Environment and Planning Report

Winter 2026

By Michael Hammerson

Following the Mayor of London's consultation on the revised proposals for **Archway Campus,** little changed from those refused by Islington Council - our Planning Committee Co-Chairs, Elspeth Clements and Liz Morris, have been heavily involved in preparing the 39-page response of the Archway Campus Joint Action Group (JAG). The group brings together thirteen Highgate and Archway community and amenity organisations, representing local residents opposed to the current scheme.

Space permits only a summary of the principal objections, but the full response is available on the Society's website.

- **The proposed 27-storey tower remains a fundamental concern.** At 82 metres, it would be ten storeys taller than the highest building identified as potentially acceptable in Islington's adopted Local Plan for Archway. Crucially, Archway Campus was considered during preparation of the Local Plan but was not identified as a suitable location for tall buildings. JAG considers that the proposal fundamentally conflicts with the plan-led approach to tall buildings.
- **The revised scheme delivers fewer homes and substantially less affordable housing.** The number of conventional homes has fallen from 178 to 167, while affordable homes have been cut from 91 to just 39 – a reduction of 57%. Yet all 242 market student bedrooms remain unchanged.
- **The Mayor's emergency housing measures do not justify these changes.** Although the measures introduce a temporary route with a lower affordable housing threshold, they do not override other planning policies or justify retaining the 27-storey student tower while substantially reducing the provision of affordable homes. The applicant also acknowledges that the student accommodation does not comply with important policy requirements concerning university nomination agreements and affordable student housing.
- **The proposed housing mix fails to give sufficient priority to local housing needs.** Nearly three-quarters of the 167 conventional homes would have only one or two bedrooms, despite the pressing need for affordable family housing. Islington's Local Plan expressly prioritises conventional housing on this site, allowing student accommodation only where it does not compromise that priority.
- **Significant harm to the historic infirmary buildings and their conservation area remains unresolved.** Historic England has maintained its serious concerns about the impact of the proposals on the Holborn Union Infirmary Conservation Area. Following JAG's request, Historic England recommended that the historic buildings be listed, but the Secretary of State rejected that recommendation without providing reasons. This raises serious concerns about the decision-making process, and JAG is seeking reconsideration of the listing decision.
- **The tower would have a major impact on our neighbourhood's historic landscape and important views.** At 82 metres, it would dominate its surroundings and intrude into views from Grade II* registered Waterlow Park and Grade I registered Highgate Cemetery. It would also affect protected views towards St Paul's Cathedral and the wider landscape visible from Hampstead Heath.
- **Neighbouring residents would suffer significant adverse impacts.** The proposed residential Block A would be particularly close to existing homes in Lidyard Road, with separation distances of approximately 10.9 to 17.3 metres and parts of the development coming within two metres of neighbouring property boundaries. This raises serious concerns about overlooking, privacy, outlook and the overbearing impact of the new buildings.
- **The applicant has not demonstrated that a 27-storey tower is necessary to redevelop the site.** JAG challenges the viability evidence used to justify the scale of development, including substantial differences over the assumed land value. Making effective use of this important brownfield site does not require maximising building height, particularly where the proposed development conflicts with adopted planning policies and causes significant heritage and townscape harm.

- **The applicant's visualisations understate the tower's likely prominence and impact.** JAG's detailed analysis identifies repeated use of wide-angle photography and carefully selected viewpoints that make the tower appear smaller or less visible. One striking example is the view from Highgate Hill outside Channing School, where the applicant's chosen viewpoint conceals the tower behind a tree. Moving only a short distance reveals how prominently the tower would appear down the hill. The two accompanying photographs (below) illustrate this concern, while further comparisons and analysis are available on the Society's website.

JAG supports the redevelopment of Archway Campus, including substantial new housing, genuinely affordable homes and an appropriate element of student accommodation. Our objection is not to redevelopment itself, but to the excessive height and scale of the proposed tower, the reduction in affordable housing and the harm to the surrounding historic environment.

The revised proposals fail to address the fundamental concerns that led Islington Council to refuse planning permission. We are now awaiting confirmation of the date of the Mayor's public hearing, when the future of this important site will be considered.

The Highgate Society Planning Committee has also prepared a detailed response to the **Draft London Plan 2026**, which proposes major changes to how London will develop over the coming decade. The Mayor's ambitious target is to deliver 558,000 new homes over ten years, with greater emphasis on suburban densification, taller buildings and intensive development around transport hubs. While recognising the urgent need for new housing, particularly social and genuinely affordable homes, the Society has serious concerns about whether these targets are realistic, given the difficult economic conditions facing developers, and whether the necessary transport, schools, healthcare and other infrastructure can keep pace. Our submission also highlights the weakening of important planning safeguards, particularly those protecting conservation areas, historic buildings, local character, employment and industrial space, and the location and height of tall buildings. The Society believes that London's housing needs must be addressed without sacrificing the quality of its neighbourhoods or the infrastructure and services on which communities depend. Our full 30-page consultation response is available on the Society's website.

New legislation has given the Mayor of London powers to call in decisions made by London Borough Councils regarding the **granting of licences to pubs, clubs, etc**. Purportedly restricted to "potentially strategic" applications, it transpires that it covers 91% of licensed premises in London. This is likely to encourage licensees to make later and less constrained applications and Council Licensing Committees to put less weight on concerns raised by local people in order to avoid the decision being called in. Such a high proportion of licences coming within the Mayor's powers could change the balance of Borough- and London-level decision making which, following the Government's much-opposed removal of most decision-making powers from local Planning Committees, is another assault on local decision-making further reducing the ability of local communities to make representations. The Society has asked our MP, Tulip Siddiq, to support efforts urging the Government to reconsider and ensure that the balance between the needs of business and residents is maintained.

In the meantime, the Planning Committee's work continues unabated; a selection follows.

2 Highgate High Street, previously home to a succession of unsuccessful restaurants, is due to reopen in January as a veterinary clinic and hospital. While we have no objection to the proposed use, we have received numerous complaints about the striking yellow paintwork on the frontage, which is particularly jarring at the gateway to our historic High Street. Haringey granted approval for a "muted ochre" colour, but the finished result is anything but muted. Following our objection, the owners of the practice contacted us, and we subsequently met to discuss the concerns. It became clear that they had not fully appreciated the sensitivity of the historic setting, but they were receptive to our concerns and keen to find a solution. We are now working constructively with them and are optimistic that a satisfactory outcome can be achieved – perhaps with nothing more complicated than a few cans of paint in a more subdued shade.

A second application has been submitted for a new dwelling at **12 Great North Road.** While we would support an appropriately sized and designed building, and there has been some improvement, the two substantial four-storey dwellings have little outdoor garden space, and much of what is provided is ancillary space for the lower ground floor. Replacing one detached two-storey house with two much larger dwellings over four levels would change the established scale and character of this part of Great North Road and harm the character of the surrounding residential area. The design and layout also seem impractical for family use. Furthermore, it overlooks properties in Sussex Gardens, which is a concern for those residents, and removes the existing off-street parking which will add to local parking stress. Finally, we are concerned that the Basement Impact Assessment, while recognising the need for groundwater control during excavation, seems unaware that the site is within the area of several headstreams and tributaries arising from the Mutton Brook and Moselle River, one even recorded as flowing to the rear of

Sussex Gardens. We believe that an independent technical review of the basement and groundwater implications for neighbouring properties and the local hydrology is necessary.

We have supported concerned neighbours in their long, and ultimately unsuccessful, efforts to persuade Haringey to refuse proposals for a significantly out-of-scale development at **6a Grange Road**. The developers have now applied for discharge of the conditions imposed to ensure that the outstanding technical issues surrounding this complex basement were properly addressed before works commence, but the geotechnical advice neighbours have commissioned concludes that the requirements of the conditions have not been met by simply producing a "high level review" claiming no further work is necessary. An appropriately qualified chartered engineer has not been engaged; no adequate hydrogeological and geotechnical investigation has been carried out; no measures are proposed to prevent groundwater being dammed by the basement which could potentially damage both neighbouring properties. This is particularly concerning given the damage to nearby 4 Grange Road attributed to groundwater damming associated with a nearby basement. Our objection contains a detailed analysis of the issues. However, no work can proceed, since a badly affected neighbour has been given leave to proceed with a Judicial Review on the grounds on which Haringey gave approval for the excessive above ground build.

Folgate Estates, the developers of the **Murphy's Yard site** south of Mansfield Road in Kentish Town, have been holding public consultations on their revised proposals, which include 17 buildings of up to 15 storeys to provide 20,000 sqm. of housing, 7,200 sqm. of commercial space, 8,000 sqm. of hotel space and, 11,000 sqm. of student accommodation. As members of the Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee, our interest is particularly in its impact on views from the Heath and on the substantial impact such a large number of potential visitors will have on the Heath.

Despite interest from a local resident in purchasing and protecting the important woodland behind **Broadbent Yard** as a wildlife habitat, the owners of Broadbent Yard, to which the woodland belongs, have so far been unwilling to consider the proposal. We remain determined to protect this valuable local green space from development and would welcome help from anyone who may be able to persuade the owners to reconsider. Readers who can assist are encouraged to contact the Society.

New gates installed at **16 Millfield Lane** under a 2022 permission are not what was approved, and the result looks very ugly. Camden have opened an enforcement case, and we have submitted an objection.

There have been two controversial approvals by Haringey in **Kingsley Place**, an award-winning 1960s modernist housing development whose architectural integrity needs to be protected: at 23B, where they approved the removal of a garage to form a new entrance area, and at 34, at the top of the road, where a new house will replace the current one said to be uninhabitable.

It is encouraging to see that the long-vacant **84 Highgate High Street,** is now in new hands, and an application submitted which will, among other things, remove the existing partition walls which had reduced the shop to an unviable unit. This will hopefully return it to a usable retail space.

Although we had objected to two previous applications to replace sheds at **6 Bacon's Lane** with a garden studio, both refused, we did not object to a third application. Curiously, though, Camden refused it, and the refusal was upheld on appeal.

In an attempt to widen its sources of income, English Heritage have submitted an application for temporary (12 months) use of an area adjacent to the **Kenwood House** car park as a sauna facility, comprising two sauna cabins, three cold-water plunge baths, two changing tents, a reception area, an outdoor shower and associated plant and utilities. It is appreciated that, following the government's ending its financial support for English Heritage and making it a self-financing charity, there is a desperate need for sustainable sources of funding to maintain this nationally important asset. However, it is regrettable that the proposals had neither been discussed with the Kenwood Landscape Forum, nor mentioned at the public consultations held in 2026, so we and others could seek more details, including set up costs and anticipated income.

Haringey's tree officer has been active in making new **Tree Preservation Orders** - on a Cherry tree at 2A Southwood Avenue, a Sycamore at 504 Archway Road and, a Fig tree at the front of Southwood Mansions on Southwood Lane. We have objected to proposals to fell a tree at **41 Stormont Road,** described only as a "large tree", but which is a fine fastigiate Ginkgo, the only reason given being that it will be "replaced with a suitable replacement tree to maintain the local environment … we will get the work carried out by an arborist". It is not, however, accompanied by any specialist report from an "arborist" nor any detail as to how any replacement would "maintain the local environment", or what that replacement might be.

We had our usual stand at the **Annual Highgate Wood Heritage Day** on September 6th. The weather was perfect, the event well-attended (though we saw few people from Highgate!) and great interest was

shown in our display, which carried information about the society and a large historical display of the history and archaeology of the Wood and the Highgate area.

Over 50 people attended a public drop-in session on 23 July to discuss the Kenwood Landscape Conservation Management Plan. The session explored the conservation planning process and the significance of Kenwood's historic landscape, including the principles guiding its management, historic images and maps, important views and distinct character areas.

A wide range of issues was discussed, including water management and ecology, particularly the monitoring of blue-green algae; the potential for sheep grazing (as currently being trialled on Hampstead Heath); the management of views towards London; changes to the historic path network and the informal routes that have developed over time; and the extent of Humphry Repton's landscape proposals, which were only partially implemented, together with opportunities for restoration. Other topics included the control of bramble and holly, the impact of events on the landscape, the implications of climate change for future planting, and the role and support of volunteers. There was also discussion about how the centenary of the Kenwood Bequest might be commemorated.

Worryingly, a recent article in the Financial Times foreshadows possibly bad news for the Heath and Highgate Wood. The City of London is considering council tax and business rates rises and substantial cuts to meet an expected £70mn budget shortfall due to hit in 2029 as part of the government's Fair Funding Review. Apart from its function as guardian of the UK's financial and professional services sector, the City also provides council housing and adult social care to its 9,000 residents, as well as wider public services such as the City of London Police (the lead national police force for fraud and economic crime), the London Port Health Authority, green spaces such as Epping Forest, Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and many other large open spaces, and cultural institutions such as the Barbican, Europe's largest multi-arts venue, and the new London Museum. While the government has agreed to provide transition funding until 2029, the City will be hit by new rules making its grant dependent on the number of overnight residents rather than daytime footfall, as the Square Mile hosts more than 670,000 workers daily but has relatively few permanent residents. The City received £1.3bn in business rates last year, much of it passed to central government. The City spent £32.8m to fund the Barbican Centre in 2025-26 and a further £191m earmarked for a major renovation could be at risk. If the cuts affect our important open spaces, we and other local groups will have a fight on our hands to ensure that they do not bear unduly heavy cuts.

On the wider national Planning scene, several developments will affect how we and groups like us can engage in the planning process.

The new **National Planning Policy Framework**, which sets the national policy parameters within which we must operate has introduced a number of changes, including the loss of the former paragraph 137 which required that applications which can demonstrate meaningful community consultation should be given more favourable consideration than those which cannot – an unfortunate indication of the way in which community participation in planning is being marginalised by government in the erroneous belief that it is holding up development.

It does, however, clarify certain aspects of how Heritage should be taken account of in determining applications. Previous wording stated that "less than substantial harm" from a proposed development could be weighed against a scheme's "public benefits", while proposals causing "substantial harm" or the total loss of a heritage asset, should be refused unless it would "achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss". Preliminary views are that the changes simplify policy while ensuring no reduction in heritage protection.

Development proposals will now be subject to a four-tier system for assessing their impact on heritage assets, emphasising support for schemes which would positively impact the historic environment. At the lower end are works which have a "positive" or "no" effect on a heritage asset. In the upper tiers are works that cause "harm to the significance of the heritage asset" or "total loss" of its significance. The new policy states that decision-makers should consider the effect on an asset's significance, rather than the scale of the development, and that development proposals which would have a positive effect on a heritage asset should be supported. Where a development would harm the significance of a designated heritage asset, this should be weighed against any "public benefits" such as securing the long-term reuse of a vacant or underused listed building and enabling energy efficiency. It also clarifies the old definition of "less than substantial harm" to a heritage asset and that the degree of harm needs more careful consideration. It recognises that there are times when an intervention into a heritage asset can actually be positive. Planners will be expected to be "proactive" about identifying opportunities for heritage assets, rather than simply focusing on harm. There will, in summary, be some relief in the heritage sector that, despite pressures to make it easier to develop, the regime for protecting the historic environment essentially remains.

Other policies are more alarming, including proposals obliging planners to approve new homes within "reasonable walking distance" (800 metres, or ten minutes) of well-connected underground, rail and train stations, and for tall buildings. While intended to increase housebuilding in London, the evidence is that not only has housebuilding stagnated in London, but developers are actually pulling out on grounds of increased building costs and lack of affordability; as observed by one unsuccessful mortgage-seeker on the radio recently, the problem is not lack of houses, but unavailability of mortgages.

Curiously – and alarmingly - there seems to have been no comment whatever, other than an article on the Accounting.web website, on a government announcement that, under the heading of simplification and efficiency, the government has decided to **abolish the consultation process for most changes to UK law** and policy, announced on 7th September in a letter asserting that "consultation culture" has turned policymaking into an "industry of dither and delay" and that the solution is to cut the general duty to consult on policy and allow ministers to reach decisions themselves, then act swiftly to implement them. The new approach will be to conduct a formal consultation only where there is a statutory requirement to consult; it would be conspicuously unfair not to consult; or Ministers believe that there is a good case for seeking external input through a formal consultation. This proposed abrogation of the democratic consultation process seems, on the face of it, to be incomprehensible.



Developer's view



Highgate Society view