



ENGLISH HERITAGE

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Mr Charles Thuaire
London Borough of Camden
Development Control Planning Services
Camden Town Hall
Argyle Street
LONDON
WC1H 8ND

Direct Dial: 020 7973 3765
Direct Fax: 020 7973 3792

Our ref: P00306650

Dear Mr Thuaire

**Notifications under Circular 01/2001, Circular 08/2009 &
T&CP (Development Management Procedure) Order 2010
ATHLONE HOUSE, HAMPSTEAD LANE, LONDON, N6 4RU
Application No 2013/7242/P**

Thank you for your letter of 15 November 2013 notifying English Heritage of the above application.

Summary

Athlone House is an unlisted nineteenth century mansion within the Highgate Conservation Area and adjacent to the Kenwood Estate, a grade I listed mansion and associated grade II* registered landscape of which English Heritage is the custodian. The existing building makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area and the setting of the Kenwood Estate.

In our view, the demolition of this building would cause substantial harm to the conservation area and the justification for its loss must be considered carefully in the context of the National Planning Policy Framework, particularly paragraphs 130 to 133 inclusive. We remain of the view that the proposed development would have a significant impact on the conservation area and would neither preserve or enhance its character or appearance.

English Heritage Advice

Significance

Highgate is located on one of the twin hills in north London. Based around the historic village are a number of large houses set within their own grounds which are in turn set within a largely rural landscape of informal open spaces. The large houses, positioned along former country lanes, were often built by successful merchants and business men who found the rural charm of Highgate and its close proximity to London particularly attractive. The finest example is Kenwood House in neighbouring



1 WATERHOUSE SQUARE 138-142 HOLBORN LONDON EC1N 2ST

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Hampstead, grade I listed and set within a grade II* registered garden.

Athlone House, originally known as Caen Wood Towers, occupies a site on the south side of Hampstead Lane approximately one kilometre to the west of Highgate Village. The site borders Kenwood House and Gardens and Hampstead Heath, which is protected as Metropolitan Open Land. Athlone House was built in 1871 by Edward Salomans with John Philpot Jones in red brick with fine stone detailing in an eclectic style. Built for Mr Edward Brooke - a prominent industrialist and Member of Parliament - it remained in residential use until 1942 when it was requisitioned for the Royal Air Force Intelligence School who were responsible for training all RAF Intelligence Officers during WWII. It was acquired by the health service following the war and was used as a hospital until 1999. Despite its post-war alterations and lack of recent use, the fine red brick building with stone dressings and mullioned windows is of aesthetic, historic and communal significance and makes a clear and positive contribution to the character and appearance of Highgate Conservation Area.

The elevated position of Athlone House results in the building taking prominence in views from Hampstead Heath and the Kenwood Estate. However, the well-modulated elevations and tones of the brick elevations, stone detailing and slate roof break the mass of the building and allow it to be comfortably accommodated in the context of the surrounding landscape. Views of Athlone House from Kenwood House are limited and it is only during the autumn and winter months that the two buildings can be seen in the same context when viewed from Kenwood's West Lawn. This is partly due to the materials used in its construction which allow it to successfully blend into the landscape.

Proposals

The proposed scheme involves the demolition of Athlone House and erection of a new eight bedroom house designed by Robert Adam Architects in a neo-classical style. The elevations will be clad in natural Bath stone.

Recent planning history

In 1998 English Heritage offered detailed comments on the planning brief for Athlone House which sought to retain the building and control the extent of development within its grounds. The brief was subsequently adopted by London Borough of Camden.

In 2007 the London Borough of Camden granted permission for construction of three blocks of apartments in the grounds of Athlone House, on land formerly occupied by institutional buildings associated with the post-war use of Athlone House by the Health Service. Permission was granted subject to S106 agreement requiring work to begin on the restoration of Athlone House within 42 months of construction of starting work on the apartments.



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At the time, English Heritage expressed reservations about the scheme but concluded that the proposed restoration of Athlone House balanced our concerns over potential harm to the historic environment. In our letters of 22 November 2004, 21st April 2005 and 26 April 2006 we reiterated the importance of a timetable of works to restore the house and expressed concerns over proposals to "mothball" Athlone House prior to restoration.

A scheme was subsequently submitted in 2009 for the demolition of Athlone House and replacement by a new building, designed by Robert Adam Architects, which was refused by London Borough of Camden and dismissed at appeal in 2011.

The main changes presented in the current scheme are the removal of the courtyard wings, modification at roof level to reduce the amount of accommodation provided and omission of some areas of basement development.

Policy

The policies outlined below form the statutory basis on which your authority is duty bound to make its decision unless there are material reasons why this should not be the case.

Section 66 and 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 impose a statutory duty upon local planning authorities to consider the impact of proposals upon listed buildings and conservation areas. With regard to listed buildings, it states that the determining authority, 'shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.' And in respect of conservation areas, it requires that 'special attention be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area.'

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the Government's policies for decision making on development proposals. At the heart of the framework is a presumption in favour of 'sustainable development'. Conserving heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance forms one of the 12 core principles that define sustainable development.

NPPF policy advises that for new development to be sustainable it needs to encompass an economic, social and environmental role, with the latter including the protection and enhancement of the built and historic environment. Paragraph 8 notes that these roles are mutually dependent and should not be taken in isolation; and that to achieve sustainable development, economic, social and environmental gains should be sought jointly and simultaneously through the planning system. Paragraph 7 of the



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NPPF states that the environmental role of a development includes protection and enhancement of the historic environment, while section 12 sets out how the historic environment should be conserved and enhanced. Paragraph 130 requires that the condition of a heritage asset should not be taken into account in any decision if there is evidence of its deliberate neglect or damage. Paragraph 132 states that when considering the impact of a proposed development on a heritage asset, 'great weight' should be given to preserving its significance.

The design of new development should respond to local character and history (paragraph 58 NPPF), should seek to promote or reinforce local distinctiveness (paragraph 60 NPPF) and should address its integration into the historic environment (paragraph 61). Addressing these design policy objectives and others will lead to good design. Poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area should be refused (paragraph 64 NPPF).

The Revised London Plan, as adopted in July 2011, provides a strategic framework for development in London. This includes key policies related to the safeguarding of London's heritage assets and their settings. Specific policies related to the Athlone House proposal which should be addressed include policy 7.8 (heritage assets) part D (planning decisions) of the London Plan states that 'development affecting heritage assets should conserve their significance, by being sympathetic to their form, scale, materials and architectural detail'.

The London Plan also provides policy for implementing the London View Management Framework. Policy 7.12 part A states that new development should 'not harm..... the characteristics and composition of the strategic views and their landmark elements'. The Revised London View Management Framework (LVMF) SPG was adopted in March 2012, and supports the implementation of the above policies of the London Plan. It identifies the view from the viewing gazebo in Kenwood Gardens, designated as view 3A, as worthy of protection. The LVMF is a material consideration in the assessment of applications for development.

English Heritage's 'The Setting of Heritage Assets' guidance sets out how we assess the implications of development proposals affecting setting, providing a clear framework for consistent decision-making. It is also intended to assist others involved in managing development that may affect the setting of heritage assets.

DP25 of London Borough of Camden's development policies within its Local Development Framework seeks to protect its heritage and states that the demolition of an unlisted building that makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of a conservation area would not be permitted 'unless exceptional circumstances are shown that outweigh the case for retention'. Athlone House is



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identified within the adopted Highgate Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategy as making a positive contribution to the conservation area and advises that there is a presumption against the demolition of such buildings.

The decision letter from the Planning Inspectorate of 21 April 2011 which dismissed the appeals on the previous scheme is a material consideration in the determination of this application. It should be noted that national planning policy has since changed with the publication of the National Planning Policy Framework in March 2012.

Position

We remain of the view that the existing building makes a positive contribution to the Highgate Conservation Area and that its loss would constitute substantial harm to its character and appearance as set out under paragraph 132 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Whilst we acknowledge that there have been some modifications to the proposed new building which represent an improvement on that originally submitted in 2009, the overall scale, massing and materials remain largely the same. English Heritage therefore remains of the view that the significantly larger massing of the proposed development would be monolithic in character and assert its presence on its sensitive context. Athlone House, by contrast, integrates successfully due to the modulation of its elevations and picturesque - if altered - roofscape. The proposed choice of facing materials for the new building contributes to these concerns. The materials used in Athlone House ensure that the building assimilates into its setting within the treeline. The light stone of the replacement house will considerably increase its visual prominence in the landscape and when viewed in the context of Kenwood House and particularly from the gazebo which is a protected LVMF view.

Whilst we note that the appeal decision is a material consideration in your consideration of this application, we must draw your attention to the significant changes in national planning guidance since the issue of the appeal decision for this site in April 2011. The National Planning Policy Framework (2012) identifies the conservation of heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance as a key constituent in achieving sustainable development and in chapter 12 gives detailed guidance on conserving and enhancing the historic environment.

Given the condition of the building and the history of the site, your authority must give careful consideration to paragraph 130 of the NPPF and whether there is evidence of deliberate neglect in order to secure planning permission in this case. The requirements and tests set out in paragraph 132 and 133 of the NPPF are also relevant in this case. It is noted that evidence on the costs of repairing the existing building have been provided and we recommend that this be thoroughly assessed as

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part of your decision-making process. Similarly, substantial public benefits are required to offset the harm caused to the conservation area in this case and your authority must be convinced that these benefits are real and cannot be achieved by any other means.

English Heritage does not agree with the Inspectors view, as stated in paragraph 37 of his letter, that the contribution made by Athlone House to the conservation area is 'positive but is limited'. Whilst the building has been altered and neglected in recent years, its contribution to the conservation area and its local character is a wholly positive one and, in our view, is not limited by its current condition. We are therefore unable to agree with the conclusion drawn in paragraph 47 that the proposals would preserve and enhance the character and appearance of Highgate Conservation Area.

Recommendation

English Heritage considers that the existing building, despite its alterations, makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Highgate Conservation Area by virtue of its scale, bulk, massing, materials and detailing. This is reinforced by the Highgate Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategy and adopted planning brief which sought the retention of Athlone House in any redevelopment of the site.

In considering proposals for its total demolition, careful attention should be paid to the policies within the NPPF, particularly paragraph 130-133 inclusive and detailed assessment of the evidence provided to ensure that these government policies are met. English Heritage remains of the view that the proposed replacement building, by virtue of its scale, bulk, massing and materials would cause harm to the conservation area and setting of the Kenwood Estate and therefore, is unable to support this application.

Please note that this response relates to historic building and historic area matters only. If there are any archaeological implications to the proposals it is recommended that you contact the Greater London Archaeological Advisory Service for further advice (Tel: 020 7973 3712).

Yours sincerely

Breda Daly

Inspector of Historic Buildings and Areas

E-mail: breda.daly@english-heritage.org.uk



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