

Environment and Planning Report

Autumn 2024

By Michael Hammerson

Camden's **Dartmouth Park Healthy Neighbourhood** traffic diversion proposals have set alarm bells ringing for the massive disruption they will cause to everyday life and communications throughout the whole Highgate area and beyond. Although it may address a localised problem, there is no assessment of the consequences for the wider region. Look at our website for updates on the campaign against the current plans being led by Andrew Sulston and Elspeth Clements; extra newsletters will be issued and flyers distributed, we will liaise with other local groups and a public meeting will be arranged for September.

The situation at **Townsend Yard** remains unacceptable:

- We were concerned that the proposed Zipcar club for residents of the new houses may be a private car club for residents only, but Haringey have confirmed this is not the case.
- We are awaiting input from a Fire Safety Consultant on the fire security of Shepherds Cottage.
- Haringey have approved the landscaping proposals; we are concerned that this includes setts to be installed on land that not owned by the developer.
- Delivery lorries are parking across the entrance to Townsend Yard in breach of the Construction Management Plan and will be reported to Haringey's enforcement section.
- We are continuing to gather evidence for 20+ years of public use of the yard, to establish a public right of way through it.
- We, and others, have been shocked to see the appalling impact of the development on Broadbent Yard; see the accompanying photograph below.

We are working with local people interested in reviving the **Archway Road Action Group** and hope to meet our GLA representative when plans for Archway Road are further developed following consultation with residents. These include guerilla gardening, tree planting, road safety and CCTV cameras.

We are frustrated by Historic England's apparent ignoring of our application to have the **Holborn Infirmary Buildings** statutorily Listed. The developers, Seven Capital, plan to convert the original Victorian buildings into flats and build new blocks of affordable housing and a 32-storey tower block for student accommodation. There is no further news on when any application will be made.

We met with the new developers of the **Newstead site in Denewood Road**. They propose a smaller development than the one approved, it is now individual houses and they have dropped proposals for a basement. While it is an improvement, we have made some suggestions as regards design.

The **Highgate School Development Proposals** will be the subject of several workshops, facilitated by The King's Foundation. They will cover General Principles; Sustainability & the School's travel plan; Dyne House and the Science Block: the Mallinson and Richards Music Centres; and Sustainability, ecology and travel. In answer to our opposition to the use of astroturf on Far Field, the school said that if this were not permitted, pupils would need to travel to other astroturf sites. At present the field is only useable 6 times a week and it was claimed that improving the drainage would not improve matters enough. A reworking of the inadequate 603 bus service timetables would reduce traffic congestion. None of the applications will go forward until any workshop amendments or mitigations have been processed.

Work has started on the appalling **Dementia Nursing Home proposal at 44-46 Hampstead Lane** and so far, applications have been submitted to discharge 10 of the 48 conditions. We objected strongly to a new application to remove the reference to number of beds and allow additional excavation of the basement. We found it very difficult to understand why such a potentially radical alteration was accepted as a Non-Material Amendment. The whole purpose of Haringey's decision to allow it, despite it being contrary to Conservation Area policy, was because it would "take pressure off the NHS". To remove any reference to the number of beds required would surely risk allowing the developers to reduce the number to a level which would obviate the whole purpose of the consent. In addition, to extend the size of the basement in

a sensitive area close to a Site of Special Scientific Interest, without any requirement for a hydrological assessment of any potential impact, seems unwise. However, our concerns were dismissed and it has been approved. Another application to amend various details has now been submitted

Works at the Grade II* Listed **4 The Grove**, dating back to the 1600s and so, very worrying, include demolition of the Grade I listed front wall, though this does not appear to have happened. We have objected to the new basement plan, which is larger than before. We also noted original 16th/17th century bricks being loaded into a skip, though there is no permission to remove original materials.

Our objection to works at **Sunbury, Fitzroy Park**, a very fine Art Deco house resulted in revised proposals, with which we are satisfied and so we have withdrawn our objection.

Following a refusal by Haringey, a second application has been submitted for extension works at **22 Kingsley Place**. Although not quite as extensive, it will still cause significant harm to the amenity neighbours and we have maintained our objection.

We have objected to proposals to raise the roof at **62 North Road**, which will have an unacceptable impact on the street scene.

We objected to a very ugly roof extension for **89 Swain's Lane**, an important modernist house, but Camden approved it.

The current is the latest in a long line of badly designed overdevelopments proposed for **6a Grange Road**. The architect met with us, but only after the application had been submitted. We have made a strong objection.

The new proposals for the **Mary Feilding Guild Redevelopment** show little improvement, other than a reduction in the size of the basement which will help neighbours. They are disappointing as the developers had recently circulated a very different scheme to neighbours. Our request for a meeting with them was rejected.

We were delighted when the appeal against Haringey's refusal of a pair of semi-detached houses on the gardens of **Alford Mews, Stanhope Road**, was dismissed, citing many of the reasons on which we based our objection - grounds of harm to the Conservation Area and neighbours' amenities. Copies of all appeal decisions with which we are involved are held at 10a.

In a well-reasoned report, Haringey refused an application for a new front wall and gates at **42 Hampstead Lane**, to which we had objected as very damaging to the character of the Conservation Area. The developers have appealed, arguing that the wall and gates are necessary for security, but this does not justify allowing such developments in a Conservation Area, and we have written to the Inspector supporting Haringey's refusal. In particular, the developer cites the impact of the new wall as slight to moderate, despite the fact that the current treatment is a low brick wall with railings, while the new boundary would be a solid brick wall 2.2m high and two ornate metal swing gates. Oddly, they even cite Neighbourhood Plan policy DH6 that "Original walls, gate piers or railings should be retained unless their removal is necessary due to the condition of a structure, or replacement is proposed which would enhance the character of the area....New boundary walls will not be permitted if they have a detrimental impact on the street scene" and they even concede that the wall "will represent a loss of cohesion... as the adjacent properties possess low walls with railings atop and a hedge behind." As so often happens, the examples they cite elsewhere in the area as justification are a long way away and not visible. Finally, there is no discernible public benefit, and we consider that no new argument has been made to justify overturning the original refusal.

We have continued to fight the threat to the Conservation Area from demolition and rebuild, and have objected strongly to yet another application, to demolish and rebuild the pleasant **41 Sheldon Avenue** on a larger scale with the inevitable basement, swimming pool and new gated boundary treatments and access, for a range of major reasons:

- It is unsustainable, and flies in the face of Haringey's new policy that retrofitting of existing buildings must be considered before demolition and rebuild. It does not assess the environmental impact of the proposals in the light of Haringey's Policy DM21 "Sustainable design, layout, and construction", which states that proposals that fail to demonstrate adequate consideration for sustainable design, layout and construction techniques will be resisted.

- The new house is about 3-4 times the size of the existing 1928 house dating from 1928, possibly one of the original Quennel houses within the area and, a recognised element of the character of this part of the Conservation Area. The developer argues that the quality of the new house will justify demolition of the existing, a conclusion which we contest. Sheldon Avenue consists of early 20th century villas, with an understated Arts and Crafts form which is part of the character of the conservation area. The gaps

between the houses give views of the gardens beyond and this is an integral part of the streetscape. The new house will destroy this gap.

- The increased size will cause a severe reduction in daylighting and sunlighting to neighbours' houses and gardens;

- There is no independent assessment of the basement report; one must be sought by a Haringey-appointed specialist, at the applicant's expense.

In summary, it is entirely inappropriate to the area and should be refused..

Many residents have complained to us about the appearance of numbers of what appear to be **Mobile Homes** parked permanently along Hampstead Lane, between The Bishops Avenue and Kenwood. This cannot be right, and we have asked Haringey's Enforcement section to investigate, and understand that they have referred it to their Highways Division for - we hope - action.

Following what we regard as several serious failures in securing adequate **Archaeological Investigation in advance of major redevelopments**, even when conditions have been requested by Historic England and imposed by Haringey, we have asked the local adviser at Historic England's Greater London Archaeology Section do their best to ensure that a developer's archaeological contractors contact the Society well in advance of submitting their final desktop assessment, pointing out to them that we have a detailed knowledge of the area's archaeological potential. We have seen too many archaeological contractors' reports which have signally failed to research the area, or their site, adequately, resulting in the loss of unique historical information; this must not happen again, particularly given that most of Highgate is now a designated Archaeological Priority Area.

We remain concerned about the poor standard of applications made within the Conservation Area. One such case is an application to convert a loft at 284 Archway Road into habitable space. The drawings generally indicate a plethora of rooflights but are sufficiently imprecise that it is difficult to see how they will all fit into the area, and we asked that much clearer drawings should be provided. We were therefore very glad to see that Haringey approved it, with conditions which address our concerns and reduce the number of rooflights.

Similarly, we looked at an application at **325-327 Archway Road** to install a 5kw domestic Air Source Heat Pump in the flat's rear garden. We have studied this application and concluded that the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero recommends that, where a heat pump is closer than 1m to any boundary, it needs a noise report, and the fan should be positioned away from boundaries. In addition, the pump would be some distance from the property, raising questions about its efficiency, as it would need to operate more frequently due to heat loss along its extended connection.

We have objected to a very poorly designed, and significantly oversized, extension proposed at **12 Stormont Road**. This would be extremely harmful to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and gives insufficient information to allow Haringey to assess the impact on neighbours' daylight and sunlight.

It was our firm opinion that the proposal should be refused, and the reason for this view is as follows:

The street comprises a variety of houses, but the unifying characteristics are arts and crafts / mock Georgian style houses or other traditional styles, mainly of two or two-and-a-half storeys, and set back from the street by 8-9m, with several metres of space between them, giving views through to mature vegetation behind, specifically protected under Haringey's own policy. The proposed two-and-a-half-storey extension will completely obliterate this gap and would not be a "...*modest addition to the host building*" as claimed. The Highgate Conservation Area appraisal specifically mentions the negative effects of extending properties right up to the boundary as "*destroying the views between the houses and the open leafy character of the streets*"; while the Neighbourhood Plan states "*The gaps between dwellings, often providing views of mature rear gardens, are an important feature of many residential streets of Highgate and contribute positively to the conservation area*". *The proposal will thus have a negative effect on the Conservation Area and cause substantial harm.*

We have also expressed the view that "the proposals lack the design rigour required in a conservation area" and that the side extension does not display the subservience to the original house required by Haringey's Policy on Side Extensions, illustrating the severe asymmetry it would cause with annotated drawings. As so often happens, the applicant's character study simply cherry-picks Google Streetview images from a wide area, with only two of the eight examples being on Stormont Road, and does not show the relationship between houses in the street. It claims the proposal provides "...*an improvement in the symmetry of the Stormont Road elevation*", when it is clear that it does not, with two front doors; misaligned dormer windows against bays; disproportionate window detailing and large expanses of blank wall, leaving the whole lopsided and inconsistent in comparison with the existing. In total, it is not of high enough design quality for the Conservation Area and would have a negative effect on its setting. We

cited a similar application which was refused on appeal for these reasons. It would also have a severe impact on neighbours' daylighting and amenity and should be refused for all these reasons.

Thankfully, the application has been refused, for most of the reasons we cited.

We have also had to oppose an application for extensions to **24 Cholmeley Park** and the creation of a parking space on the front garden. It would cause a substantial loss of back garden land, and the loss of front garden to provide a parking space would set a dangerous precedent by eroding the street's character of low original garden walls and hedges. Increasing the area of hard standing would also add to surface water run-off. The creation of 3 new rooflights to the front of the property is too many, since there is generally a presumption against rooflights in conservation areas, and the roof extension is out of character with the existing and surrounding buildings. All this may harm neighbours' amenities by overlooking areas not previously overlooked. A significant redesign is needed.

Our objection to proposals for an insensitive front boundary treatment and a rear garden swimming pool at the fine Arts and Crafts house at **45 Lanchester Road**.

The current open and green frontage, with its low boundary wall, is integral to the current street scene; the new treatment would damage the open character of Lanchester Road and set a terrible precedent, particularly when it is adjacent to Highgate Wood. In press reports, the work was justified on the grounds that "The existing entrance gates and walls of the property do not provide the necessary privacy or security for the family." This, however, is irrelevant as a planning issue; why did they not choose a more suitable location?.

Though it is located immediately below Highgate Wood and adjacent to other houses, there appears to be no hydrology report on the possible impact of the swimming pool on local hydrology and house foundations, particularly as no. 49, only two doors away, is a Statutorily Listed building.

There has been considerable activity on the Trees front, and some excellent decisions from Haringey's tree officer, Daniel Monk. We (and others) objected strongly to proposals to fell 6 Sycamores, 6 Limes, 2 Ash and a number of evergreens at **223 Archway Road**. While the trees had been very poorly managed over the years, this was a complete overreaction by the owners to a notice from Transport for London that "You must prune the vegetation overhanging the footpath and obstructing the highway." The trees form a critical green element in the otherwise urban and traffic-dominated Archway Road, and we were pleased when Haringey responded positively to our request that a Group Tree Preservation Order be placed on them.

We objected to proposals to fell a Birch and a Plane tree on public land next to **446 Archway Road** because of cracking in buildings, even though the applicants consultants' first report did not attribute the cracking in the building to tree root action or seek felling as a solution, and their subsequent report, while recommending felling, gave no clear reasons why felling is necessary. We argued that alternative solutions, such as a root barrier, should be explored, particularly since the trees were there when the building was constructed in 1995. Haringey's Tree Section responded by planning a Provisional Tree Preservation Order on them.

Shockingly, this was not the end of the story. Passing the site, the Tree officer noticed that the trees had been felled, in defiance of the TPO; this has been reported to Enforcement and we hope that appropriate action will be taken.

We also objected to a five-day notice to fell a large, protected Oak, a major landscape feature, stated to be dangerous, at **10, Willowdene, View Road**. However, it was clear that its condition was the result of poor management, resulting in it being heavily overgrown with ivy, which could indeed make it dangerous in a high wind. We observed that removal of the ivy, and some careful pruning, would remedy the problem, and were pleased at Haringey's refusal of the application for these reasons.

An application to fell a poorly managed pollarded Lime Tree at **1 Highgate Avenue** was also refused by Haringey's Tree Section and a Provisional TPO was made to protect it.

Finally, we objected strongly to an application to fell a protected oak at **17 Denewood Road**. The application gave inadequate information on the condition of the tree, or the reasons for felling.

It is clearly an ancient hedgerow oak, probably identifiable on the 1869 Ordnance Survey Map. While noting that the crown is 90% below "normal" density, it is clearly still quite vigorous and its form typical of normal crown dieback in ancient Oaks. With appropriate pruning and reduction, the life of the tree, and its contribution as an important Heritage and ecological feature, could be maintained for some years to come. Far from being "a net visual detractor to the character of the Conservation Area", as is claimed, it is in fact an important ancient survivor of the pre-development fields and hedgerows, and its gnarled and stag-headed appearance, typical of major ancient oaks, makes it a positive visual contributor to the

character of the Conservation Area. It is therefore an important element of the local landscape and ecological chain, and every effort should be made to retain as much of it as possible consistent with safety.

We also rejected the suggestion that a Dawn Redwood would be an "appropriate" replacement to maintain the character of the area, suggesting little understanding of local ecology or character. An ancient oak appears a natural and integral part of the landscape; a columnar 30m Dawn Redwood would stick out like the proverbial sore thumb. The application also appears not to appreciate the difference in ecological value between the two species. Ancient oaks are a vital source of food for rare wood-living and leaf-eating insects, supporting more species than any other native tree. Dawn Redwood, being a coniferous native of the far East, has little ecological value. Further, ancient oaks, even when dead, are a highly important food source for rare insects and fungi, and every effort should be made, following its death, to retain as much of its stump as possible. We await Haringey's decision.

Finally, we have drawn Camden's attention to the condition of the Lime Trees along the top of Highgate West Hill by the Reservoir, which under their current management regime look like telegraph poles covered with epicormic growth and have asked them to allow the crowns to grow more naturally; see our photograph below.

There is, as always, much to report on our Open Spaces, about which we get surprisingly little feedback from members.

On **Hampstead Heath**, we learn that, at *Golders Hill Park*, the Pinetum next to the Café has been developed since 2019 into an outstanding woodland walk with over 40 conifer species. The Stumpery, near the cafe, with its dense cover of ferns and other vegetation, is now wildlife rich, with sightings of hedgehogs and Bank Voles. The orchard contains some very old trees, including a veteran pear regrowing from its stump, while relaxed mowing makes it more nature rich. Swan Pond was desilted in 2022 and reed beds are being planted. The Zoo is being repurposed to focus on British wildlife and the Heath's biodiversity. This includes species recovery programmes, including the recent arrival of two Scottish Wildcats and a new group of Red Deer, sharing space with the Fallow Deer. The former Butterfly House will focus on small native animals. The several apprentices working with the garden and zoo teams has been an excellent training opportunity and enabled the City to recruit high quality and locally experienced staff. Overall, efforts are being made to increase the Park's sustainability and biodiversity.

It is hoped that negotiations will at last begin with the owner of "*Harry's Land*", who outbid the City on this site below Athlone House in the vain hope of being able to develop it, with the aim of at last adding it to the Heath, joining the part of the Athlone House gardens which the Society and the Heath and Hampstead Society were instrumental in getting added to the Heath in 2005.

Check the Hampstead Heath Website, where you can search for their important Veteran tree walk.

Pollution from flea treatment for dogs in ponds remains a concern and is being researched, while there have been break-ins and vandalism at the Lido and elsewhere although there is nothing to steal. There was a large illegal demonstration of about 500 people on West Heath and to secure their removal the Metropolitan Police had to be called.

The City are in the process of reviewing the management of their 55 charities, which include Hampstead Heath and Highgate Wood. Due to recent financial conditions, and future uncertainty over business rates and inflation, the City are running a large deficit and the current method of deficit funding therefore puts the future of the charities at risk and they are looking at new funding sources. The Consultative Committee will be involved in the debate and has already made its views clear at a preliminary meeting, in particular, that the Charities must remain a part of the City of London and the process must not be rushed but changes piloted over a period of time, since it will be impossible to fund the significant capital expenditure needed, which cannot be raised through charitable funding.

Work at *Kenwood* during 2024 includes replanting of the Cafe Terrace; renovation of the holly hedge bordering the West Meadow and Pasture Ground; maintaining the Sphagnum Bog SSSI and a wide range of other planting and pruning projects, explained in detail to the Landscape Forum, including dead hedging of the 500-year-old Sweet Chestnut in the Elms Garden and the opening up of the view of the House from the Beech Mount.

Research is showing that Kenwood has a unique and distinctive flora and fauna even compared with Hampstead Heath, including a healthy population of Grass Snakes, a number of butterfly species and Kestrels and Buzzards nesting in the West meadow. Ken Wood seems to be the centre for the recovery of the Firecrest, a rare bird making a resurgence in Southern England, Kenwood being where it is most often seen. The West Meadow is the centre of biodiversity on the Estate, where Red Bartsia - usually only found

in the Chilterns has been discovered. A Nightingale had been heard on the Heath and at Kenwood, for the first time since WWII.

On *Kenwood House*, 2023 had been a good year for visitors, and for income at £2.6 million, though site expenditure was £2.9 million; the deficit, we were told, is met through other profitable English Heritage properties, including, notably, Stonehenge. There were over 100 events, including tours, talks, school visits, and also various community events. Kenwood has 470 volunteers who have given 2,500 hours of time.

On dog walking licencing, it was explained that dog owners are one of the key audiences at Kenwood, many would like to join the City's licencing scheme, but the City are having a very challenging time with it and are having problems with staffing and enforcing the licencing. The main effect has been to reduce dogs on the Heath but increase them at Kenwood. A scheme can be set up, but monitoring is a real challenge.

The new Landscape Management Plan is being worked on, but priority is being given to the Master Plan, which is almost complete. Hopefully, it will be out for consultation in the near future.

For groups like the Highgate Society, a major outcome of the election result is the inevitable game of musical chairs we will once more have to engage with, following the government's announcement of yet another major overhaul of the planning system, aimed at addressing the housing crisis, and also at stimulating economic growth, which inevitably means making development easier.

A major element of this will be yet another revision – the fourth in recent years – of the National Planning Policy Framework, within which all regional and local planning policy has to operate. An eight-week consultation has started, with which we will have to engage. Key elements are:

Annual Housing Targets have been raised to 370,000 homes per year, a significant increase from previous levels;

Mandatory Housing Targets will be imposed on all councils in England to deliver an additional 1.5 million homes within the next 5 years;

Local Plans and Community Engagement will play a crucial role in determining how homes and infrastructure are developed, but we do not anticipate that that will mean listening more closely to community concerns, but will rather embody the definition of "Consult" in Ambrose Bierce's *Devil's Dictionary*, published as long ago as 1911 – "To seek approval of a course of action which has already been decided on";

Councils must review their **Green Belts** and identify "grey belt" land for development – which, too often, is green belt land which has been allowed to deteriorate to increase the chances of getting permission for lucrative development. Green Belt development will require that 50% of the homes must be affordable, access to green space must be enhanced, and essential infrastructure such as schools and GP surgeries built. Since the main provider is expected to be the private sector, we cannot see this happening;

Grey Belt will be defined as previously developed Green Belt, or any other Green Belt land which makes a "limited contribution" to the five Green Belt purposes. where councils lack up-to-date plans or fail to meet local housing targets, housebuilders will be permitted to propose developments on grey belt land;

Brownfield Land will be prioritised for new development, with a presumption that permission should be given, to promote higher-density urban housing;

The consultation will address whether to retain references to well-designed buildings and places but remove references to "beauty" and "beautiful", which were in any case meaningless.

Reforms will include changes to the Right to Buy policy and granting councils greater powers to build social and affordable housing. The development of key infrastructure, including laboratories, gigafactories, data centres, and large-scale wind and solar projects will be prioritised, and there will be further reforms to "streamline the planning process".



Townsend view from Broadbent Yard



West Hill Limes