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Daren Zuk
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Camden Council

Dear Daren

Planning Application 2025/1301/P Cantelowes Gardens : Construction of a second caged floodlit MUGA pitch for a pickleball - paddle court

1. The current layout of the park Cantelowes Gardens already has a vast MUGA pitch which delivers health + fitness benefits to many local groups + students from the nearby Camden School for Girls. This is currently run by Camden Councils sports contractor GLL + it often remains underutilised, especially during the weekend, when there are rarely any GLL staff on site + the flood lighting is never on at the weekend. This poor management affects the safety of all those who have access to this park each weekend.

Camden Council need to better utilise their existing caged MUGA pitch facility, rather than build a second caged floodlit MUGA pitch for a fad paddle court, on top of the existing natural play area, built specifically for the needs of the many local children from the surrounding neighbourhood to relax outdoors, enjoying playing + having fun + exercise with other children running barefoot in the sand, in a calm relaxed nature inspired environment, supervised by their parents sitting either on the picnic table benches next to the infants playground or under the shade of the nearby trees, clustered around the sandpit or along the pathway which connects Camden Road with Osney Crescent, with birds chirping as they fly overhead from tree to tree.

Another caged floodlit MUGA pitch built + shoehorned into this tight location, would shatter the simple pleasure many gain from spending time in this busy little local park, meeting their neighbours + friends from the community.

2. The existing sandpit was designed by the renowned landscape architect Tim Wilson, following an extensive consultation process + was funded with a budget of £60,000 back in 2008.

The inclusion of this natural sandpit play area into the park design, is currently acknowledged as a protected feature by the Mayor of London's - in his London Plan

2021 - chapter 8 - green infrastructure - Grey to Green - which acknowledges the significant value parks + open spaces offer, which connect Londoners to green spaces at a neighbourhood level. In doing so, this helps him achieve his target of making more than 50 per cent of London green - by 2050 - by increasing the tree canopy cover in London by 10 per cent.

The green features of the park also act as part of London's green infrastructure network to help clean our air, reduce the risk of flooding and keep our city cool.

The SuDS sandpit feature in the park also adheres to his London Sustainable Drainage Action Plan which helps mitigate against the worst effects of climate change, to help London deal with the likely increase in heavy downpours + thunder stormwater flooding. The sustainable drainage of the sandpit area allows the ground + nearby trees to absorb this excess water, which is known to fill the sandpit, during heavy downpours during the Summer + even attracting ducks to land until all the standing water has receded.

Building a second caged MUGA pitch for a paddle court would go against his London Plan 2021 by reducing soft landscaping + creating further hard landscaping - from Green to Grey - resulting in damaging this significant ecological features of this site.

The existing trees on this site should be protected + maintained + particularly those which have significant canopies + offer shade within the urban environment of this sandpit. The existing cluster of mature trees help to trap air pollutants, have enhanced amenity value, provide shading, absorb rainwater + filter out noise. They also provide extensive areas of habitat for squirrels, bats, nesting birds + wildlife.

The existing trees provide services [such as pollution removal, carbon storage + stormwater attenuation] When mature trees like these are removed, the park asset is significantly degraded + the compensation is required in terms of substitute planting to replace services lost + should be based on a recognised valuation method such as CAVAT.

3. The negative impact of the noise + light pollution subjected on the nearby local residents living on Osney Crescent within the Kentish Town South ward, is another deeply objectionable aspect of this paddle court proposal.

Cantelowes Gardens is essentially a park + the balance has to be right, for both respecting nature + the local residents living nearby.

Mistakes made, have been widely been acknowledged in the past, such as the installation of the redundant costly architectural downlighting, subsequently switched off along the pathway due to high maintenance running costs + attracting nocturnal ASB. This should act as a warning for Camden Council, not to repeat the mistakes of the past.

4. The psychological benefits of natural play for children playing running about in the sandpit, touching the sand between their toes, is one of the simple pleasures + early memories, most children will recall, especially, for those children on the spectrum who treat the sandpit as a therapeutic area, where they can engage with other children + simply having fun together, in an inclusive environment.

“ Spending time outside playing in nature is proven to be good for both adult + children’s mental health. With both a global climate emergency + a mental health crisis amongst young people, there has never been a more important time to encourage young children to explore + connect with their natural surroundings. ”

London Wildlife Trust

There are so many other reasons why this sandpit feature needs to be protected as a community asset, for all the local children to continue to enjoy, in the years to come.

Its creator, Tim Wilson is shocked Camden Council wishes to disrespect + discard his creation, after barely twenty years, as if it was a piece of fast fashion trash, ready to discard, as if it was worthless.

This destructive approach is neither sustainable, nor carbon natural + is something Camden Council repeatedly say, they only do, only as a last resort.

There are many other more suitable locations across the borough which would benefit from the pull factor another caged floodlit MUGA pitch would add, without destroying this much loved + established sandpit, which is tantamount to blatant vandalism.

There has also been significant local opposition to this paddle court plan by many local parents + residents.

Hopefully, Camden Council listens to their voices + reconsider their plan.

5. In conclusion, I/we also strongly object to this proposal, for the negative harm it will cause to the social cohesion of the local family communities who live nearby, surrounding this park + value this unique free to use sandpit play feature, for all their young children, no matter what their socio-economic background.
6. Please keep us informed with the outcome of this planning application. Should this go up for a debate at the town hall planning scrutiny panel meeting, I/we shall look forward to attending.

Andrew Deans
Cantelowes Gardens Friends