

Environment and Planning Report

[WEBSITE]

Spring 2025

By Michael Hammerson

Liz Morris writes:- Our Planning Committee has been heavily involved with the campaign group opposed to the plans to develop the **Archway Campus Site** (Holborn Infirmary). These include a 27-storey tower which will blight views far and wide including from Grade II* listed Waterlow Park and Hampstead Heath. Our committee Chairs Liz Morris and Elspeth Clements have played a key role in drafting a comprehensive 45-page objection (available on our website) submitted to Islington Council on behalf of the Archway Campus Joint Action Group. This coalition includes local groups from Archway and Highgate, as well as residents from the streets surrounding the Campus.

It highlights numerous breaches of national, London, and local planning policies. One of the most worrying aspects is the misleading claims about the provision of affordable housing - far lower than advertised, with a staggering 75% of these homes being just studios or one-bedroom flats, completely inadequate for meeting Islington's pressing need for family housing. The overwhelming focus on student accommodation, in a borough with already the highest number of student units in London, appears to be more about maximizing developer profits than serving the community's needs. The application is due to go before Islington's Planning Committee in March.

Adding to our concerns is the site's historic significance. Historic England has recently consulted on the potential listing of the Holborn Infirmary buildings, currently on its "at risk" register. They are outstanding examples of late 19th-century Gothic Revival workhouse infirmary architecture and represent a key moment in the evolution of public healthcare. Given that the Conservation Area was designated specifically to protect these buildings, it would be perverse not to grant them listed status. The Society has strongly supported Listing this irreplaceable heritage.

On the **Highgate School applications**, *Francis Wilkinson writes:* In 2022 Highgate School submitted a composite planning application for five developments: for the demolition and rebuilding of Dyne House in Southwood Lane; for the expansion of the Science block on the School's island site; for the rebuilding of the Mallinson Sports Centre; for the demolition and rebuilding of the Richards Music Centre, both in Bishopswood Road; and for an all-weather pitch on the Far Field in Hampstead Lane. This is their 10-year development plan, and there were many objections. The School agreed to host 4 half day and full day workshops which were independently and professionally facilitated and which community representatives, architects and school staff attended; from the community side the process was coordinated by the Highgate Society. In addition, there was an expert workshop which dealt principally with hydrology. Various changes were made to the plans during the workshop process, which lasted 6 months. At the final workshop the Head, Adam Pettitt, said that the School would not be pursuing the application for an artificial pitch on Far Field, but would apply to provide a building for improved changing facilities there, and would not be making any substantive changes to the former orchard area between the Mallinson Centre and St Michael's School. The first project is now to be the rebuilding of the Mallinson Sports Centre, and the revised (and smaller) plans for that development are expected to be lodged with Haringey Council in February. Much of the concern felt by residents related to the disruption that would be caused by the building works, particularly at Dyne House, but such disruption, however substantial, is not an allowable ground to object to a planning application. While the workshop process is complete, it does not bind anyone in relation to any objections which may still be made to the individual planning applications, when the revised applications are submitted by the School.

Catherine Smyth (previously at the Stratford Legacy Development Company) has taken over as head of Haringey Planning. We will follow up with an invitation to a meeting and Highgate walkabout.

The **Dartmouth Park Healthy Neighbourhood** proposals remain a major concern, and new proposals from Camden are awaited. The problem is that national funding is available to promote low traffic neighbourhoods. We have seen 300 pages of emailed comments to Camden and our response to the

scheme has taken these into account. At the Society's 3rd September public meeting Councillors acknowledged that "this has been a lesson in terms of how we do our engagement on such schemes" and that Camden "has not managed to communicate well enough or handled the engagement well enough," and that improvements are necessary. We had a useful meeting with Cllr Marcus Boyland, making clear that we wish to work with Camden officers.

A Joint Action Group meeting (see www.dpjointation.com) was held to rethink some of the proposals: for example, coaches visiting Highgate Cemetery must continue to go up Swain's Lane as there is not enough space for them to turn around. A leaflet to gather community support has been distributed throughout the DPHN area and streets immediately around it. We realise that there is no quicker way to create divisions in the community than to suggest specific solutions when the data is incomplete and the consultation has not been done properly. The impact on pollution is complex given the other factors involved which include pollution from other sources as well as vehicles; gradual tightening of emission regulations for combustion engine vehicles; and gradual increases in the share of electric vehicles on our roads.

The Townsend Yard fire safety report which we commissioned from an independent fire safety expert reveals that the regulations are quite "loose" and the developer is generally compliant, but certain conditions need to be met to ensure that the occupants' escape from Shepherd's Cottage in case of fire is not compromised, and we are pressing for an agreement to these conditions. We are also concerned that the removal of the garages attached to Shepherd's Cottage has caused damage to the Listed Building which cannot be repaired as the wall of the new building abuts it. We are also pressing Haringey on what we, and others, consider the public right of way across Townsend Yard, particularly as we are concerned that the new houses may have been built beyond the boundary of the land actually owned by the developer.

Despite Haringey's removal of **caravans and motor homes parked permanently in Hampstead Lane**, they have returned and we have once more asked Haringey to address the problem.

We continue to comment on a wide range of individual applications; a selection follows.

The proposal to erect a large basemented house at **6a Grange Road** is the latest of several attempts to over-develop a small site. As is all too often the case, the architect met with us only after the application had been submitted. Haringey have commissioned an independent assessment of the Basement Impact report and we have submitted a strong objection.

We objected to an application to allow a large outbuilding at **10 Grange Road** to be built as "permitted development", and thus without the need for planning permission. The decision hinged on whether the proposal was genuinely incidental to the enjoyment of the dwellinghouse. It envisaged using the space for gym equipment, a large WC and extensive storage areas. The planners noted that the same applicant recently had an enforcement notice upheld for the conversion of an outbuilding into residential accommodation, and that those unauthorised works and the current proposal to build a very large structure for incidental use appear inconsistent. They concluded that the scale and size of the proposed building was much larger than might reasonably be required for purposes incidental to the enjoyment of the house and therefore requires an application for planning permission.

We opposed a large extension and other work including a new basement at **16 Sheldon Avenue** as against policy in being overbearing in scale and proportions to the main building, would significantly increase the massing and depth of building and would be deeper and larger than its neighbours. The new basement - for a games room - would be 16m meters long and the full width of the building; yet no ground investigations were undertaken and the Basement Impact Assessment was simply a desk-based one, and it is essential to undertake on-site investigations before building a large basement, since Policy requires applicants to demonstrate that their proposal will not adversely affect the structural stability of neighbouring buildings, increase flood risk to nearby properties, or threaten trees.

We objected to substantial extension and alteration works at **24 Cholmeley Park**, which together would be harmful to the Conservation Area, and to the loss of front garden land for parking space, which would set a dangerous precedent for the streetscape and, by increasing the area of hard standing, would also add to surface water run-off, all against policy. Haringey agreed and refused it.

The new application for 11 houses at the former **Newstead Retirement Home Redevelopment** has been submitted. It is smaller than the original permitted development and the basement has been removed, and there seem to be little grounds for objecting.

We have objected strongly to a retrospective application for a very large garden room erected without permission at **4 Highgate Avenue**. Despite its size and harmful impact on neighbours, it has been

accepted only as a minor amendment to a previous permission, is limited to the glazing and levels, and makes no real attempt to remedy the actual harm caused. We consider the drawings inadequate, since the floor level is considerably higher than shown, as is the height of the new building relative to ground level; the glazing is shown inaccurately; and height of the building is in any case unacceptable, due to impact on neighbours. It should not be considered until accurate drawings are provided and should certainly not be considered as a "Non-material Amendment" to the previous planning permission. Indeed, since no permission exists for it, it cannot be considered an "amendment" to any permission, but is an unauthorised development for which no previous application has been submitted and which therefore cannot be "amended".

We have objected to a strange application to replace half of the building at **120 Archway Road** with a 4-storey block of 4 flats. While the existing 1950s building is architecturally poor, so, we consider, is the proposed replacement. Its colours and materials would clash incompatibly with the Victorian style along Archway Road, not to mention the rather sad half of the 1950 building which would remain; nor can we see how only half of it can be successfully demolished. It would also have a negative impact on the setting of the Listed Archway Bridge. While we welcome good new design, this is not.

Proposals for major extensions at **108 North Hill** would seriously harm this important, and unique early 19th century terrace of cottages, the first buildings to be seen when entering the Conservation Area from the north. The application claims it will be barely visible, when it will actually be very prominent. It is described in the Highgate Conservation Area Appraisal as "a rare survival which contributes in a very positive manner to the whole road and particularly to the approach to the Conservation Area" and it is proposed to be added to the Local List of notable buildings. It would have caused substantial harm to the terrace and has been refused.

We also have concerns about a proposed replacement for the old coach house at **28 Shepherds Hill** - another instance of our being approached by the developer only after the application has been submitted. Its height, bulk and new windows will impact badly on neighbours, the basement bedroom would be poor accommodation, and the front elevational treatment is over-busy and poorly designed. The roof parapets, purportedly to protect the beehives to be housed there, increase the height, and overall policy requires it to be subservient to the main building; as currently designed, it is not.

Following the talk given to the Society on the proposed **Highgate Cemetery Works**, including restoration, conservation, demolition and replacement of buildings, erection of a visitor centre, etc., we have written to Camden to support the proposals.

A revised application for redevelopment of the **Mary Feilding Guild, North Hill** has been made, again without any consultation with the Society by the developers. A proposed 50-room care home, rehabilitation clinic and block of 9 flats is poorly designed and too large for its site, but since it is considerably smaller than the approved scheme, it will probably be approved.

It is proposed to install 18 solar panels on the flat roof of **51 Fitzroy Park**. We have asked that the applicants be required to submit photographs from appropriate locations on Hampstead Heath, to show that they will not be visible from it.

We supported local residents opposing an application for retrospective permission for works carried out without consent at **27 Woodside Avenue**, including structural alterations, removal of hedging and paving over of the front garden. The concern is that, while the road is within the Highgate Neighbourhood Plan Area, it is outside the Conservation Area; the works therefore create a damaging precedent for those parts of the Plan Area outside the Conservation Area. It fails to conform with policy that extensions or alterations should be of good design and complement the original building. Paving over the front garden with no planting or other mitigation increases surface water run-off.

At **32 Holmesdale Road** an application was made to change five of the nine conditions attached to the existing consent, including felling a tree specifically protected in the consent granted on appeal. We have objected strongly.

Residents of **High Sheldon** in Sheldon Avenue sought our support in opposing the installation of a prominent telephone base station on the roof, the telecoms company maintaining that they have automatic permission and that the residents cannot oppose it. We have written supporting them.

We continue to actively monitor issues relating to Trees and Open Space and are encouraged by the determined approach of Haringey's Tree Officer in refusing applications for felling or heavy pruning and securing their protection under Tree Protection Orders.

We objected to a third application to fell an important Monkey Puzzle tree at **37 Southwood Avenue**, following two previous refusals. There is no new evidence justifying felling; the issue can surely be resolved by a root barrier and/or underpinning. The applications seem to be prompted by insurers, but we have cited the dismissal of an appeal against Haringey's refusal of an application to fell an ancient Hornbeam at 54 North Hill in 2015, which ruled, that even if a tree was implicated in structural problems, it could be sufficiently important that alternative solutions other than felling must be adopted. Indeed, the owners of the house appear to oppose felling. It is therefore good to report that Haringey refused permission.

Similarly, an application – originally to fell, but now to heavily prune, a London Plane at **Olisa Court, 446 Archway Road** – has also been refused and a Tree Protection Order imposed, and following the felling of two Birch trees there without permission, Haringey have secured their replacement.

We opposed removal of four trees and substantial reduction of a mature Privet hedge at **3 Southwood Avenue**, on grounds of cracking to a boundary wall, which would have a major harmful impact on the streetscape. We have asked Haringey to assess whether these works are really necessary.

We oppose heavy reduction of a protected Veteran Oak at **42 Hampstead Lane**. No justification for the work statement has been submitted, and the tree is an important stag-headed veteran Oak, possibly one of the hedgerow trees shown on the 1869 Ordnance Survey map. We have argued that the reduction of some 60-70% will threaten its survival.

Camden have refused a proposed outbuilding in the back garden of **23a Hampstead Lane**, which sets an important marker for back garden development. We were among a number of objectors to the revised application. They considered that it would, by reason of its siting, scale and design, dominate the rear garden and detract from the open setting of neighbouring gardens, fail to be a subordinate garden addition and detract from the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. Its windows could overlook neighbours' gardens and cause light pollution for their properties. Its size and location are considered unneighbourly, and it is an overbearing structure when viewed from adjacent gardens which will impact both on neighbouring gardens and the wider Conservation Area and is thus against policy. It would not support biodiversity, since it would leave insufficient space to attract wildlife, particularly given the amount of existing area, and there are no measures to offset this. It would be sited in the raised area of the garden, as the lower area has permission for an extension, and would take up 28% of the grassed area. It therefore fails to comply with Policy in this respect too.

Haringey invited us and the CAAC to meet them to explain their proposed reduction works to the Lime trees within the **Highgate School Churchyard**. They seem acceptable and the trees should recover well.

As always, much is happening on **Hampstead Heath**. Of particular concern to the Consultative Committee are the City's proposals for a new model for funding their Charities, including all their open spaces, in the light of severely reduced funding for all City expenditures. The City have approved a new annual grant-funded model, instead of the former "deficit funding" model in which the City paid the basic costs out of dedicated funds and met any gap in income annually, allowing the charities to raise extra funding. We had previously understood that the model would be piloted at Epping Forest and West Ham Park, but it appears that it will come into effect in 2025-6, followed by the other open spaces in 2026-7. The HHCC has some concerns about its introduction and on such issues as the possibility that it could result in the various charities actively competing against each other, which cannot be allowed to happen; we were told that a fund-raising consultant would be appointed to advise on all these matters, and hope that the opportunity will be given at the next meeting to obtain clarification. It has been assured that the City will remain the Corporate Trustee and will always be the fall-back and backstop source and meet any deficit.

Discussions will hopefully be held with the owners of the disputed "Harry's Land" with the aim of purchasing it for addition to the Heath. Recruitment of new Rangers proceeds; there should be a full complement by the end of January, and new Constables will be recruited for the Heath Constabulary.

The Hill Garden won the London in Bloom 2024 award for Best in Show; its management includes considerable volunteer involvement, and it is popular for weddings and filming, which provides valuable income but is highly labour-intensive for the Heath staff.

Substantial repairs are needed to the Golders Hill Pergola, a Grade II* listed structure formerly part of Inverforth House built 1905-25. The original oak frameworks have been deteriorating for many years; since they stabilize the pillars, this threatens the stability of the structure, while some of the walls are showing cracks. The City has undertaken a detailed review of the problem and has initiated a programme

of urgent work and is seeking longer-term solutions. Electronic sensors have been placed at many points to measure movement of walls and pillars. Repairs are estimated to cost about £4m and a fund-raising campaign is being designed. Great efforts are being made to make the Pergola safe while keeping it open to the public.

The main work on Parliament Hill Fields and Golders Hill Park is hedge cutting, tidying borders, leaf clearance from paths, playgrounds and facilities, etc. The improved Athletics track is well-used. The Lido and bathing ponds were busy throughout the summer, with bather numbers higher than the same period in 2023, despite the poor weather. The Mixed Swimming Pond remains closed for lifeguarded public swimming until April 2025. Maintenance work will take place at the Lido in early 2025, including increasing the number of solar panels on the Lido roof.

Phase 2 of the maintenance project at the Ladies' Pond will start in February/March 2025, including new facilities and essential repairs. It will be closed during the work and women-only swimming will be moved to the Mixed Pond. A new Leisure Management System will provide a more user-friendly, affordable and flexible ticketing and booking system for Heath swimmers.

There is a new Ranger for Golders Hill Park, and a new Head Gardener at Golders Hill Park. Works in the Park include pathway repairs and resurfacing and refurbishment of the toilets. Drainage works have been carried out to address the wet areas and poor drainage in the middle of the park. The Heath Extension playground, completed in January 2024, is very well used by the local communities. Playground equipment across the Heath is inspected regularly. Work continues to be done in the Park by Heath Hands volunteers. Members of the public can adopt all the species housed at Golders Hill Park Zoo; see the website for details. Last August the Zoo received its first BIAZA (British & Irish Association of Zoos & Aquariums) accreditation screening, and work is now underway with the Learning team to develop learning opportunities with schools, which is a key component of the BIAZA accreditation.

The Heath managers continue to work with Camden's Climate Adaptation and Resilience Team to address surface water flooding in East Heath Road and the Parliament Hill residential area, and it is planned to introduce new "leaky dams" above the Catch Pit area, which will slow down flood waters during high-volume rain events.

The annual check of the 27 bat boxes recorded thirteen bats, a mixture of common and soprano pipistrelles, although there was evidence of bat activity in another three (droppings).

The Ecology Team have published a scientific paper on the pollution of the Heath ponds by flea-treatment chemicals from dog swimming.

On notable wildlife sightings, the rare Dartford warbler has been recorded on the thistle and scrub patches near Parliament Hill for the first time in 30 years, highlighting the importance of maintaining and managing these habitats on the Heath, and eggs of the rare Brown Hairstreak butterfly have been sighted on blackthorn for the first time; it is hoped that it is becoming established.

To ensure the Model Boating Pond Island remains a sanctuary for wildlife, a £50,000 donation has been made by public donors to remove the connecting section of land to make it a true island, establish further wetland planting, create amphibian and reptile hibernacula, install temporary fencing to protect the new planting, and monitor the flora and fauna which are using the island. Work should start in April, and complete in May.

The Conservation Team has carried out coppicing and other vegetation management on the dams and spillways on the Highgate and Hampstead chains of ponds; bramble and scrub management (done outside the bird nesting season), and meadow cutting, carried out in stages to avoid harming hibernating hedgehogs. The Team also supervises Heath Hands sessions.

In collaboration with the City Corporation's Carbon Removals, the Conservation Team has been working to improve veteran tree soil health by funding fencing and a soil geo-injector unit to relieve compaction and enhance soil microbial communities around veteran and other established trees in heavily compacted areas. They have installed enclosures around 18 veteran trees, with more planned. They featured on the ITV news on 26 November, carrying out halo pruning around the two veteran trees at Two Tree Hill on Sandy Heath. Several major storm events since September resulted in root plate failures on ten veteran trees.

A new report proposing a project prioritisation process for Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park will inform the implementation of the five-year plan and enable production of a prioritised project list, which is needed as the Corporation's natural environment charities have limited resources,

both monetary and staff, and do not have sufficient capacity to deliver everything on their 'wish lists'. Projects such as those relating to compliance, health and safety are mandatory; others are not, but there is currently no clear way of deciding which activities can be delivered within existing capacity and budget, and which activities will require additional resources; the Corporation is seeking to address this by applying priority criteria to each activity to produce a prioritised list of activities which can be assessed against available staff and resources, the aim being to ensure that decisions taken in relation to each charity are taken in the best interests of that charity.

Heath Hands volunteers have also been active in **Highgate Wood** and have been working with local residents to help make gardens more hedgehog friendly. Due to the recent high winds, the threshold for closure of the wood has been lowered to 37mph on grounds of public safety, a situation which might be expected about six times a year. The City has a statutory duty of care to regularly inspect trees for safety, and as it takes one hour to close the wood to visitors, it is only closed with forecasts of wind that will be of long duration. The Roman Pottery Kiln excavated in the Wood in 1970 has been restored and is now back on display in the information hut; it is intended for the full interpretive display to be installed during 2025, and a full education programme for local and more distant schools is already in operation. A new 5-year management plan for the Wood will be approved before the end of the year.