

Athlone House (app ref: 2013/7242/P)

Supplementary Note in respect of Ecology, Trees and Landscaping

19th May 2014

Introduction

This note has been prepared further to Charles Thuaire's email of 16 April, which seeks clarification in respect of changes to the proposals in relation to trees, ecology and the historic landscape from the previous application/appeal. It also asks for clarification on the concerns raised from residents at Caenwood Court to the proposed extended tree screen adjacent to their boundary. Our client's consultants Catherine Bickmore and Natasha Newbury have considered the issues that were raised and a fairly full summary is set out as follows:

1. Ecology

- 1.1. The 2013 report has been updated to some degree in order to deal with surveys of habitat, bats and reptiles, planning policy changes, and modifications to the landscape proposals. Overall, the changes are not significantly different from 2009. The overall concepts of mitigation and enhancement still apply.
- 1.2. The survey findings largely reflect those of the 2007/9 surveys, although there are some differences. Some of the paths have become invaded by ruderals and bramble, with some areas of the acid grassland slightly less diverse and extensive. The former bare ground to the north of the house (previously an extension of the house which was demolished and subsequently used for construction) and a small area adjacent to the entrance is now grassland. The house was still being used as a day roost for bats (by a common pipistrelle). The grass snake population appears to have expanded its range eastwards to the north of the house.
- 1.3. The main changes to the effects of the design proposals are as follows:
 - 1.3.1. The proposed modification and slight extension of the existing (Pulhamite) pond in the western part of the site within an area of secondary woodland with restoration works, including dredging and re-profiling the banks in the southern part of the pond. The existing pond is to be connected by a small waterfall/ravine to a new pond created on its east side.
 - 1.3.2. The new pond will be semi-natural in character to provide benefit to wildlife, but associated construction will require mitigation to avoid harm to the grass snake. This will result in a small loss of secondary woodland/scrub and bracken. However, in the long-term it will benefit wildlife, including protected species such as the grass snake and an increase in wetland habitat.
 - 1.3.3. The design of the proposed pond to the east of the house has been slightly extended on its eastern and southern sides but remains semi-formal with a water detention function integrated to benefit wildlife.
 - 1.3.4. The removal of some additional shrubs and scattered ornamental trees in the lawn to the west and south of the house (and immediately to the east of the Sunk Garden) will result in a slightly

larger area of acid (restored) grassland. This will open up views towards the Sunk (rose) garden and enables an increase in the area of acid grassland to benefit biodiversity.

1.3.5. The removal of the new area of outgrown amenity grassland to the north of the house will require mitigation to avoid harm to the grass snake.

1.4. Overall, the development will have a positive effect on the nature conservation interest of the site and the Hampstead Heath Site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation.

2. **Landscape history**

2.1. The report has been updated and includes additional more recently issued information with respect to archival material: Gertrude Jeykll, at the request of Guthrie, produced planting plans in 1920 for the Sunk Garden and Iris Garden. In the light of these plans, the overall historic landscape interest of the grounds is slightly increased.

2.2. In the western part of the grounds the dropping well will become a new feature of the landscape proposals for the additional pond. The new pond will be designed to enable circulation of water between it and the Pulhamite pond as part of the restoration of the Pulhamite waterfall.

2.3. The landscape proposals include the dredging of the Pulhamite pond including slight enlargement /bank re-profiling in the southern part away from the rockery area, and removal of volunteer trees on the eastern side and planting of additional shrubs along the western (boundary) side of the pond.

2.4. The low walls round the Sunk Garden will be restored as will the raised wall on the west side. Outgrown shrubbery on the eastern and southern sides of the sunken garden will be removed.

2.5. An orchard to the west of the Sunk Garden will be in keeping with the historic landscape structure. It has been formalised with rows of fruit trees. The previous scheme showed informal, randomly planted trees.

3. **Arboriculture**

3.1. The tree survey has been updated to comply with the updated BS 5837:2012 and updated proposals. The proposals retain significant trees around the house. Those to be removed are small sized and low value trees, which would be replaced with other trees elsewhere as part of the landscape proposals.

3.2. During the period of works (demolition and construction) tree protection around the House will follow similar principles as in the previous application, except that a group of birch trees (901,902,903) will be removed and replaced by a cedar. More recent planting along the eastern boundary with Caenwood Court will also be protected during the period of works.

4. Landscape proposals

The following additional changes have been made to the landscape proposals since the last appeal:

- 4.1. The landscape proposals to the north of the house have been revised to create a forecourt with a central fountain feature. (This was previously a courtyard where the space was partially surrounded by wings of the house.)
- 4.2. The boundary planting at Caenwood Court has been altered since the appeal scheme; the main plant species have been changed from *Pinus nigra* to *Quercus ilex*. In addition, the extent of the previously proposed tall boundary trees have been reduced to retain open views for Caenwood Court residents towards the Heath across the southern part of the garden.
- 4.3. The pond on the east side of the house will be enlarged.
- 4.4. Screen planting has been added to the southern boundary to reduce views into the house from the 'Donated land' now forming part of Hampstead Heath.
- 4.5. Some of the existing trees within the lawn to the south of the house have been removed due to the health and condition of the trees, with some replacements. 'Insignificant' trees to the immediate north of the house along the boundary have been reduced in number with more appropriate species chosen.
- 4.6. Woodland paths to the north of the site have been formalised.
- 4.7. Wildflower planting has been added around the pond to the east of the house.
- 4.8. The external steps leading from the west side of the house have been altered.
- 4.9. An enclosed refuse store has been added at the entrance gate which adheres to the Council's waste regulations.

5. Objection from Caenwood Court Residents

- 5.1. As you are aware, we have consulted with the Caenwood Court residents in relation to our client's proposals. Various aspects of the boundary planting were discussed, including (i) the choice of pine species; (ii) retention of borrowed views from certain Caenwood Court apartments across the southern part of the Athlone grounds; and (iii) the potential to extend proposed temporary screening further to the north during the construction phase. (The latter is not included in our proposals.)
- 5.2. One resident asked whether the pine trees originally proposed would shed a large number of needles which would blow into Caenwood Court. Withers therefore explained to the residents' agent in September 2013 that the *Pinus nigra* species had been chosen because it sheds fewer needles than, for example, the Scots pine (very likely the species that the resident had in mind). The number of pine trees has been reduced in comparison to that in the previous appeal scheme.
- 5.3. Our client's landscape architects revised the boundary planting proposed for the southern part of the boundary with Caenwood Court in order to protect

views from certain apartments towards the Heath. It was suggested by the residents that this might be achieved by 'breaking up' the proposed tree line. This has been achieved in the proposals by: (a) varying the species at that part of the boundary (to make it more like the Heath); (b) ensuring that the height of the boundary trees is reduced and (c) scattering the trees at varying distances from the southern end of boundary.

- 5.4. Having made these revisions, we were surprised and disappointed to receive the objection from Quod on behalf of the Caenwood Court residents, which came as a surprise after positive pre-application consultations, and given our client's willingness to engage with them.
- 5.5. Withers have responded to the residents' company and to the Caenwood Court residents and invited the company directors to a further meeting with our client's landscape architects, and the residents to a private viewing of the proposed design.
- 5.6. We will continue to engage fully in this dialogue.