

To the Chair of the Planning Committee,

I write with regard to the above planning application and wish to lodge my objection to the above planning application. I write as a Head of School of Architecture, with a doctorate in Architecture and spatial representations of cultural identity and collective memory, a close friend of someone whose husband rests close by, and a native of London, who has enjoyed the peace, reflection and space as palimpsest, bringing the cultural and collective memory of great and ordinary people together in both a sacred and spiritual place.

Highgate Cemetery in London is the embodiment of Victorian architectural and cultural values, expressed through its Gothic Revival design, Romantic landscape, and funerary symbolism. Its architectural elements such as the Egyptian Avenue and Circle of Lebanon, reflect the 19th-century fascination with death, the afterlife, and ancient cultures. The layout—winding paths, dramatic vistas, and a deliberate integration of nature—evokes a sense of the sublime, inviting reflection and memorial. The combination of elaborate tombs and wild vegetation blurs the line between human legacy and natural decay, creating a powerful aesthetic of remembrance.

Culturally, Highgate represents the Victorian era's preoccupation with mourning, moral legacy, and social hierarchy. It mirrors the stratification of the living world in its division between grand mausoleums for the wealthy and modest graves for others. As a site of collective memory, Highgate continues to resonate through the preservation of its well known residents, but also a place of respite in the city.

Any cemetery functions as a public archive of cultural beliefs, with its symbolic statuary and inscriptions encoding shared understandings of life, death, and identity, but this seems to be the essence of Highgate as a place of private mourning but also a shared cultural landscape, where individual lives contribute to a broader, ongoing story of collective remembrance.

Details of the proposed development have been brought to my attention, and as an interested party, I am shocked at the audacity of these plans, and would like to frame my objections with reference to the following material considerations.

1. Impact of Scale and Design

The proposed building is quite significant in scale and appears to block the only open side of the Mound. This alters the character of the space to great detriment. The building's visibility from many views across the cemetery, will have a negative impact on the historic and contemplative atmosphere of the site described above.

2. Noise and Activity Impact

Increased vehicle noise and foot traffic from gardening staff is likely to be quite noticeable. There will potentially be noise from machinery, workers, and the operation of the building itself (shutters and doors etc). It will feel more like a busy place with multiple activities. This will affect the peace and tranquillity of the surrounding area and is likely to impact negatively on mourners and family members, further causing emotional distress.

3. Construction Challenges and Feasibility

The site is located near the heart of the cemetery, equidistant from both entrances, with limited road access for heavy construction vehicles. The excavation needed for foundations in such a sensitive area poses serious challenges. Ensuring structural stability of the Mound's fill material during excavation will require complex retaining structures. These issues will drive up construction costs significantly, especially for what is intended to be a relatively modest service building.

It has been questioned as to whether the Highgate Cemetery Trust has sufficiently budgeted for this complexity, and whether the construction is truly feasible. There is a real risk that, if approved, the project will encounter unforeseen difficulties during construction potentially forcing cost-saving compromises that could have serious long-term implications. (please note, this section has been adapted from information shared with me by professionals.)

4. Precedent and Long-Term Implications

There is a concern that granting planning permission for development on the cemetery sets a precedent for further proposals to be considered favourably. Given the need for the trust to generate income, this seems a real threat.

6. Alternative Locations and Design

It seems that there are many other viable sites within Highgate that would create much less impact than the proposed site. We would urge the design team and the Trust, to consider these carefully before progressing with this proposal.

I would urge the Highgate Cemetery Trust and relevant decision-makers to reconsider the current proposal. Its scale, location, and construction implications make it wholly unsuitable for this sensitive and historic site.

Thank you for your careful consideration of this matter.

Kind Regards

Dr. Jemma Browne SFHEA

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Ms Miriam Baptist
Planning Application Case Officer
Camden Council Planning Department
Development Management,
Camden Town Hall, Judd Street,
London WC1H 9JE.

13th May 2025

Dear Ms Baptist

Subject: Objection to Planning Application –2024/5407/P – 2024/5423/L Highgate Cemetery

I am writing as the brother of Simon Speck, who was buried at Highgate Cemetery in May 2019, to convey our profound concern about the proposed gardeners' building on the Mound

As you are no doubt aware, there is considerable opposition to this proposal, especially regarding the effect it would have on the unique atmosphere and privacy of the Mound. This area is a sanctuary for those who are grieving, offering a place to connect with loved ones who are no longer with us. I make a point of visiting Simon's grave with my family whenever we are in London from Devon. The Mound is a vital space for us, providing a tangible link to Simon. The introduction of a new building for gardeners would fundamentally alter the experience of these visits.

There are numerous aspects of the planning application that trouble grave owners and their families. I would like to draw attention to three particular concerns:

1. Scale and Visual Impact

The proposed building is disproportionately large and would obstruct the only open aspect of the Mound, significantly changing the character and feel of the space. Its prominence would be felt from across the cemetery, especially from the Mound itself, and would detract from the historic and contemplative environment that defines Highgate Cemetery.

2. Heritage Value of the East Cemetery and the Mound

Highgate Cemetery is internationally recognised as a site of exceptional cultural importance. Its designation as a Grade I historic park and garden reflects its outstanding value as a place of national historic, architectural, and communal significance. Any intervention that alters its layout, character, or setting must be carefully considered, with full appreciation for how each element contributes to the cemetery's identity. The East Cemetery is not merely a historic site; it

remains an active place of burial, remembrance, and community ritual, as integral to Highgate's character as the celebrated architecture of the West Cemetery.

3. Disruption and Loss of Tranquillity

The anticipated increase in vehicle movements and foot traffic from gardening staff would disrupt the peace that is so essential to a cemetery. The planned ground-level façade, featuring grilled security shutters, is particularly concerning due to the likely noise generated during daily operations. The presence of a large, utilitarian structure-combined with frequent vehicle activity and mechanical noise-risks transforming the Mound from a place of reflection into a service area. This would be entirely at odds with Highgate Cemetery's primary purpose as a burial ground and a place for remembrance.

While I have focused on these three main points, we share the broader concerns expressed by others in their submissions to Camden Council's Planning team and directly to the Trust.

Yours sincerely,

Jeremy Speck