

Environment and Planning Report

Winter 2024

By Michael Hammerson

I write this report, for the first time in sixteen years, without the help of my little amanuensis Ulysses, to whom I had to say goodbye in September. He was very old, had a good life, and used to love planning committee meetings at my house – and not a few of you knew him – but there are too many empty spots around the house. His ashes are in my study window, where he used to love to sit.

We made a detailed response to the Government's consultation on yet another revision to the **National Planning Policy Framework** – the fourth in recent years. The full text is on our website; we and others particularly noted the impossibility of the Government's proposed housing targets if this is to be left to private developers.

We held our regular **meeting with Haringey Planners**, attended by representatives from Enforcement, Conservation, Strategy and Development Control. Their head planner Robbie McNaugher, with whom we worked closely, is leaving, and we hope for a similar working relationship with his successor. The agenda covered controversial decisions, process, notification of appeals, the definition of minor or non-material amendments, the sharing of pre-application advice, and what constitutes good design. They confirmed that the revised Local Plan will be consulted on in the New Year, but there is still no date on when they will consult on Highgate's revised local list, which we drafted for them 7 years ago.

Members should be aware that we have learn that Haringey propose to extend **double yellow lines** to 10 metres at all corners in the Borough, from the current 5 metres; we are told that this is to improve sight lines for road and pedestrian safety. While we do not in principle oppose measures aimed at improving safety, we have been told of concerns by some residents that it will cause substantial loss of parking space in an area of high parking stress. There has been inadequate consultation on the proposal, and members who believe that it could have impacts of that nature on their streets should raise their concerns urgently with the ward councillors.

The fire safety aspects of the **Townsend Yard** development, as they impact on **Shepherds Cottage**, remain unresolved and we continue to pursue this. We have reported to Haringey Enforcement that delivery lorries to the **Townsend Yard site** are causing obstructions by parking across the entrance to the Yard and are endeavouring to ascertain whether this is in breach of their planning permission. We understand from Haringey that an application has been submitted to make the amazing **Folly** behind the Yard a Listed Building, but they cannot tell us who has made it.

An application has now been submitted for the **Holborn Infirmary Site**. It includes conversion of the original Victorian buildings into flats and new affordable housing but, dismayingly, includes a 26-storey student accommodation tower, which will have a huge impact over a wide area. Despite extensive community engagement, following which it was expected that the Tower would be omitted, it has become clear that the developers, Seven Capital, have not listened to any of the concerns expressed by community groups and affected neighbours; should Islington permit it, the campaign group will have to consider seeking a Judicial Review of the decision. However, it has been specifically noted on the application as a Departure from the Local Plan, which will be one of the reasons on which it will be fought. In addition, Historic England have not only failed to process our application to List the Victorian buildings after a year but are not responding to our repeated enquiries as to the status of our application.

Discussions on the **Highgate School Development Proposals** progress slowly. There was a workshop on sustainability and biodiversity in June, at which major concerns were aired about the proposals to cover the Far Field with Astroturf, but the other workshops have been delayed whilst issues between the various experts on hydrology and Basement Impact Assessments are resolved. They recommenced in October, under the aegis of a facilitator provided by The King's Foundation and will cover Dyne House and Science Block; the Mallinson and Richardson Music Centres; and a roundup session.

We oppose the proposals for Dyne House, which, we consider, should stay as originally designed; an approach supported by the Twentieth Century Society, who have applied for the building to be Listed. Following the sustainability meeting the School has however, agreed to make the parade ground a

greener space and not the multi-use games area originally proposed. No planning applications will be submitted until all these issues have been resolved. We also have major concerns about the design of the Richards Music Centre and the ecological impact of extensive excavations in The Orchard and around the Mallinson Centre.

We are concerned about a proposed basement excavation under the front garden, and various structural works, at the Grade II* Listed **4 The Grove**, which dates to c.1700 and have objected strongly.

Sunbury, Fitzroy Park is one of the best Art Deco houses in the area. We objected to insensitive proposals to extend and alter it; revised plans are acceptable and we have now withdrawn our objection.

An application for substantial extension works to the Listed **62 North Hill** would have had a harmful impact on it and its two Listed neighbours. We submitted a strong objection and a revised application was made but is little improvement.

At **42 Hampstead Lane** there have been six "minor" and non-material amendments to the original permission to demolish and rebuild the house, to which we had objected. Strangely, three were permitted and three refused, though the real damage was permitting demolition and rebuild. An earlier refusal of a replacement front wall and gates, as incongruous, overbearing, and out of character to the main building and the Conservation Area, has been appealed; we wrote to the Inspector supporting Haringey's refusal and reinforcing our argument that it would cause substantial harm.

A second application for a rear extension at **22 Kingsley Place** was approved. Although smaller than the first, it will still cause significant harm to neighbours' amenity.

We objected strongly to an application to demolish the well-designed **41 Sheldon Avenue** and replacing it with a house four times the volume, with basement and swimming pool, on grounds of embodied energy and failure to consider retrofitting. New plans have recently been submitted. The new Haringey local plan will include a retrofit first requirement, but this is not yet a material consideration.

Haringey decisively refused a large side extension at **12 Stormont Road** as an overbearing and unneighbourly form of development, to the detriment of neighbours' residential amenity. It would appear bulky, incongruous and harmful to the architectural integrity of both the property and the group of which it forms part. It would harm the green and spacious character of the street and of this part of the Conservation Area. It is one of the original Arts and Crafts houses by the Quennell brothers, built between 1914 and the 1930s, though it has been extended several times. This part of the Conservation Area is characterised by large, detached houses of individual design, unified by the vernacular revival style influenced by Arts-and-Crafts forms and detailing. The gardens clearly visible through the gaps between them are a major factor in the appearance of the Conservation Area; the proposed side extension would remove this, against policy. Too many of these houses have been altered, damaged or demolished and rebuilt, usually replaced by inappropriate and much larger buildings.

We opposed a roof extension at **89 Swain's Lane** on this important modernist house, but Camden approved it.

A proposed three-storey basemented house at **6a Grange Road** is a gross over-development of a small infill site; the architect met us to discuss it, but only after the application had been submitted. We have made a strong objection.

Listed **37 North Road** has been deteriorating badly for several years. Its new owner is an architect who aims to restore it.

An application has been submitted for 11 houses on the **Newstead site in Denewood Road**. While smaller than the original permitted development and omitting the basement, we still have some concerns. One 3-storey block is too close to the pavement and will harm the openness of the rest of the street, where the properties are set further back; the approved scheme took account of this. We are also concerned about the removal of three trees visually separating the site from Willowdene, which the applicants concede will create biodiversity net loss, we consider they should be retained.

A rather bizarre application has been made to demolish half of the two unprepossessing 1950s semi-detached houses at **120 Archway Road** and replace it with a 4-storey building providing five one-bedroom flats which would tower over the adjoining Victorian house and badly affect the setting of the Listed Archway Bridge.

There is a third attempt to build a house on a corner plot at **29 Milton Park**, comprising a basement with sleeping accommodation and living accommodation at ground level. While the reduction of size is an

improvement, putting the majority of the accommodation in a basement is not acceptable.

We supported neighbours' concerns about a lower ground floor rear extension and office/gym outbuilding in the rear garden of **21A Jacksons Lane**. Together with past extensions, it will cover more than 50% of the original garden and will negatively impact the whole adjoining area of back gardens, currently a valuable wildlife space with virtually no light pollution. Being taller than the already tall fence, it will damage neighbours' views of this large green area. Despite ten objections, Haringey permitted it, on the grounds that it would not be visible from the public realm. This may be so, but it will be visible, over a very wide area, from people's houses and back gardens, which in a Conservation Area is surely unacceptable. Another surely disingenuous reason given was that, although there will be greater coverage of the back garden, the astroturf lawn is being replaced with a grass one so this will actually "increase" the area of garden!

We objected to proposals for a new crossover and hard standing for front garden parking, and structural alterations, at **28 Hornsey Lane Gardens**. Haringey refused it, considering that it would be too close to a street tree, which would be seriously damaged, and result in the loss of street parking in an area where there is already a shortage of spaces. Additionally, the works to the house would be out of character and harm the Conservation area.

We also objected to upwards and sideways extensions at **67 Talbot Road** which would not be subordinate in scale to the existing building, as required by policy. They will harm the character and appearance of the building for neighbours and the Conservation Area and will adversely affect neighbours' amenities.

We reported the many complaints expressed to us about the large number of **mobile homes parked along Hampstead Lane** to Haringey. As a result, prompt action was taken by the Enforcement Team and the Antisocial Behaviour Team, and all appear to have gone, except for one derelict caravan.

There has been much activity on the Tree front. Notably, we objected to an application to fell a major protected **Oak at 17 Denewood Road**, which failed to mention that it is a very ancient oak, probably shown as part of a hedgerow on the 1869 O.S. map. While the report notes that the crown is 90% below "normal" density, it gave minimal useful information as to the actual condition of the tree. There is in fact still much life in it, and this type of crown dieback is a normal and healthy late stage in the life of an ancient Oak. We argued that, with appropriate treatment, its life, and its Heritage and ecological value, could be prolonged and that, far from being, as claimed, "a net visual detractor to the character of the Conservation Area", it is an important ancient survivor of the pre-development fields and hedgerows, and its gnarled and stag-headed appearance, typical of such major ancient trees, make it a positive visual contributor to the character of the Conservation Area.

We also rejected the suggestion that a Dawn Redwood would be an "appropriate" replacement. This indicated little understanding either of local ecology or character. An ancient oak appears a natural and integral part of the landscape; a columnar 30m Dawn Redwood will stick out like a sore thumb. It also failed to appreciate the difference in ecological value between the two species. An ancient Oak is not only an important heritage feature, but a vital food source for rare wood-living insects etc., supporting more species than any other native tree. Dawn Redwood, a coniferous native of the far East, has little ecological value. It is clear that any replacement should be an English Oak.

We therefore rejected the assertion that "The character of the conservation area would be appropriately maintained by the planting of... as the... dawn redwood... a typically elegant tree." and urged Haringey to refuse the application. They agreed with us, seeing no reason why the tree cannot be regularly monitored, retained safely, and managed appropriately, and noting that the loss of the tree would be unacceptable and contrary to national and local policy.

We also opposed a third application to fell or severely prune a **Chile Pine at 37 Southwood Avenue**, following two previous refusals. While the application, evidently prompted by the applicants' insurers, takes an aggressive tone, it provides no further conclusive evidence to justify felling this important tree (on the world list of Endangered Trees in the wild), and we consider that the issue can be satisfactorily resolved by insertion of a root barrier and/or underpinning. If their concern is principally that of cost, it was established, in the dismissal of an appeal against Haringey's refusal of an application to fell an ancient Hornbeam at 54 North Hill in 2015, that even if a tree was implicated in structural problems, it could be of sufficient importance that alternative means of addressing the problem other than felling must be adopted. If there is a justifiable case, Haringey's refusal should simply be appealed, providing evidence in support. We also understand that the joint owners of the property are themselves opposed to felling,

which must cast further doubt on the need, given their obvious interest in maintaining the structural integrity of the property.

Our stall at the annual **Highgate Wood Heritage Day** was a great success, with visitors showing great interest both in the work of the Society and our historical display, and also attracted by the **restored 1st century Roman Pottery Kiln**, now on permanent display in the wood. We wonder, though, why so few people from Highgate visit what is one of London's most important ancient woodlands, a high proportion of visitors coming from Crouch End, Muswell Hill, Finchley and areas much further afield.

As members of the **Kenwood Landscape Forum**, we attended their half-yearly open public meeting on 4th November to discuss proposed events for the next six months. It is important to resist any attempt to reintroduce events for more than 10,000, which were abandoned this year, as they cause considerable deterioration to the grounds, which have little time to recover between events, and mean part of the estate is not available for much of the summer season: surely contrary to the original stipulation that there should be year-round public access. While English Heritage have an extremely difficult task to raise the money necessary to manage their properties, following the Government's shameful withdrawing of all funding for English Heritage from earlier this year, making parts of the estate inaccessible for extended periods is surely not the way to approach it. We and other local groups are keen to work with them to find alternative means of raising funding, but the response has been lukewarm.

On **Hampstead Heath**, the rare breed of sheep grazing on the Heath Extension was once more a success, and there is now even talk of whether the sheep could be kept on the Heath permanently.

The City of London are conducting a mid-term review of their Ten-Year Heath Strategy, in which we have been involved. The main issues relate to climate change and the impact of increased visitor numbers, currently estimated at 10 million a year. In the light of declining income, the City are also carrying out a major review of the future funding of their various Charities, of which Hampstead Heath and Highgate Wood are two. They are considering a model providing a fixed grant each year, rather than "deficit funding" in which the City simply meets any shortfall in income annually; this would enable the charities to seek additional funding from outside. The members of the Consultative Committee have sought assurance that this will not have any adverse impact and that responsibility for supporting the charities will remain with the City. Current major expenditure projects include essential repairs to the Hill Garden Pergola, currently estimated at anywhere between £2 million and £4 million, depending on what options are taken forward.

Negotiations have at last commenced with the owner of the disputed "Harry's Land" below Athlone House, who had outbid the City of London when the site came up for auction in the vain hope of securing some form of development, despite the fact that covenants ensure that it can never be developed.

A study revealing unacceptable pollution in the Heath ponds from dogs swimming in them after receiving chemical flea treatment has now made national news. The first step will be to make dog walkers, vets, and others aware of this serious problem.

On a wider matter of major concern, the fact that **Butterfly Numbers** have plummeted this year has made national news. While poor weather is the immediate cause, insect populations have been steadily falling across much of the planet. Habitat destruction is the most obvious problem, and while in London and Hertfordshire many good butterfly areas are protected, the government's aggressive housebuilding program, particularly in the Green Belt, will present a threat to some sites. Pollution is also a massive threat - sewage in the rivers, widespread use of pesticides, and artificial light outdoors at night. In Highgate and Hampstead, apart from our valuable protected open spaces, we have vast chains of gardens which could, if sensitively managed, act as a critical ecological corridor to encourage wildlife and facilitate its spreading between those open spaces. For advice on how your garden could play its role and be more wildlife-friendly, please contact us.