated powers while the local Ward Councillor, who requested it go to Committee, was on holiday, and local residents were given only two days to comment on a new application to build a bicycle rack over the root plate of one of the affected Veteran Oak Trees. Curtly told that no consultation was necessary because only the Tree Officer's view was wanted, angry residents, have submitted a Freedom of Information request for all documents relating to this application.

Following refusal on appeal of a large extension at **7 Church Road**, two new applications have been submitted, one for a similarly-sized extension and another of an even larger one. We have objected on several grounds, including:

- they build over the root protection areas of trees on the western boundary; the original scheme was designed to avoid harm to these trees;
- The extension proposed would take up almost all the remaining amenity space, leaving only a small sunken garden and would increase the size of the property beyond what is reasonable on this small backland plot. The original application was accepted on the basis that the garden space would be retained. This proposal will covers almost all of the garden area with an impermeable surface which requires additional drainage;
- the new windows will look straight into the rear garden and windows of neighbours, and cut out all the evening sun from the neighbouring garden;
- the extra basement excavations could have devastating consequences for the drainage and services for the adjacent house; indeed, there was considerable accidental subsidence during the construction of the original house.

Though substantially altered in 1833, **5 The Grove** is still Grade II listed, sitting between Nos 4 and 6 Listed Grade II\* in this important terrace of houses, originally built in 1668 as a group of 6 houses. We therefore believe that the application to partly demolish its front wall and the addition of new cast iron railings would harm its integrity. The existing railings can be repaired; they do not in need replacement and, despite assertions that “the sense of openness, history and quality that the land contributes to the setting of nearby listed buildings and to the character and appearance of the Highgate Conservation Area would be retained”, the existing railings are already historic and it is hard to see how the character will be retained by new and higher railings. In addition, the risk to the adjacent Grade II\* buldings by digging a basement under almost the entire front garden of No. 5 must be high.

In the light of rumours surrounding the future of the site of **the BBC Telecommunications Mast at the top of Swains Lane**, we asked Camden if they had been approached regarding redevelopment. They replied that they had had no formal approaches as yet, but asked if we had any thoughts for them to bear in mind in the event that one is made. We responded with the following points (summarised):

- the mast has long been a blot on the skyline in views from Hampstead Heath and a sensitive redevelopment may well be acceptable. However:
  - the scale of residential development could cause major traffic problems in an area already aggravated by the difficulty in finding parking space in these very narrow one-way streets for existing residents, and any development should therefore be low density;
  - construction traffic would also be constrained by the narrowness of the Lane, used regularly by northbound rush hour and school run traffic, the diversion of which by construction works would cause severe pressure on other local residential roads. This therefore also requires an appropriate scale of development;
  - The location of the site, at the top of London's highest hill will be a strong temptation for a developer to propose a high-rise development with "spectacular" views over London and Hampstead Heath. This would introduce a completely unacceptable built element into skyline view from Hampstead Heath. Therefore no new built form should be visible from Hampstead Heath and the City of London should be consulted for their views on potential impacts on the Heath;
  - Given the site's location at the heart of the Highgate Conservation Area, bulk and design would be of the utmost importance;
  - Given the likely subsoil conditions - Highgate's geology and hydrology is extremely complex - the creation of any basement could have major issues of water diversion and ground stability for neighbouring properties, and altered ground water flow may even affect neighbouring Highgate Cemetery. No basement should be permitted;
  - Any new development must be carefully designed so as not to affect the view of St. Michael's church westward along Bisham Gardens from Highgate High Street.
- Pleasingly, Camden replied that our comments were really helpful and that they would be happy to meet us when appropriate and to encourage any developers to have pre-application discussions with us.

**The Highgate Conservation Area Appraisal**, whilst a valuable tool for steering development, is now seriously out of date. Haringey have promised an update in a year or two, but we consider the urgency that we have made a start by allocating individual streets to members of our Committee for reassessment. Members with architectural or local history skills who would be interested in participating are welcome to contact us – as would anyone interested in helping us wade through the 500-page consultation version of the new Haringey Local Plan.

Similarly, we have determined to make another attempt to have **The Victoria pub** designated as an Asset of Community Value; see our website for how you can help support the effort.

We felt the application to build a garden outbuilding in the front garden of **Apothecary House, 47 West Hill** was unacceptable and objected; Camden agreed, and have refused it.

We objected to proposals to replace the garages behind **Wembury Mews** as overdevelopment, and also to felling the trees on the site which, besides being undesirable in itself, will impact on the amenities of existing residents.

We are objecting to an application to demolish 2 houses at **44-46 Hampstead Lane** and replace them with an 85-bed nursing home in two double-basemented 6-storey buildings. There have already been pre-application meetings with Haringey.

To start on a surreal note, we asked Haringey why the consultation deadline for a particular application in this week's List was back in August. It was explained to us that the three weeks' notice period appeared in the press advert published in the online edition of the Enfield Independent in the week ending 27th August.

As reported earlier this year, the Society was selected to be one of 36 out of the 44,000 respondents to the Planning White Paper consultation to give oral evidence to the **House of Commons Select Committee on the Paper**. Its report, published in June, mentions our evidence several times and its conclusions are highly critical of the Planning White Paper – noting, importantly, that “with 9 in 10 planning applications approved by councils, and more than a million homes given planning permission but not built, it is clear that it is the housing delivery system that is broken, not the planning system. Raising the number of homes required without incentivising or compelling developers to build will not lead to more homes.” It also notes that the Government's response, due on August 10th, is now overdue. Bizarrely, it has disappeared from the Government's website; fortunately we have downloaded a copy and will happily e-mail one to any member who requests it.

We have kept our Haringey MP Catherine West regularly informed of our concerns about the Government's ill-considered assault on the planning system, and were immensely pleased to learn that she had secured a **Zoom meeting for us with the Shadow Spokesperson on Planning**, Ruth Cadbury,

MP for Brentford and Isleworth, which we shared with representatives of the Heath and Hampstead Society and the London Forum. Ruth gave us a full hour of her time, listened sympathetically to our concerns and certainly seemed to take them seriously and, indeed, to share them. After introducing our societies and what they did, we made the following points:

- (a) We share the concerns expressed nationally about the proposals in the White Paper, which will fatally weaken holistic planning and the community's role in it. We mentioned our evidence to the Select Committee, which seemed to impress her.
- (b) Following the departure of Planning Minister Jenrick, is the statement by his successor Michael Gove that he "will make an announcement on next steps *in due course*" significant, perhaps signalling a major backtracking following such widespread criticism?
- (c) Given the extent of the opposition, we consider this the opportunity to gather cross-party support to halt the process and call for a real cross-sectoral public consultation, and to ensure that the Select Committee's recommendations are taken on board – a view with which she agreed.
- (d) While the Government blames the planning system for failure to provide enough housing, the actual reason is the progressively weakening of the system by Government tinkering, particularly the disastrous widening of permitted development, making holistic planning effectively impossible, and the fact that developers are only building what is most profitable, not what is needed – i.e. affordable and social housing.
- (e) The recent Civic Voice / Grosvenor Estates survey found that, while 92% of people had no confidence in their local authorities, 98% had no confidence in developers, so effectively creating a development free-for-all is not the way to solve the problem, which is exacerbated by a weakened planning system and failure in community engagement, which Design Codes will only exacerbate by dictating what is good design and giving automatic permission for developments which accord with it. Particularly crass is the Government's proposal that, where an LPA does not have a Design Code, the applicant for a site may write his own.
- (f) For community groups, the most important thing is to secure meaningful community engagement in the planning process.
- (g) Almost annual revisions of National Planning Policy, and almost weekly revisions of National Planning Guidance, makes the planning system even more complex.
- (f) Government proposals of a 30-month target for the production of Local Plans is impossible, particularly when Council funding cuts have decimated planning, design and conservation staff.

We ended by suggesting that what is urgently needed is a Select Committee Inquiry into Community Engagement in Planning; both Catherine and Ruth both promised to take it up for us.

We continue to press Haringey to publish the results of their **pre-application discussions** with developers, usually kept from us on questionable grounds of "commercial confidentiality". Our case is strengthened by the announcement by Kensington and Chelsea that it will routinely publish pre-application advice as part of a drive to boost transparency, stating "If applicants are really worried about seeking advice, it makes you wonder what they are worried about. If they put in a scheme for our advice and responded to that advice, there's no reason to be worried about people seeing what we've said."

We regularly flag up Haringey's too-frequent **failure to take applications to planning committee**, however many objections are received – e.g. 35 at 37 Lanchester Road and 165 at Tudor Close. In contrast Barnet, Camden and other Boroughs automatically consider any application which has more than 5 objections for consideration by full planning committee. We are also pressing them to follow Camden and other Boroughs in introducing **Article 4 directions** to Counter Class E permitted development allowing any shop of high street use to be changed to housing, given the likely impact on the High Street and Archway Road. We also cannot understand the continued delay in producing the urgently-**needed revised Local List**, more than two years after it was promised.

Good news is that, as a result of our urgent appeals to Historic England, the hugely inadequate **Highgate Archaeological Priority Area** has been expanded to cover a much wider area of Highgate Village and the entire area of the Mediaeval Park, and Historic England have already requested archaeological conditions on several sites.

We continue to actively monitor dozens of **applications for tree works** – some of them perfectly acceptable, some not. We likewise continue to be actively involved with the management of our important **Open Spaces** and are long-standing members of the **Hampstead Heath** and **Highgate Wood Consultative Committees**. But we hear little in the way of comment from members on any of our open spaces; does this indicate that you are generally happy with the way they are managed?

A thank-you to the Heath and Hampstead Society, who kindly invited Highgate Society members to their annual Springett Lecture free of charge; we heard a fascinating talk by Merlin Sheldrake on the strange world of Fungi.

**Hampstead Heath** saw the celebration of the **150th anniversary of the 1871 Heath Act** during the summer, with events including a Kite Festival organised by the Heath and Hampstead Society, who have also sponsored a series of seasonal **Biodiversity boards** at four entrances to the Heath, which have proved very popular.

The retirement of Superintendent Bob Warnock was reported in our last report, and it has been announced that the **new Superintendent** will be Stephania Horne, who has worked on open space management at Hounslow and Redbridge, and on London Wildlife Trust Projects; we look forward to working with her. Despite the greatly increased costs of managing the Heath during lockdown, the budget is on track for 2020-2021 and fees from filming fees have been helpful. **Pubic events** re-started during the summer, including the Hideaway Cinema by the Lido, and here will be a **Christmas Fair** next to the East Heath Road car park from November to January.

The City will be introducing 70 licences for **Professional Dog walkers**, and a similar scheme may be considered for Kenwood. In the recent weeks there has been an upsurge of reports of dogs attacking or frightening walkers, probably connected with the greatly increased level of dog ownership during lockdown. The City and residents are co-operating on a fundraising campaign for a new playground on the Heath extension. On the recent Consultative Committee walk, we heard how the City are protecting the Extension's many veteran trees and ancient hedgerows, and it is hoped to bring repeat the 2019 Sheep grazing project. Even something as apparently simple as desilting of the pond at Golders Hill will cost £200,000 for even this small water body, but the long-planned renewal of the Zoo there has been delayed until 2022. Other issues include monitoring Network Rail's replacement of fencing by the Lido; they have been asked to include wildlife access points. Camden have asked to trial a "cycle burst plan" for schoolchildren in the gospel Oak and Spaniards Road areas, though, if successful, any plans to extend cycling routes would come to the Consultative Committee. We were also given a report on the City's ambitious Open Spaces Learning Programme, focused towards helping disadvantaged communities and youth to undertake educational activities on the Heath; as one example of the need, it appears that child poverty in Gospel Oak was 39%, as against the national average of 31%.

We and the Heath and Hampstead Society work closely with the City on planning issues affecting the Heath. A poor appeal decision means that a housing development at **Jack Straws Castle**, abutting the Heath, was allowed despite strong opposition from the City. The high-rise **Murphy's Yard** development at Gospel Oak Officers will be the subject of a workshop with the developers, the City and local Stakeholders. After several years, there appears to be no progress in determining the strongly-opposed housing development at **55 Fitzroy Park**, which would cause serious harm to the fringes of the Heath and to the stream flowing into the Bird Sanctuary Pond.

**Highgate Wood**, a 28-hectare ancient woodland, remained open during the pandemic, though it was badly affected by severe erosion from greatly increased public use and the creation of new desire lines, and income is down due to the suspension of sports hiring. However, both here and on the Heath, signs of recovery are already apparent and fallen timber is being used to divert visitors from compacted areas. Efforts will focus on ensuring that both open spaces continue their unbroken record of Green Flag and Green Heritage Flag Awards. The next Conservation area for woodland regeneration will be a 2-acre plot opposite the Play Area, badly compacted after many years of intensive usage; but canopy thinning will be used rather than the coppicing used in previous Conservation areas. However, from March the Highgate Wood Team will reduce to four full time staff, and the tender process for the Pavilion Café will be undertaken during 2022/23. Other major projects will be measurement of visitor pressure on sensitive areas; building on the data from the oak decline survey, now in its twelfth year; more involvement of Heath Hands; and ecological monitoring – including my own 35-year survey of moths in the wood, which has recorded nearly 450 species. Forest School activity will also be reviewed; two short-term Licenses have been issued, but there will be no more because of the heavy erosion and soil compaction they cause. I am also a Trustee of the project to raise the funds to restore and display the Roman Pottery Kiln permanently in the Wood; the project will also support 6 young people with a heritage focussed training programme.

Oak Processionary Moth is still common on the Heath and Highgate Wood, but spraying has been stopped because of the collateral ecological damage it causes, and there is hope in that parasitic fly from the continent has become established and should help control the population.

The Society is also represented on the **Kenwood Landscape Forum** (*writes Arlene Polonsky*). There is a semi-annual walkabout of the Kenwood Estate with the head gardener, the general manager of Kenwood and the senior garden advisor at English Heritage, followed by a discussion meeting. At the meeting on October 11<sup>th</sup> an issue which arose was the effect on the grounds caused by the events programme which is necessary to raise funds for Kenwood. Works to repair the pasture ground which had been damaged by recent events were expected to commence on October 18. The next scheduled event is "Christmas at Kenwood," November 26-January 9 from 4:30 p.m. This is an illuminated twilight walk which begins through Millfield Gate by the Tea Hut and continues up the Inner Circuit path, across the front of the house, through Lime Walk to the Green Gate at the back of the Henry Moore sculpture, then back to the end of the Flower Garden and out towards the car park, then down the West Drive to the back of the House and the exit back up East Drive. The sides of the paths will be lit and picket-fenced to ensure that visitors keep to the paths and avoid trampling the edges, particularly where repairs are underway from previous events. There is to be a Market Square on the Flower Garden which will impact the grass coverage; however that area is to be completely turf-ed.

It is unfortunate that past events have resulted in considerable damage to the grounds, which are scarcely remedied before the next event takes place. The pandemic has intensified the problem, since the gardeners have been short-staffed and some have been working from home with contractors who work onsite. This has resulted in the unfortunate "pruning" of the rhododendron beds in the Flower Garden: apparently the work was done without the onsite supervision of Kenwood gardeners, and it will take some time before these beds have recovered.

The Kenwood Estate has been a boon to Highgate during the pandemic. It is much frequented and the café is once again in operation, subject to mask wearing and social distancing.

There are widespread concerns about Haringey's proposals for a **Flood Relief Scheme in Queens Wood**. Though this will involve extensive earthmoving and tree felling in this ancient woodland, Haringey are trying to argue that no Environmental Impact Assessment is necessary. This is completely unacceptable – not least because there is no evidence that the flooding affecting houses below the wood is caused by run-off from it, when it is equally likely that it comes from the roads and other hard surfaces around the area. We hope members will write to Haringey expressing their own opposition to any works until a full assessment is produced.

We anxiously await the Court of Appeal's ruling on Islington's appeal against dismissal of its legal challenge to the government's expansion of permitted development, arguing that it was not properly consulted on.

This allowed developers to demolish and rebuild properties as homes, to build new homes above existing homes and offices, and made virtually any high street use subject to the new relaxed rules.

It was bitterly opposed by many planners and disregarded evidence of the poor quality of homes built under existing PD rights. It was introduced without the further consultation the government promised when the majority of respondents to an earlier consultation were opposed to the plans.

The new PD rights were described as "disgraceful" by the RIBA and the government was jointly rebuked by the RIBA, the RTPI, the Chartered Institute of Building and the RICS, while the government's own Building Better Building Beautiful Commission said it had permitted "future slums" and the government's own assessment said it created worse homes.

In November 2020, High Court rejected the challenge, but granted leave to appeal.

However, the replacement of controversial Planning Minister Robert Jenrick by (the equally controversial?) Michael Gove appears to have thrown the Planning White Paper process into the melting pot. **Gove has paused the government's proposed planning shake up and pledged a 'review' of the changes** in consultation with Tory backbenchers who had threatened to block the plans, and a Junior Minister has confirmed that the **planning bill is in a "state of flux at the moment"**. It is speculated that the government may substantially water down its more controversial planning changes, including the zonal local plan system that would automatically grant outline permission for certain types of development in "growth" areas designated for "growth" and remove public scrutiny of individual planning applications. It may also drop the proposal for mandatory housing targets, and all we currently know is that a new Planning Bill will appear "in the relatively near future." We are also promised yet another review of the National Planning Policy Framework. It is also hinted that there would be a shift of focus from planning and towards Gove's 'levelling up' agenda. To soften up public opinion, the Government is also proposing a new "nature recovery zone" planning designation, to encourage Councils to create biodiversity projects.

The Government is also trying to woo back public confidence, Gove told stating **that he “welcomed” the idea of maintaining residents' ability to comment on and influence individual planning applications – a complete reversal of their proposal to remove the** community's right to comment; a key recommendation of a report in June was to scrap this proposal and retain the current system. Select Committee Chair Clive Betts said that local plans must be at the heart of the system, and local people must retain the opportunity to comment, object, and, where necessary, influence the outcomes of individual planning applications. In response, Gove said he “entirely agreed”.

Shadow Planning Spokesperson Ruth Cadbury said that Gove's responses suggest that, “effectively, the government's developers charter is being reviewed” and asked him to “confirm that the government's wholly unpopular and disastrous planning reforms will never return”. Gove said he was still “considering” all the responses to last year's consultation on the planning white paper “and will make an announcement on next steps in due course”.

On the other hand, as reported by Planning Commentator Andrew Lainton, Gove is also proposing a revival of the old, failed system of increasing housebuilding by placing it in the hand of local communities, in his paper advocating “community-powered Conservatism” that would see residents made the “ultimate arbiters” of developments in their area.

“Trusting the People”, drawn up by 10 MPs, says the Government must “complete the Conservative Party's historic mission to put power and trust into the hands of the British people”. It advocates putting more public services, from mental health support to dentistry, into the hands local communities and proposes to make “neighbourhood planning universal and the ultimate arbiter of local development”. The paper states: “We need to move from a passive, optional ‘rights’ approach (rights to provide, rights to buy, rights to transfer, rights to challenge, rights to neighbourhood plans, etc.) to a ‘do’ approach, where community power is the standard model. This means deliberately putting our public services and local assets into the hands of mutuals, social enterprises and charities which are run by local people. When this was experimented with in 2011, all it achieved was to delay housebuilding and progress on development plans by a decade. While there was an upsurge in neighbourhood plans, most are just Parish Plans which do not allocate much land to development and is recognised as a diversion of planning from delivering major sites to small local ones. Neighbourhood Plans still need planners to implement them, and there is a huge shortage in the planning profession. Also, many communities just don't want them, aren't interested, or simply don't have the skills or resources to undertake what we found to be the daunting process of producing it. What it led to was a collapse in housing numbers and an upsurge in unco-ordinated 'build what you like where you like' appeal-led planning, boosted by nationally-imposed housing targets which had nothing to do with local need. Our own experience of neighbourhood planning is that, while it has introduced a raft of good policies which should improve the quality of planning in Highgate, in practice it has not improve the quality of planning at all and we still get incomprehensibly bad decisions, against local policies.