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Miriam Baptist – Case Officer
Development Management
Camden Town Hall
Judd Street
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SUBJECT: Objection to Planning Application 2024/5407/P

Dear Miriam Baptist,

I am writing to you regarding Planning Application 2024/5407, Highgate Cemetery. I would like to preface my comments by saying that as a designer myself, I understand the depth and rigour of the architectural proposal that has been submitted for the future maintenance and upkeep of the cemetery. There are necessary inclusions such as the proposed ticket offices, West side buildings and improvements to circulation. However, as a grave owner of my late father in the Mound, my comments/objection will be specific to the proposed Gardener's building directly adjacent to the Mound.

Firstly, I must express my dissatisfaction with being contacted two months after the closure of the comments period (letter received dated on the 27th March) and thus apologise for the late contact. As a grave owner and a key stakeholder (along with others), I was neither consulted nor made aware of these changes until very recently, this letter should have been sent at the very beginning of this process. This poor communication undermines the primary interests of those who have a long term vested interest in the future of the site. Upon selecting Highgate Cemetery as the final resting place of my father (now potentially within meters of a utility building), these intentions for the site should have been expressed.

It is imperative that grave owners be included within the design development and planning process to ensure our concerns are addressed. I implore that all grave owners of the Mound be made aware before any decisions are made by the Council. Ideally, a meeting which includes all grave owners to verbally discuss their thoughts before moving forward as there is an evident collective discontent.

As of present, the Mound acts a private (grave owners only) and contemplative place for grave owners to mourn. It is elevated and somewhat disconnected, yet benefits from the direct view over the cemetery – maintaining a visual connection to the rest of the site.

The proposal would fundamentally alter the character of this space. The erection of a two-storey structure would completely sever the view from Mound, further isolating the area from the rest of the cemetery. Additionally, affecting natural light and leading to increased traffic within the Mound, especially by creating an additional access route and placing the entrance only meters away from my father's grave. The creation of additional facilities, vehicular storage and a workshop would also create unnecessary noise, combined with the disruption of pedestrian movement along the already narrow path which acts as the main circulatory route. The Mound already borders a play space which occasionally disrupts the peace; the creation of a solid façade would only enhance and echo these acoustics, another aspect which must be considered.

It is also important to contemplate the impact of the construction itself; by locating the Gardener's building deep within the East Cemetery there will no doubt be a prolonged period of disruption. The excavation and moving of consecrated ground in addition to the storage of building materials, scaffolding, vehicles and labourers constantly on site. This without doubt will impact the primary pedestrian route but completely extinguish the tranquillity of the Mound.

It is clear from the Design & Access statement that the design of the Gardner's building has evolved throughout the planning process. Evidently, through the iterative process there has been a heavy regularisation/simplification of the scheme. The building now exudes a sense of municipality, its rectilinear form, metal gates and ordered façade now produce only an unsympathetic utilitarian proposal. I find the structure no longer responds nor integrates with the vernacular of the cemetery.

Regarding the layout of the structure – upon entry into the mound, grave owners are immediately presented with WC access and a terrace. The mound already struggles with private access with tourists frequently meandering through during times of personal grave maintenance and mourning despite the indicative signage. This will only increase footfall and reduce privacy.

I do not feel the proposed location is appropriate and another site would be more suited to house the Gardener's facilities, somewhere more periphery with more immediate connections to main roads to minimise disruptions. Perhaps along the southern edge or even combined with the proposals on the West side. It also begs the question – where are all of the vehicles and tools currently kept? Does this space have scope to be expanded and improved? If the option to relocate the building is not an option, I believe there is opportunity to further develop the Gardner's building. A single storey structure could satisfy the essential needs whilst creating a level planted extension to the Mound – preventing visual isolation and creating an additional space for grave owners to inhabit such as a small garden with seating.

I wholly understand the requisite for improving facilities for the gardeners who play a fundamental role in the cemetery but with any architectural project/intervention, especially within a sensitive site – one's primary outcome should be on improving the space for the end users, the active grave owners.

Kind Regards,

Kyri Mouzouris

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