



10A South Grove, Highgate, London N6 6BS

Ms Tania Skelli
Haringey Planning Services
cc. Elisabetta Tonazzi, Conservation Officer
25th April 2023

By email only.

Dear Ms Tania Skelli,

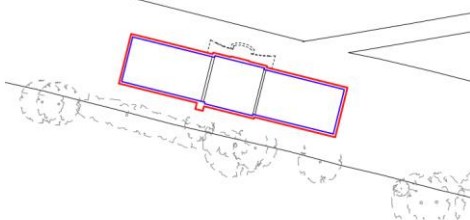
**RE: Richards Music Centre, Highgate School, Bishopswood Road, London, N6
4PR- HGY/2023/0315**

I am responding on behalf of the Highgate Society to this application for planning consent to demolish the existing pavilion building and replace it with a two and a half storey building over an extensive and deep basement. We strongly object to this application for the following reasons: -

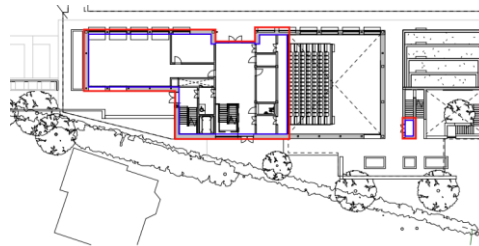
1. The existing building may only be designated as a neutral contributor, looking at the Bishops Area map in the Highgate Conservation Area Character Appraisal (HCACA), however the description of "positive contributors" in para 10.8 therein states that "most of the existing buildings contribute to the homogenous character of the sub-area." Despite this description there are precisely zero buildings shown on the map as positive contributors, which in our opinion is a gross error. That all the buildings are therefore considered to be neutral has been seen as a developer's charter to demolish buildings with alarming regularity, more often than not causing considerable harm to the Conservation Area. The interpretation put on neutral contributors, in this particular area, that they can be demolished is utterly wrong and the bar to justify demolition should be set much higher than in other sub-areas where the positive and negative contributors are properly identified. This building, despite unfortunate extensions, very much contributes positively to the Conservation Area and is particularly well suited to its location overlooking a sports field. It has the feel of a sports pavilion which was of course its original function.



2. The proposed building is considerably larger than the existing one. Using the figures supplied by the applicant the new building is nearly three times larger. However, if one compares the floor area diagrams in the submission it becomes clear that the actual size is even greater, nearer four times the size, because the applicant has included the uninhabitable attic space in the existing building and excluded half of the ground floor of the new building because it is a void over the theatre.



First Floor Existing Area Plan



Ground Floor Proposed Area Plan

Whilst they may well be technically correct according to RICS rules on measurement, the building that will be seen above ground level will be twice as big as the existing building with the same size again below ground level, an iceberg building virtually four times the size of the existing building. Why does the building need to be so big? Why does the school need a second performance space when there is already one in Dyne House? Why couldn't drama and music use the same communal facilities, maybe swapping the sixth form accommodation from Dyne House to the RMC where they would be nearer to the staff common room?

3. The existing building has the traditional appearance of a sports pavilion which is well suited to its location. Indeed, in its semi-rural setting, its appearance fits perfectly with the wider area and it is demonstrably a positive contributor to this part of the Conservation Area. The proposed replacement building, by contrast, with its acres of glazing and very long low-pitched roofs, resembles nothing so much as a car showroom

on an industrial estate or a main road – to which its design is more suited than a Conservation Area. Compare the images below.



RMC building proposed, remarkably sunny for a north elevation.



A typical modern car showroom

4. Leaving aside the size of the basement, the two and a half storey building seen above ground is already a storey higher than the existing building and to make matters worse a clerestory level has been added by raising the roof further, serving little function other than seeking to grab the attention, an attribute more suited to a car showroom than a conservation area. The obvious downside of this elevated roof is the vast area of glazing which will create a heat loss in winter and a heat gain in summer. The Quality Review Panel commented, in Feb 2022, “*However, the panel is concerned by the extent of glazing proposed and it recommends that this is reassessed, with excess glazing removed.*” Not only has the applicant clearly ignored this request but, according to the school’s website, denies that the request was ever made, listing only two “key” items

raised by the QRP, both regarding the appearance from the street.

5. The brief called for the building to be no higher than the ridge line of the existing building and it appears that the architects have cynically used that brief as a design tool to help maximise the volume.



The new low-pitched roofs are almost a perfect fit below that ridge line (green dotted), apparently without regard for the height of the roof verges which are well over twice as high as the parapets of the existing building. This superimposed image illustrates that difference in reality. Bear in mind that the original building was further back and the new proposal further forward, but this could not be illustrated thus as it would not be visible. In addition, the towering and overbearing aspect produced by the proposed building is exacerbated by the fact that the surface of the playing field is now, since its level was reduced several years ago, a further two metres below the ground level.



It is the height of the roof at its edges that defines its appearance from the neighbouring properties and from the sports pitch, creating overshadowing and a very overbearing presence.

6. The Highgate Society welcomed the design of the new Junior School on the other side of the road and feel that it has a good relationship to the sports field which it faces. The low-pitched roofs slope down towards the field, rather than being perpendicular to it, and are covered in greenery to increase thermal mass and reduce the heat island effect. Green roofs also reduce pollutants in the air and carbon dioxide, improve sound insulation, reduce and filter storm water run-off and reduce energy costs; all round a

more eco-friendly, environmentally sustainable solution. The school's website refers to their sustainability credentials *"The proposed projects will have the capacity to adapt to the projected effects of climate change including fabric first approach to the building envelope, use of native planting, green roof areas, a drainage strategy accounting for future climate change and provision of low water use fittings."* It is with some incredulity that it does not appear to have even been a consideration for this project. This is particularly regrettable since the permeable and more ecologically sustainable grass pitch of the junior field was replaced a number of years ago with an artificial grass surface. The new project does not therefore help to "adapt to the projected effects of climate change", but, rather, to augment the negative impact of that artificial surface. In addition, significantly more detail is needed as to the nature, extent and actual positive benefit of the "native planting" to establish whether it would make more than a token gesture towards sustainability and biodiversity. The image below is a simple re-working of the same building footprint but using a green roof pitched down towards the playing field and neighbouring rear gardens, and adding a covered walkway along the front elevation. As this is not a sunny elevation, facing due north, the covered walkway would principally provide welcome cover along this walkway between school sites and for spectators watching the field of play.



The eaves and ridge line are both much lower than the current proposal, and it is arguably a design better suited to its function, partly as a sports pavilion, and its location in the Conservation Area. Curiously it is also a design that could easily have come from the stable of projects by these eminent architects, a selection from the submitted D&AS illustrated below.



7. We also have concerns regarding the deep basement construction and the potential harm to nearby buildings and the impact on the mature trees through the diversion of groundwater. As Haringey are now all too well aware, the hydrology of the Highgate area is immensely complex, including numerous springs in the immediate area. In addition, the 1869 Ordnance Survey Map shows the presence in the area of the Junior Field and the site of the Richards Music Centre, of what we understand were watercress beds, indicative of a permanently damp environment. Indeed, we believe that this waterlogging during wet seasons was a reason why the grass pitch of the Junior Field was replaced by an artificial pitch. We therefore have major concerns that a deep basement here could exacerbate these ground conditions, not least for neighbours gardens. We would strongly recommend an independent review of the BIA to ensure that no problems are encountered during or post construction.
8. We would also point out that the site is within the greatly expanded Highgate Archaeological Priority Area and is within the general area of the important Mediaeval Bishop of London's Palace in the Hornsey Great Park. There are therefore clearly archaeological implications to this development, and we believe that some form of archaeological assessment would be highly advisable.

The Highgate Society strongly objects to this proposal in its current form for all the reasons stated above. This application must be refused pending a review of the sustainability issues, and the harm to the character of the conservation area. We hereby request that this application be considered by the Planning Committee.

Yours sincerely

David Richmond
Chair Planning Group
The Highgate Society

Disclaimer: The Highgate Society is an unincorporated association established for the public benefit. It endeavours to ensure that the information it provides as a free service is correct, but does not warrant that it is accurate or complete. Nothing in its correspondence, or discussed verbally at any time with representatives of its Planning Group, constitutes professional or legal advice and may not be relied on as such.