

**Planning Application 2013/7242/P : Athlone House, Hampstead Lane, London N6  
Objection to Proposal to Demolish and Replace.**

I wish to register my objection to the proposed demolition and replacement of the existing Athlone House.

I have been a member of the Athlone House Working Group, on behalf of the Highgate Society for many years, and have only recently moved away from Highgate.

The reasons upon which my objections are based are as follows:

**1.00** The maintenance and restoration of Athlone House remain requirements of the section 106 agreement made between Camden and the Owner of the house and his successors in title. This planning obligation agreement remains in respect of the remainder of the property following the grant of planning permission for new residential development on a part a part of the Athlone House garden lands, (now called Kenwood Place), which have now been built and sold.

**2.00** Athlone House is both much-loved locally, and is capable of repair and restoration today just as it was in 2005 when the s106 agreement was made. The house contributes greatly to the character of the adjacent part of Hampstead Heath, and to Highgate and Hampstead seen from the Heath. That is an important planning purpose identified by Camden at the outset. Many people who live round Hampstead Heath, and the millions who visit it and who love the views both into and out of this wonderful stretch of recreational landscape, will feel a great sense of outrage, not only if the loss of Athlone House is permitted, but also if binding public agreements made on behalf of the public as in this instance, are let fall if one party unilaterally decides no longer to honour them.

Athlone House retains many of its fine external and internal features, and remains capable of, and very much worthy of renovation and restoration. It is my opinion that Athlone House should be repaired as the Owner undertook to do and restored to use as a single, or multiple family dwelling, as it was originally agreed would be done.

**3.00** Although EH has declined to list Athlone House, this should not be taken to mean that the building lacks architectural importance, or that the many architectural features that have survived the occupancy of the building by the NHS and others, and the absence of adequate maintenance and repair of the building since they vacated. In your Conservation Area Policy Statement LBC recognise the significant contribution Athlone House makes to the views from Hampstead Heath, and the surrounding area.

In 1871, when the house was completed, the architect Edward Salomons was one of the leading exponents of Gothic revival architecture in England, particularly in the area around Manchester, and it was natural for Edward Brooke, his Manchester client, in seeking to build his new home in the northern suburbs of London, to select Salomons as his architect.

In its day, the Gothic style was understood to be not just a matter of appearance, but represented the spiritual made real. Everything had to be crafted and made beautiful; whether it could be seen or not by men, everything was visible to the eye of God. It was this spiritual conviction that underlay the whole concept, and is perhaps why, by association, the fine stairhouse looks very reminiscent of a church or chapel, complete with vaulted roof and clerestory.

At Caenwood Towers, now known as Athlone House, Salomons produced a fine asymmetrical, romantic composition for his client, richly ornamented externally with valuable detail deliberately designed to suit the particular location on the building, and with its potential for the picturesque and romantic.

Many of these features remain today, and are capable of restoration. Today, even in its semi-dereelict state, Athlone House still remains picturesque.

#### **Externally:**

**The East, West, and South elevations** are of high quality thin-joint brickwork, with Douling stone facings and features. It was all intended to last, and it has done so. The brickwork needs cleaning, and the stonework has suffered in some places as a result of atmospheric acid attack, but it remains capable of repair by piecing-in or by replacement of some individual stones.

**The North elevation** has suffered where the NHS buildings have been removed, exposing the previous demolitions to the original house carried out to attach them. This is not an impossible task to put right, and indeed should include the removal of other remaining NHS accretions

**The tower** profile has lost its access turret and some of its castellation. This could be restored **The loggia** on the west elevation has been taken down. It could be rebuilt, and would re-enlive the surrounding elevation. Several renderings of the original house are available to be used as a guide to the original.

**The Dutch gables** of the original house were simplified when they were damaged by storm or bomb-blast. They would not be difficult to restore to their original shape.

Many of the elegant, tall **Tudor-style chimney stacks** remain. These were designed to contribute interest to the romantic profile of the house and its visually attractive skyline above the foreground trees. Several retain their original chimneypots, and as has been shown only recently at Hampton Court, such brick stacks are capable of conservation repair where there is the will. The work needed at Athlone House is much less elaborate than was carried out there.

**The external roof tile bands** remain, as do several of the missing filigree ridge tiles. I personally saw several of them stored under the main stair inside the house during an early visit.

The later-added **circular extension to the ballroom**, with its fine fish-scale copper roof and curved windows is a finely crafted piece of work, has lasted well, and should be repaired. Some purists decry it, but it is a part of the house.

The external elevations retain many of the features that were liberally included in them to add visual interest. Carved medallions bearing portrait heads enhance several of the gables; there is a fine copper sundial on the South façade; there is much decorative metalwork, including a wrought iron weathervane, with a grasshopper motif, and various small aedicules and turrets adorn the upper parts of the building. All are eminently suitable for conservation.

#### **Internally**

The chief feature of the interiors is, in my opinion the very fine pitch-pine grand staircase that leads from the Hall to the First Floor. This generously-proportioned stair, with its carved balustrade rises in the special stairhouse building that Salomons designed for it. It is contained in a pointed-arch, barrel vaulted roof with carved beam-work, there is a fine large Gothic window on the main landing, and the whole is illuminated also by clerestory windows at high level.

Much of the original Victorian interior detailing has been lost, although there remains some good carved linen-fold panelling. In the hallway to the main garden door, the ceiling corbels bear the initials EB of the original owner. It would not be appropriate to seek to recreate the Victorian interior now long gone, and that is not advocated.

**4.00** For many years the public have not been permitted access near or into Athlone House, and few people therefore actually know what is there. Several architectural historical experts have referred to it as being of no great architectural merit, but I do not believe they are all entirely disinterested parties. The Highgate Society has a large collection of excellent photographs of all the features I have listed above, and of many more that remain hidden, or that I have failed to mention. It would not be appropriate for me to reproduce them here, but

they would, I am sure be made available to you should you care to ask my colleague Mr Michael Hammerson.

I believe that all who have seen what is actually still there at Athlone House would agree that to permit the destruction of all this beautiful craftsmanship would be a major error of judgement. Just as Scott's St Pancras Hotel, which was designed in the same architectural idiom and (1868-74) in the same period, fell into desuetude, has been rescued, and is now highly extolled as the model of good conservation practice (it even features on the cover of government conservation policy documents and on the cover of Pevsner's *North London*), so also Athlone House merits conservation for future generations.

**5.00** The intentions of the s106 planning agreement that was freely entered into by the title-holders and yourselves have not changed. Neither have the circumstances. The terms of that agreement remain reasonable, and in my opinion you would be correct in resisting any attempt now to introduce arguments of comparative cost arising from considerations of profitability. Such matters were not considered relevant by Parliament under section 106 of the Housing and General Purposes Act under which this particular agreement was made, as they tend to negate the fundamental public purpose Parliament had in view... The building remains capable of restoration to a useful purpose as it has done since first it was acquired by your authority on behalf of the public.

I have set out here the reasons why I believe you should not falter in your hitherto firm resolve to defend Athlone House. This application should be refused.

Yours faithfully,

