

Environment and Planning Report

Winter 2025

By Michael Hammerson

While summer has seen a distinct falling-off in the number of individual planning applications, our expert team, ably led by **Elsbeth Clements** and **Liz Morris**, has been fully occupied in dealing with the several major issues impacting on Highgate. We've also helped a good number of folks coming to our planning surgery on Saturday mornings.

On 23rd October, we held our periodic meeting with Haringey's Head of Planning and other officers to discuss issues of concern and working together as closely as possible. A very wide range of issues was covered, the most pressing of which are summarised here.

We discussed the Society's proposed response to the Haringey Draft Local Plan, out for consultation until mid-December. To analyse this document of over 800 pages will put a heavy load on the Society's resources, and we asked for an extended period to submit our comments. A preliminary presentation for the local community allayed some of our concerns, but such issues as their site allocations programme, and their aspiration for 400 new housing units in the Highgate area, will need very careful study.

We repeated our dismay that the Highgate Conservation Area Appraisal, and the updated Local List, have been continually put to one side by Haringey for several years, though with current government pressure for development, they are urgently needed. The Society provided information for these updates back in 2017, but no action followed, both are now seriously out of date.

An Article 4 Direction removing Conversions from Retail to Residential in the Archway Road from permitted development is now urgently needed as sub-standard conversions of shops to residential are threatening the commercial viability of the Archway Road. We understand that this will be addressed in the new Local Plan, as will applications which do not reflect the character of the area. In addition, we understand that from April 2024 the window for planning enforcement action has been extended from four to ten years.

We detailed our range of concerns over aspects of the **Highgate School** development programme, including the proposed badly conceived side extension to the Science block, where the architect has refused to make any amendments, though it would block views into the courtyard which are identified in the Conservation Area Appraisal, upset the symmetry of the building and make a mess of the roofscape.

The 20th Century Society have joined us in opposing the proposed remodelling of the exterior of Dyne House, which is feared will make it resemble a commercial office building. Despite the workshops during the summer, there have not been any material changes to the Dyne House plans. We also raised nearby residents' concerns that the complexity of Highgate geology and groundwater flows combined with the steep slope of the site make the proposed development with its deep basement potentially damaging to the surrounding listed houses. Furthermore, there has been very little analysis of ground water conditions (only 2 relevant boreholes done 15 years ago) and very little methodology for the excavation and construction of what will be a highly complex basement.

We echoed the concerns of local residents in Broadlands Road who back onto the Mallinson Centre site, particularly in regard to the vast water attenuation reservoir to be dug into the historic ancient Orchard, which is the last surviving hedgerow and meadow from pre-development days in the area. We strongly oppose this.

We raised Haringey's own proposed **Wellington Gyrotory Scheme** development. Unfortunately, a few days later it was granted permission by Haringey's planning committee, ignoring all our concerns about living conditions, pollution, absence of any pedestrian crossings from the island

site, deplorably bad design for a Conservation Area, impact on neighbours, and recent road traffic accidents and incidents in and around the petrol station next door. Moreover, Transport for London confirmed *"there may be no crossing option due to the nature of the site"* and while Haringey attached a condition to the approval that the *"delivery of pedestrian access improvements associated with the development"* must be in place before the site is occupied, this condition does not guarantee that safe pedestrian crossings will in fact be deliverable.

We flagged up our concerns about the disconnect between Conservation and Enforcement. We have received several complaints about stringent conservation conditions imposed on minor works to listed buildings, while there appears to be no conservation input into protection of the public realm, particularly when applicants flout planning protections, while Enforcement appear to ignore the incremental effect of small-scale changes which are nevertheless contrary to Conservation Area policy. We were particularly unhappy about the relentless erosion of the Victorian streetscape in Archway Road, over many years, through perverse planning consents and failure to take enforcement action.

Individual cases of concern included proposals for a basement at **25 Southwood Lawn Road**, which was permitted despite the fact that no adequate Basement Impact Assessment had been carried out; so it was difficult to understand how the planners could have concluded that *"Overall, the works will not adversely affect the structural stability of the application building or neighbouring buildings; will not increase flood risk to nearby properties and avoids harm to the established character of the area and neighbouring amenity"*.

Despite the fact that (and thanks to the Society's recent efforts, a large part of Highgate is designated an Archaeological Priority Area), there have been serious failures in securing adequate archaeological coverage. A notable case was at the Cranwood site, adjacent to the nationally important Roman pottery site in Highgate Wood, where we saw Roman deposits being lost without record because the archaeological contractors involved considered that they were recent deposits of no importance. Another case was at a large development in Hampstead Lane within the Mediaeval Park. We are familiar with the archaeology of the area and are anxious to be consulted by Haringey and developers at an early stage to ensure such disasters are not repeated. We were asked to highlight these [archaeological] applications from the weekly application listings and were told that Haringey will endeavour to direct applicants for these sites to the Society at the preapplication stage.

The meeting was followed by a drive and walk-around to look at a range of developments of concern, including several conversions to residential in Archway Road; the Wellington Gyrotory site; the "Bishops Area" (north of Hampstead Land and west of North Hill), where excessive rebuilds and high boundary treatments have been permitted, contrary to Haringey's own policies for this part of the Conservation Area, leading to its relentless deterioration; the Highgate School sites; the long-running problems at the Townsend Yard development; and, the Broadbent Yard site and adjoining important woodland, currently up for sale, where our approaches to Haringey's Ecology Officer and Planners with regard to ensuring the survival of the woodland have resulted in no support whatsoever. We also showed them the 271 Bus Stand project. Though this is on the Camden side of the High Street, we pointed out that the Haringey side of the High Street will benefit equally from any improvement and that Haringey should be participants in any initiative.

We also raised, yet again, our long held concerns that though the boundary between Camden and Haringey runs down the middle of the High Street, there is very little liaison between the two Boroughs on planning or transport issues. A notable recent example was the so-called "Dartmouth Park Healthy Neighbourhood" proposal, where Haringey were not consulted by Camden despite the significant impact the scheme would have had on traffic volumes over a wide area within the Borough.

Meanwhile, the battle with Camden to get something done on the former **271 bus stand** in the Village continues. This is an eyesore in the centre of one of the borough's most important historic high streets and it is a disgrace that it has been left in this condition for so long. We have drawn up a simple scheme, which will consist of paving it over but with provision for market stalls, other uses and the Visit Highgate information boards. Although "meanwhile use" for market stalls has been

agreed and will proceed in 2026, Camden's Regeneration and Transport departments both claim lack of funds for the works. We are continuing to push to get something done.

Camden is now proposing **5 major redevelopments** of settled 1960s estates to triple the density of housing through tower blocks, although they propose no increase in social housing, which is most badly needed. Although these are peripheral to Highgate, they will adversely impact on views from Hampstead Heath, the most prominent proposal being for the Bacton estate, which is being opposed by active local groups.

Archway Campus Redevelopment (Holborn Infirmary): Alarming, Islington's refusal of this application for a 27-story tower for student housing has been called in for decision by the Mayor of London, who has a record of overruling refusals of tower blocks to boost housebuilding numbers. The public hearing is likely to be in the Spring, and we are currently working with the Campaign Group to hire the services of a planning barrister to help prepare written and aural submissions.

The tower block breaches numerous policies at national, regional and local level, and the area is not designated by Islington for high buildings. It will have serious overlooking and daylighting impacts on local residents. The affordable housing element is inadequate and 77% of the units across the site will be 1-bedroom or studio units (some of only 20sqm), when the pressing need is for affordable family housing.

A further, highly alarming, matter is that although the site was designated a Conservation Area because of the historic hospital buildings and, Historic England recommended that a request for the buildings to be Listed should be implemented, the Secretary of State has refused the listing request – a disgraceful and blatantly political decision.

Following the listing for sale of **Broadbent Yard**, we approached the sellers' agents, John D. Wood, asking for a meeting, and received a reply that they would be pleased to meet us. However, numerous attempts to arrange a meeting have been met with complete silence. We also met Haringey's Nature Conservation Officer to explore ways of ensuring the protection of the important Woodland site, which is part of the land for sale, and were advised that we should pursue this with the Planning Department, who are similarly refusing to reply to repeated messages by ourselves and our Ward Councillor. We also sought help and advice from the London Wildlife Trust and the Woodland Trust, neither of whom, disappointingly, have shown any interest.

Highgate School Development Proposals: Despite the series of workshops held over the summer, a number of major concerns remain. The proposal for an artificial pitch on the **Far Field, Hampstead Lane** has, fortunately, been abandoned in favour of proposals to improve drainage. However, there are still major concerns about the proposals for the **Science Block**, and we have presented the school with alternative proposals which will address their pupil circulation needs at lower cost and with a better design. We remain extremely concerned with the proposals for the **Mallinson Sports Centre**, particularly about the impact of the proposed attenuation tank to be dug in The Orchard. We consider this a seriously flawed idea, which will cause significant ecological damage and cause potential flooding and ground water problems for neighbours, and are trying to persuade them to seek alternative solutions from hydrological engineers with suitable experience. Our concerns about the proposed design and materials for **Dyne House** are shared by the Twentieth Century Society. We believe that it should remain as is, but the school will consider no further changes.

Following Haringey's refusal of a Certificate of Lawfulness for multiple occupation at **293 Archway Road**, we have asked Haringey what enforcement action will now be taken and are awaiting a response.

We were disappointed that Haringey approved revised proposals for residential development on the site of the former **Newstead Care Home, Denewood Road**. While we welcomed the removal of the extensive basement included in the previously approved scheme, we have serious concerns about the excessive density of the development, the new building line on Denewood Road (which projects significantly forward of the previously consented scheme and harms the established street scene) as well as the resulting loss of light and privacy to neighbouring properties. We are also concerned about the positioning of the refuse store on the boundary with a neighbouring property

and within two metres of habitable rooms, which could have an unacceptable impact on residential amenity.

More documents have been submitted in relation to the latest application to overdevelop the small infill site at **6a Grange Road**. The latest version of the basement impact assessment (revision K!) has been reviewed by experts who conclude that it is *still* inadequate and could have a major groundwater impact on neighbours. In addition, the above ground build still clearly fails daylighting/sunlighting tests and will materially harm the amenity of the neighbours on the north side. Design concerns remain unaddressed and the root zone of a protected tree in the front garden would be affected by the basement piles running through it. We consider there has been an inadequate assessment of the threat to the tree's root zone. We therefore maintain all of our previous objections.

There is a strange application to demolish half of an uninteresting 1950s building at **120 Archway Road** and replace it with a new 4-storey building of 5 one-bedroom units of a spectacularly unacceptable design. Following our original objection, a modified scheme was submitted, but it's still pretty poor for a Conservation Area. We are extremely dismayed to discover that it has been approved.

A revised application for 2 houses at **12 Great North Road** may be less objectionable than the first, but there have been numerous objections from neighbours which we support. These include excessive height and massing, overlooking and loss of privacy, substandard outdoor amenity ("private gardens" are only service courtyards with limited amenity value), parking and site constraints (increasing pressure on surrounding streets), over intensification and poor internal arrangement (the houses have poor internal circulation, no step-free bedrooms, multi-level split layouts and reliance on basement spaces, inconsistent with the needs of a range of potential residents). The risk of future use as a short-let or non-residential property remains; this would conflict with policy objectives for delivering genuine housing.

More encouragingly, an architect and his client wishing to refurbish the long derelict post-war house at **9D The Grove** approached us, anxious to seek our views of their proposals. While we thought the proposals as presented to us were acceptable, the subsequent application contains a basement impact assessment with which we have a number of concerns.

We have objected to a second application to create a roof terrace and access dormer at the front of **21 Highgate West Hill**. Although an improvement, it fails to address the design impact on this unspoilt row of Victorian villas, whose rooflines are singled out as of importance in Camden's Conservation Area Appraisal. The large dormer remains an intrusive feature causing a fundamental change to the character of the roofscape.

Several Nissen-hut style **street cycle stores** have now appeared in the Conservation Area, including in locations where we cannot imagine there is any demand for them. In one case near the corner of a junction, causing a serious obstruction for vehicles emerging from a side road, obliging them to swing out into the middle of the road.

Haringey acted to deal with the **proliferation of mobile homes in Hampstead Lane**. Most were removed; but inevitably, they have reappeared. Unfortunately, Haringey have said they will not consult on extending the local CPZ to Hampstead Lane and Bishopswood Road until after the local elections in May 2026.

On our Open Spaces, we receive strangely little feedback from our members; this hopefully indicates that people are in general satisfied with the way they are managed. We are grateful to the volunteers who ran our stand at the **Highgate Wood Heritage Day** held on September 7. With excellent weather, information about the Society and a big display on the history and archaeology of the Wood and the wider area, it drew much interest and several new members. However, we are always surprised by how relatively few people come from Highgate itself, most coming from further afield. A week later we attended the refiring of the reconstructed Roman Pottery Kiln (the original is now on display in the Wood); the experiment was successful, and it was instructive to see how 400 vessels could be fired in such a small kiln.

Our other major natural open space is, of course, **Hampstead Heath**. As long-standing members of the City's Consultative Committee, we are aware of what a hugely complex task the management of the Heath is and here we give space to the many issues affecting it.

The Conservation Team's summer grassland management programme was planned to avoid disturbing special plant species, including Common Spotted Orchids. It has also undertaken control of the rampant bramble in several locations, bracken on Sandy Heath and, sapling growth on Cohen's Field, the Heath Extension and South Meadow. It has also removed highly invasive Himalayan Balsam from the Highgate and Hampstead pond chains and carried out tree lifting along main pathways following tree failures in South Meadow and the Vale of Health. Helped by Heath Hands, it has installed ten small "leaky dams" on the Heath Extension and along the edge of Cohen's Field. Constructed of light brash materials, they will help create new wetland habitats by slowing the streams. Proposals to remove the Model Boating Pond Island causeway have been approved; this will create a more secure habitat for wildfowl.

The Summer heatwave resulted in the Heath being very busy, resulting in more litter, a need for more frequent cleaning of the public toilets and grass cutting in the amenity areas, though the cut areas are bordered by long grass to provide a wildlife habitat.

Structural repair continues at the Hill Garden and Pergola. The shelter has been repaired following water damage. The Belvedere Roof area may need partial closing for remedial works. A Conservation Plan for the Pergola will provide a better understanding of its history, heritage significance, and repair and maintenance issues.

A balance needs to be maintained between visitor activities and the conservation of the natural, built and heritage environment. The Tree Team inspects roadside trees and has removed a London Plane branch affected by Masseria disease along the Gospel Oak fence line, and several dead trees on the northern boundary of Sandy Heath, Golders Hill Park and Gospel Oak. Recent high temperatures caused a number of tree and branch failures, including the remaining hybrid Black Poplar between the Men's Pond and the Highgate No. 1 Pond, and two Ash failures on the Heath Extension. This will inevitably continue under the impact of climate change.

The Tree Team also controls invasive Oak Processionary Moth, removing nests posing a public risk. The arrival from the Continent of a parasitic fly is also helping to control its numbers, and Blue Tits seem able to eat the larvae without harm. The Team has also started soil decompaction on a group of veteran oaks at Golders Hill whose root zones have been badly compacted, the areas cordoned off to allow soil recovery. The Team also attended a two-day International conference on pollard management and biodiversity.

Investigations continue into the problem of Pond pollution from flea treatments washed into the water by swimming dogs. A meeting for local vets was held in October, to try to persuade them to adopt alternative methods of flea control.

Following alarm at the countrywide decline in hedgehog numbers, a new report on the Heath's hedgehog population, funded by the City Bridge Foundation, evaluates the local situation since 2018 and identifies future conservation measures. Some of you will already be aware of initiatives in the wider area to create hedgehog "corridors" through local open spaces and gardens.

Two exciting wildlife records during 2025 included the very distinctive caterpillar of the rare Alder Moth, a first for the area - over 400 species of moths have been recorded in recent surveys of the Heath - and a Purple Emperor butterfly.

The Heath has extensive sport facilities - football, rugby, cricket, tennis, swimming, athletics, bowls, croquet - which are all well used and need regular maintenance. The bowling and croquet clubs will be holding open days for the public. The tennis courts at Parliament Hill and at Golders Hill Park saw a 10% increase in use this summer at the former and 19% at the latter. The Parliament Hill Athletics Track is well used by clubs, schools and others and the track was booked every weekday throughout the season. Highgate Harriers hosted the Southern Athletics League meeting in June, and the London 5000m event and the Middlesex Youth League Athletics Meeting in July. A lot of repair and maintenance has been needed at Parliament Hill Lido - with the added complication that it is also a Listed Building - and the paddling pools. New solar panels will be installed on the roof of the Lido. A charity offering young refugees and migrants' opportunities in London has

liaised with Lido staff and visited the pool twice, giving 24 young refugees the opportunity to swim at a discounted rate. The new Ladies' Pond aeration system has improved water quality and addressed algal blooms, and new aeration systems will be installed at the Men's, Mixed and Hampstead No.2 Ponds.

Use of the dedicated Swimming facilities has become a major issue, following the Supreme Court's judgment in the case of *For Women Scotland v The Scottish Ministers*. It decided that the terms "man", "woman" and "sex" in the Equality Act 2010 refer to a biological man, a biological woman, and biological sex, while emphasising that trans people have the separate protected characteristic of gender reassignment under the Equality Act which protects them from unlawful discrimination and harassment. Following this ruling, the City Corporation is reviewing its access policies and will consult with swimmers and other stakeholders and continue to take specialist legal advice. The current access arrangements will remain unchanged pending the outcome of the consultation, and temporary signage has been erected at the Ladies' Pond: "Those who identify as women are welcome to swim at the Kenwood Ladies' Bathing Pond. The Ladies' Pond is open to biological women and trans women with the protected characteristic of gender reassignment under the Equality Act 2010. The City of London is preparing a public consultation on the future admissions policy at the Ladies' Pond." Equivalent signage has been erected at the Men's Pond. As has been reported in the media, Sex Matters have initiated judicial review proceedings against the City Corporation regarding the access arrangements, which is being defended.

The Natural Environment Learning Team helps children and young people to connect with nature through active learning in our green spaces, considering nature connection in childhood the foundation for pro-environmental behaviours in adulthood. Over 5,000 school students participated in outdoor learning programmes; 15 secondary school students participated in a 'Green Changemakers' project at the Adventure Clubhouse, creating a bee and butterfly bank, and 153 participated in the youth programme.

An unauthorised party in the wooded area of West Heath on 14 June caused day-long disruption. The ninth such event to be organised by Act Up London, it was promoted online with its details kept secret, but the City learned of it long before and worked with the Metropolitan Police on a response and presence. Attempts to communicate with the organisers in advance were ignored. Some 500 people attended, resulting in significant health and safety risks, exacerbated by the party's organiser being visibly intoxicated. Officers experienced verbal abuse and theft of equipment. Much litter was left, and expense incurred from having to close Jack Straws Car Park, and overtime and redeployment costs. The City will seek an injunction to prohibit future occurrences.

In August, the City held a tour and discussion on the situation on the West Heath, notably its use as a public sex environment, including during daytime, increased drug use (hundreds of needles), the proliferation of related detritus and, the abuse experienced by both Officers and the public. Attendees included Heath Constabulary, Camden Council, the National Health Service, Heath & Hampstead Society and the Metropolitan Police. Ways were discussed to address these problems appropriately.

Unacceptable public behaviour is encountered elsewhere. Two additional security guards were needed at the Lido from May to September to assist with crowd control, illegal entry and antisocial behaviour; on very busy and hot days, a third was needed. Lifeguards reported 25 incidents at the Lido and Ponds of users being verbally or physically abusive, a 150% increase over 2024. Overnight trespassing at all three Bathing Ponds included theft and vandalism at the Lido and cafe. The wider public does not sufficiently appreciate these issues with which the Heath management have to contend.

On the positive side, Hampstead Heath and Highgate Wood have both retained their Green Flag Awards and Green Heritage Awards, which they have won every year since they were inaugurated - an achievement of which the local community should be proud.

Golders Hill Zoo celebrated its 120th anniversary in May. It is recruiting new volunteers and hosts summer placements for students. Several veterinary students join the Team each summer. It was awarded British & Irish Association of Zoos & Aquariums Accredited status in May for demonstrating world class standards, among the first to be accredited. However, in 2025 DEFRA

issued new standards for zoo practice which must be met to comply with the Zoo Licensing Act. A notable change is the recategorization of Red Deer from 'Category 2' to 'Category 1', which actually requires firearms and trained personnel due to risks from contact between the public and animals. Sadly, this means the Red Deer will have to be relocated; however, the Fallow Deer will remain. The wading bird enclosure requires extensive work, necessitating moving the nine birds to Birdworld in Surrey.

The tenancies of the three cafes on the Heath have expired and are being remarketed, inviting proposals from all interested parties, including existing operators. This has raised concerns among some users. As a registered charity, the City are legally obliged to demonstrate good practice in the charity's interests and are obliged to competitively market the cafés. All currently operate under short-term tenancies at will. It is emphasised that the remarketing is not purely profit-driven; a range of criteria are involved, including café concept, menu and food offer, environmental management, community and social value, management approach, experience and business plan. When the process is concluded, recommendations will be put to the Consultative Committee.

Events included Race for Life, which includes fundraising for cancer research, and Run for Your Life, is a joint effort with the Royal Free Hospital to promote health and well-being through participation at all fitness levels. A Survivors Children's Concert showcased the resilience and creativity of children and young people, and Highgate Harriers piloted a 5,000-metre track event aimed at club runners. Despite budget constraints, they maintained a summer programme of Bandstand Concerts by inviting bands to perform free concerts on Sunday afternoons, which were well attended.

The Consultative Committee has been carefully monitoring the City's review of their funding methods for all its 11,000 acres of open spaces, which attract over 47 million visitors a year, and were concerned that they were not consulted about this centrally made decision. The aim of the review is to provide more predictable funding and to allow the charities more flexibility in their management, and not, we are assured, about cutting funding or reducing the City's commitment to preserving and protecting their open spaces - and certainly the Consultative Committee has, in the past, often been exasperated at the remoteness of the funding processes from the operations on the ground. Despite the age-old image of the City as a body of unlimited wealth, budgets for each of its operations are limited and costs have been escalating in recent years, as for every other organisation. All the open spaces will remain open as before; the review focuses on the funding processes.

They will be looking at the potential for the various charities to generate income and fundraise; some will have the potential, others will not. They will remain protected under the charities' governing documents and there are no plans for large-scale commercial events; the priority remains protecting nature and preserving the character of each site, ensuring their long-term sustainability, refining their funding models and governance, and giving them greater flexibility to operate, generate income, build reserves where possible, invest in conservation, and enhance services. To meet modern day socio-economic challenges, particularly following the global pandemic, the demand for public access to green space increased dramatically. This has coincided with increasing climate pressures and increases in the overall cost of maintaining these green spaces. The charities now need greater flexibility to operate, generate income, invest in conservation, and enhance their services.

A major concern for the Consultative Committee has been to ascertain the position if a charity cannot raise sufficient external funds independently. We are assured that the City will remain the sole trustee, with ultimate responsibility, and will meet any shortfall. The charities are moving from a deficit-funded model, where the City pays agreed net costs not covered by other income, to a grant funding model, where the charities are allocated an annual core contribution. This will enable the charities to build financial reserves where possible, support additional income generation and improve long-term planning.

From April 2025, Epping Forest and West Ham Park moved to the new model; the remaining charities will follow in April 2026. The Consultative Committee has asked for a report on how the new system has worked at Epping and West Ham and has urged time to assess how it is working and whether changes are needed before moving the other charities to it. We are also assured that

engagement with stakeholders will be a priority throughout the process. Each charity's Consultative Committee will be kept informed of key decisions and given the opportunity to voice concerns and give feedback. For now, then, watch this space.