

REVISED PROPOSALS FOR ATHLONE HOUSE

STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY CONSULTATION



Prepared by

QUATRO

October 2013

Revised Proposals for Athlone House

Statement of Community Consultation

1. Background

Proposals for a new house to replace the existing Athlone House were dismissed at appeal in 2011. The Inspector accepted that the existing building could be replaced with a single large residence, and endorsed the Classical design approach by Robert Adam Architect, but felt that the replacement dwelling was too large and made specific comments in this respect on its impact to the openness of the Metropolitan Open Land. Subsequently the plans were revised and reduced in size. The revised scheme is significantly smaller and addresses the key features of the previous design which attracted criticism in the Inspector's Decision.

Overall, the floorspace increase has been reduced to no more than 10% over the size of the building as it existed in 2003 (the Inspector accepted the 2003(A) scenario as an appropriate benchmark against which to assess any increase in floorspace). Other changes include;

- The basement has been significantly reduced in size and completely enclosed; it is not now visible from the outside;
- The visible rooms at second floor level between the stair wells on the east and west sides have been removed. In their place will be pitched copper roof slopes. Thus the perceived height of the main body of the building when viewed from the east and west will be two storeys in place of three/four.
- The west and north guest wing buildings have been removed completely, which further reduces the mass as viewed from the Heath, and particularly from the Kenwood gazebo. It is expected that guest / staff facilities will be provided by the Gate House and Caen Cottage, in line with existing the planning permission.
- The second floor sitting room on the southern elevation has been removed. Thus the perceived height of the main body of the building will be two storeys in place of three.
- A projecting rounded bay to the dining room on the east side has been added for increased articulation.
- Further planting is proposed to overcome concerns of the neighbours at Caenwood Court.

In order to seek the views of local stakeholders and local residents on the revised proposals, the Athlone House Design Team arranged a public consultation programme prior to the submission of a planning application. The public consultation programme comprised;

- A meeting with Highgate Ward Councillors
- A meeting with members of the Athlone House Working Group
- A two-day Public Exhibition at the United Reformed Church

2. Meeting with Highgate Ward Councillors

The meeting with Highgate Ward Councillors Valerie Leach and Sally Gimson was held on 19th July 2012. Councillor Maya de Souza had been scheduled to attend but unfortunately was unable to do so on the day. The meeting was also attended by Council Planning Officers. Both Councillors Leach and Gimson made it clear that they would listen to the briefing from the Athlone House Design Team and would ask questions, but that they would not be making any comments on the proposals.

Although Councillor de Souza was not able to attend the meeting she was able to attend the Public Exhibition and made the following written comment;

“The s.106 agreement should be enforced and original building protected”

A written comment was also received from Councillor Bob Hare who visited the exhibition and who represents Highgate Ward in the London Borough of Haringey;

- 1. “Irrespective of current ownership, the original permission and requirement to restore the existing Athlone House should be followed.*
- 2. The proposed house has a bulk and massing that result in a very different appearance; one that is out of character with the surroundings.*
- 3. The existing house has a valuable character that contributes positively, to the surroundings, and that reflects and comprises the historic assets of the area.*
- 4. Although the wings have been removed, together with the entrance to the basement, the bulk and massing viewed from Hampstead Lane, the Heath and other surrounding viewpoints remains excessive.*
- 5. The overall architecture remains grandiose and over-bearing.”*

3. Meeting with Members of the Athlone House Working Group

The meeting with members of the Athlone House Working Group was held on 19th July 2012 and was attended by members from the Highgate Society, the Heath & Hampstead Society and the Highgate Conservation Area Advisory Committee. Members of the Athlone Working Group asked a number of questions about the provision of Staff accommodation and were informed that the intention is that staff accommodation can be provided in the Gatehouse and Caen Cottage, which benefit from an extant residential consent, rather than in new build accommodation.

The Group made no comments on the revised proposals at the meeting but subsequently wrote as follows;

“Thank you for arranging a special viewing of the exhibition by the AHWG of your latest scheme for Athlone House last Thursday evening.

Not wishing to prolong the incursion into your evening, we did not spend time filling in your questionnaires, but we discussed what we had seen afterwards elsewhere, and as a matter of courtesy we set out below our brief conclusions upon what we saw.

It will not surprise you that we are no more enamoured of the architectural design of your new proposals than of the dismissed scheme, since the one is a repetition of the other, with some sections removed.

We remain very concerned that you remain determined to demolish Athlone House despite the agreement into which the previous holder of title, and therefore yourselves made, undertaking to restore the house.

We are also very concerned that the scheme you now propose remains significantly larger than the Athlone House it is intended to replace.

Again, thank you for your courtesy in allowing us to 'preview' the drawings you exhibited.

Yours sincerely,

Gordon Forbes

on behalf of the Athlone House Working Group."

4. Public Exhibition

4.1. The Public Exhibition was held on 20th and 21st July 2012 at Highgate United Reform Church, South Grove, Highgate N6 6BA. The hours of opening were;

- Friday 20th July 2012 - 2.00pm – 8.00pm
- Saturday 21st July 2012 - 10.00am – 1.00pm

The exhibition material included a series of A1 boards describing the revised scheme in comparison to the original proposals, together with a scale model of the revised scheme. Members of the professional team were present to explain the proposals and answer questions. Comments Forms were available and visitors were encouraged to leave their comments.

4.2. The Public Exhibition was advertised via;

- A letter to over 1,100 households in the surrounding area (see Appendix 1)
- A letter to local groups (similar to the letter to households)
- An advert in the 'Ham & High' on 12th and 19th July 2012 (see Appendix 2)
- A press release sent to the local media (see Appendix 3)

4.3. The Public Exhibition was attended by 56 people, as follows

- Friday 20th July 2012 – 11 people
- Saturday 21st July 2012 – 45 people

4.4. A total of 32 written comments were received (29 at the exhibition and three by email). The following points were made;

- **In support of the revised proposals:**

A small number of comments were made in support of the proposals, including;

“Having written to the planning inspectorate to object to the original scheme, I was most interested to study the revised plans and to be given a copy of the 2011 Appeal Decision. I have carefully read this and conclude that the original scheme was rejected only because it contravened MOL regulations.”



“I was pleased to note that not much of the projected revised house will be visible from Kenwood or Fitzroy Park, that the basement will no longer be visible from the ground level, and that the guest/staff wings have been removed. Although I am not that keen on Professor Robert Adam’s design, I can see that this form of classicism, with its Bath stone, will soften the impact of the rather brutalist flats that have been built on the site.”

Resident, North Road, N6

“The design of the new building seems to me to be an improvement on the present building.”

Resident, N10

“Significantly better than before”

Resident, Hillway, N6

“I agree with the general approach and principles toward the design of the new building, but I feel it will only be successful if it achieves the sense of it being built to last with great effort involved in the construction; something a lot of old buildings in London have. Also, this house should blend in with the community nicely for people to accept it, but I think it’s a case of waiting for it to be built and seeing if it adheres to these principles.”

Anonymous

- **Acknowledgement that the plans had been reduced in scale, but expressing opposition:**



A number of comments were made acknowledging that the building had been reduced in scale but expressing opposition to the revised proposals, including;

“The revised plans do improve on the original plans bulk, but it would still be seen as bulkier than the present house from the Heath. It will not nestle, as seen from the Heath, thus making the Heath feel smaller. I still find it unacceptable that this is proposed,

against the original agreement of sale. But if demolition is believed to be inevitable, a building that looks less bulky and is not such an ugly pastiche would be more appropriate.”

Resident, Stanhope Road, N6

“The proposal is a slightly smaller version of the refused scheme. In the right context it would be fine, but it is totally out of place here. The original building could and should be restored to its original state. If it can be done at Wittanhurst it can be done here –our historical buildings are important.”

Resident, Grange Road, N6

“I realise that your new plans include a reduced house footprint, with smaller basement, but it is still approximately 25% larger than the original house. However there is still lack of compliance with the Section 106 Agreement in that in return for building the 25 luxury apartments, the developer signed an agreement to restore Athlone House. Despite the new plans, morally I do not think that this agreement should be reneged upon.”

By email

“This new proposal is a slight improvement on that that was rejected but is still offensive to the location.”

Resident, no address

- **Opposition to the revised proposals on design grounds:**

A number of comments were received which raised concern about the design, including;

“Dreadful architecture. Along with the rest of Bishops Avenue this is a debacle!”

By email

“Poor design, will blight the beauty of Hampstead.”

By email

“The proposed tower seems unnecessary”

Resident, Stormont Road, N6

“For a second time – I appeal to everyone – do not let the developers allow this ugly building be considered”

Resident, Southwood Park, N6

“I believe that the original building is far more attractive than either of the proposals exhibited. The new proposals are too far removed from these original features which should be preserved.”

Resident, no address



- **Opposition to the revised proposals on the grounds that the existing house should be restored**



restored.”

The largest number of comments came from those who believe that the existing house should be restored, including;

“I continue to be at a complete loss as to why any new construction should be permitted, since the terms of the original permission to develop included the requirement to restore Athlone House as a place in which to live. I think it is tedious that the community should, once again, be presented with another new building, when Athlone House should be

Resident, Bisham Gardens, N6

“The deal was to repair and restore the existing building. The revised design remains ostentatious, obtrusive and too visible for the Heath.”

Resident, Fitzroy Park, N6

“Disappointing. I understood that the planning permission originally was given on the basis of retaining Athlone House.”

Resident, Cholmeley Gardens, N6

“This is not a restoration of Athlone House. The approval to build the new blocks of flats in the early 2000’s was only granted on condition that Athlone House was restored to a habitable condition.”

Resident, Pond Square, N6

“As planning permission was only granted on condition that Athlone House was restored by the developers, no plans for a new building on the site are acceptable. In this context the revised proposals are irrelevant.”

Resident, Cranley Gardens, N6

“The plans are going against the previous agreement and I feel very strongly that the house should stand in its original condition.”

Resident, Southwood Park, N6

“The house should be refurbished and returned with no increase in size. This was the original agreement with the developer who should have been heavily penalised for not carrying this out. It is a landmark and the new, ugly replacement is not appropriate.”

Resident, Winchester Place, N6

“The original ruling made it clear that Athlone House must be returned in its integrity. Nothing has happened to suggest that that ruling can now be challenged.”

Resident, Brisham Gardens, N6

“This revised proposal seems to me to be as inappropriate for its setting as the previous one and, perhaps more importantly, ignores the responsibility of the owner in respect of the section 106 agreement entered into with Camden whereby permission was granted for the flats at Kenwood Place.”

Resident, Broadlands Road, N6

5. Conclusion

It is clear that, despite some support for the revised plans and an acknowledgement that the revised proposals are reduced in scale, the major concern of those who have made comments on the revised proposal remains a strong belief that the existing Athlone House be restored.

However, this strongly held view runs counter to that of the Planning Inspector who examined the previous scheme in 2011 and concluded that the existing house is not of sufficient heritage or other value to justify being retained. The Planning Inspector embraced the architecture and design of the proposed replacement house and he dismissed objections about the harmful visual impact on the Conservation Area and the Heath. The only reason he did not allow the appeal was that he thought the building was too large relative to the existing one to be acceptable in policy terms on Metropolitan Open Land.

The revised scheme is significantly smaller and addresses the key features of the previous design which attracted criticism. In particular, the floorspace increase has been reduced to no more than 10% over the size of the building as it existed in 2003 (the Inspector accepted the 2003(A) scenario as an appropriate benchmark against which to assess any increase in floorspace). Other changes are;

- The basement has been significantly reduced in size and completely enclosed; it is not now visible from the outside;
- The visible rooms at second floor level between the stair wells on the east and west sides have been removed. In their place will be pitched copper roof slopes. Thus the perceived height of the main body of the building when viewed from the east and west will be two storeys in place of three/four.
- The west and north guest wing buildings have been removed completely, which further reduces the mass as viewed from the Heath, and particularly from the Kenwood gazebo. It is expected that guest / staff facilities will be provided by the Gate House and Caen Cottage, in line with existing the planning permission.
- The second floor sitting room on the southern elevation has been removed. Thus the perceived height of the main body of the building will be two storeys in place of three.
- A projecting rounded bay to the dining room on the east side has been added for increased articulation.

In addition, the proposals will deliver the following benefits;

- An affordable contribution that will deliver additional affordable units to the borough
- Additional landscaping and planting is proposed to overcome concerns of the neighbours at Caenwood Court.
- The viable restoration of this dilapidated site

Appendix 1 – Letter to local residents

Dear Resident

A revised proposal for Athlone House

Following the Planning Inquiry last year which refused planning permission for a new house to replace the existing Athlone House, the plans have been revised and reduced in size.

The new scheme is significantly smaller and addresses the key features of the previous design which attracted criticism. In particular,

- One storey has effectively been removed from much of the house
- The roofscape has been made more varied.
- The revised house consists of 2 storeys above ground with some accommodation in the roof.
- The revised house has a considerably smaller basement which is no longer visible at all from ground level.
- The guest/staff wings have been removed in their entirety.

Overall the new scheme is significantly smaller and we believe it should be acceptable in planning policy terms.

Before submitting a new planning application to Camden Council for the smaller house we have arranged a Public Exhibition of the new proposals to give local residents the opportunity to give their views, on;

Friday 20th July - from 12 noon – 6.00pm

Saturday 21st July - from 10.00am – 1.00pm

At

Highgate United Reform Church

South Grove, Highgate N6 6BA

We hope that you will be able to attend. However, if you are unable to attend and would like to give your views, please email pdimoldenberg@quatro-consults.co.uk

Yours sincerely

Paul Dimoldenberg

Appendix 2 – Local Press Advert

PUBLIC CONSULTATION REVISED PROPOSALS FOR ATHLONE HOUSE

Following the Planning Inquiry last year the plans have been revised and reduced in size. The revised house consists of 2 storeys above ground with some accommodation in the roof. It has a considerably smaller basement and the guest/staff wings have been removed in their entirety.

A Public Exhibition will be held at:

Highgate United Reform Church

South Grove, Highgate N6 6BA

on

Friday 20th July 2012

2.00pm – 8.00pm

Saturday 21st July 2012

10.00am – 1.00pm

Representatives from the Athlone House Design Team will be on hand to answer your questions

Appendix 3 – Press Release

Revised proposals for Athlone House go on public display

Revised proposals for Athlone House will go on public display on;

Friday 20th July - from 12 noon – 6.00pm

Saturday 21st July - from 10.00am – 1.00pm

At

Highgate United Reform Church, South Grove, Highgate N6 6BA

Following the Planning Inquiry last year which refused planning permission for a new house to replace the existing Athlone House, the plans have been revised and reduced in size. The new scheme is significantly smaller and addresses the key features of the previous design which attracted criticism. In particular,

- One storey has effectively been removed from much of the house
- The roofscape has been made more varied.
- The revised house consists of 2 storeys above ground with some accommodation in the roof.
- The revised house has a considerably smaller basement which is no longer visible at all from ground level.
- The guest/staff wings have been removed in their entirety.

The previous scheme was examined in 2011 by a Government Planning Inspector who agreed that the existing house is not of sufficient heritage or other value to justify being retained. The Planning Inspector was in most respects happy with the architecture and design of the proposed replacement house and he dismissed objections about visual impact on the Conservation Area and the Heath. The only reason he did not allow the appeal was that he thought the building was too large relative to the existing one to be acceptable in policy terms on Metropolitan Open Land.

A spokesman for the Athlone House Design Team said;

“Before submitting a new planning application to Camden Council for the smaller house we have arranged a Public Exhibition of the new proposals to give local residents the opportunity to give their views. Overall the new scheme is significantly smaller and we believe it should be acceptable in planning policy terms.

ENDS

Contact Paul Dimoldenberg on 7566 7960 or 07864 042 584