

Attention: Michael O'Sullivan
My reference: 14066
Camden reference: R13/127

RE: contract/Various Estate Enhancements

Rear of Christchurch Hill/Grove Place

Dear Michael,

I left you a phone message this morning. I've spoken to you in the past, and you always make things so clear and you are so reasonable, so I thought it best to forward you these two letters I have sent to Camden Planning, with a note to you as they have not yet responded to my concerns.

Back in 2013, I got a letter alerting me to enhancements to the rear of our building. I think the plans sounded really good - modest and would definitely make things nicer. The contribution being asked of me as a leaseholder was roughly £500, my projected contribution to the overall budget of roughly £16K, which would cover a combination of planting and a safe children's playground. So far, so good!

But recently, I received a very long report from the Leaseholders and Tenants' Association here at Christchurch Hill and Grove Place. It included a copy of the new budget from a private firm - with an estimated budget of £65K!

From £16K to £65K in a matter of a year - yikes - you will understand why I am now really worried.

The plans seem excessive - with a climbing wall, which will be unsightly, and possibly dangerous from a health and safety point of view ... the cost of the climbing wall, which is of no interest to most of the tenants in the block, and not something I want to use or look at. The cost of the wall and the soft landing would be around £6K. Also, the washing lines in use now are perfectly good, but the private firm wants to replace them with mechanical ones which will cost £4K. Both the climbing wall and the new clotheslines are totally unnecessary. I am really worried the costs and the plans are escalating out of control, and the result will be an inner-city-style playground not at all in keeping with the natural beauty and traditional style of Hampstead Village and Hampstead Heath, and an overemphasis on a children's playground without regard for the peace and tranquility of the residents here.

I am thinking especially of the older residents, who would so appreciate more greenery and wooden benches, and generally, a tranquil settling. The original plans, which were more modest, struck the perfect balance.

Are you aware of the budget skyrocketing from £16K to £65K? Will this mean a succession of hefty bills for leaseholders like myself? Do you know how this larger project will be funded? I am really worried that the leaseholders will be held to ransom over these plans. Not all of us have small children, and if we were obliged to contribute, then it would be in the spirit of community. But I think the original quote of £500 would be my limit on the whole project. Beyond that, I do think it would be

unfair - and unreasonable, and could cause a serious divide between council tenants and leaseholders.

It puts me in a very awkward position, because I do not wish to alienate my neighbours! But I am bound to be more worried about the costs than the council tenants, who won't be facing the hefty bills leaseholders must pay. I had one bad experience with the Council a couple of years ago when a neighbour's roof was leaking and I got a bill for £900. When I protested, the Council basically wrote back to say I had to pay it or be thrown out.

So, I am very worried of course it will be great for the rear of the building to look a bit better. It looks like a 1970s wasteland at the moment - a sea of concrete with no sensitivity at all to the fact that this block is nestled within one of the greenest and most beautiful parts of Hampstead. Can you have a look at the most recent plans, and let me know how I can stress a greener and more modest approach to the alterations?

Best wishes,

Martha Richler

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **martha richler** < >

Date: Mon, Jul 14, 2014 at 9:03 AM

Subject: Fwd: Application Ref: 2014/4059/P

To: planning@camden.gov.uk

Dear Camden Planning,

I have sent two letters (see below) regarding the alterations to the rear of Grove Place and Christchurch Hill.

I have not received any acknowledgement from you - I am getting really worried about the growing budget and unnecessary expenses and works planned - please see below.

I oppose the climbing wall and the new washing lines and the excessive costs for lighting, and generally, the lack of sympathy with the natural environment and traditional style of Camden.

As a leaseholder I do not feel it is fair to be billed for works I do not want.

And, I oppose the style - multi-coloured plastics and generally tacky materials - and the emphasis on making a children's playground when all I hoped for was a prettier and more serene space.

This is not fair and not at all what I want and others have also expressed shock at the original budget tripling. It's all fine for Council tenants asking for things but leaseholders have to foot the bill and it's not fair. We should at least make the alterations more modest and within budget.

We should also respect the Hampstead style - natural beauty, beautiful trees, peace and quiet, natural light, natural materials.

Martha Richler
flat 10, 59 Christchurch Hill

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From: Martha Richler < >
Date: Mon, Jul 14, 2014 at 8:58 AM
Subject: Fwd: Application Ref: 2014/4059/P
To:

Begin forwarded message:

From: Martha Richler < >
Date: 14 July 2014 08:56:53 GMT+01:00
To: planning@camden.gov.uk
Subject: Fwd: Application Ref: 2014/4059/P

Dear Camden Planning,

I sent these comments on the 3rd of July, regarding the changes to the rear of Christchurch Hill and Grove Place, ref 2014/4059/P.

I have since seen the projected budget, as outlined by the private firm consulted by Camden Council. It is really worrying me, because whereas the original budget was £20,000, they have budgeted more than three times the original budget - upwards of £65,000.

As a leaseholder, I am very concerned about the share of costs that will be levied on myself. I am an artist with a very modest income - last year, it fell below £2,000. This year, I have managed to secure intermittent teaching work, but the graphic novel I finished was for a publisher who went bankrupt, so I will not be paid for my book, which I spent two years working on. I chose an ex-council flat because I knew the charges would be reasonable. So far, since I bought this flat a few years ago, roofing repairs were done to a neighbouring block, and I was sent a bill of over £800. The scaffolding was sitting there for months, dripping with rain - I think the actual work took a day or two, but the scaffolding was there for two months. Anyway, it was a hefty bill, and a shock and surprise, and quite upsetting.

Now, with the alterations to the communal area, I am very concerned about the costs.

Examining the budget, I think there are some alterations which are completely unnecessary.

The climbing wall is incredibly ugly - this is a natural conservation area and we love Hampstead for its natural beauty. The climbing wall with its tacky multi-coloured footholds looks simply awful. It is also a health and safety issue. The communal area is unsupervised. The cushioned area and the climbing wall are totally unnecessary and not part of the original plan just to tidy up the area and have pretty planting. It would save £7,000 not to have the climbing wall. I do not want the climbing wall and do not wish to contribute to it and do not want to have to look at it.

The new washing lines are completely unnecessary. We are happy with the washing lines that are there. That would save another £4,000.

I think the Council needs to look again at the budget and simplify the plans. All we are asking for is some raised beds and pretty planting and to tidy up the area.

Also, the cost of the rails - of approximately £4000 just to have rails for two short flights of steps - is completely over the top.

I do not want to contribute to this if it is going to spiral out of control. Yes, a play area is a very nice idea, but it does not have to be a playground on par with schools. All we need is a small play area and the rest should be a tranquil and happy setting for all the residents, including older residents who are not strong or well enough to walk very far. They are the ones who deserve at least as much care and attention.

The excessive lighting also worries us and looks very expensive. What would look handsome would be three traditional Victorian streetlights. But to have lighting as if it were an airport with lights at the base and on the ground and to the side and all the rest seems so over the top and adding to the expense of the project.

We need to focus on what it is to live in Hampstead - the beauty of the natural environment and the trees and flowers. It should be a peaceful communal area and does not have to look like an inner-city playground. The plastics and artificial materials and multi-colours are going to spoil the natural environment and will look tacky in six months' time.

I am really upset about this and how the plans have become overly elaborate, expensive, and tasteless.

Especially for leaseholders who have to pay an enormous bill for works I, for one, do not want - it is not fair.

I wanted simply a prettier environment but in keeping with Hampstead tradition.

Best wishes,

and please see earlier correspondence below, before I saw the budget and plans for a climbing wall and new washing lines, costing thousands of pounds!

Martha Richler, leaseholder, flat 10, 59 Christchurch Hill, London NW3 1JJ

Begin forwarded message:

From: Martha Richler < >
Date: 3 July 2014 15:01:34 GMT+01:00
To: planning@camden.gov.uk
Subject: Application Ref: 2014/4059/P

Address:
Rear of Christchurch Hill and Grove Place
London
NW3 1JP

Proposed Work:
Alterations to rear garden area including erection of pergola, installation of traversing wall and safety surfacing, external lighting, and erection of metal gates to Christchurch Hill entrance.

My name:
Martha Richler

Leaseholder.

My address:
Flat 10, 59 Christchurch Hill
London
NW3 1JJ

Phone number:

Comments:

I'm so delighted the Council has agreed to improve the area behind our building at Christchurch Hill and Grove Place. It is very dated and such a waste, given the wonderful location, and the number of people who would enjoy this space if it were less harsh. The truth is, I wish we could lift all of the concrete, and turn it into a beautiful grove of simple lawn, paths and trees - much as Hampstead Heath looks. I am a little jealous of the beautiful landscaping around the estates on Well Walk and further down Christchurch Hill on the corner of Well Walk. I am sorry that the plans - which I instigated with letters to you when I moved in, with suggestions and drawings for a transformation of the concreted area - are going to be so limited to the interests of the children. I do appreciate a play area is important, but can we also include the older residents, who would so appreciate wooden benches and a peaceful place to sit and read and rest?

I am a little worried that the plans are too focussed on children's play areas and don't really include those older residents and the working people in the building who would love to sit and have a peaceful time. I think I am also concerned that without mature

trees, there is too much harsh sun out in the concreted area and no shelter from the sun and the rain. The softening effect of large, mature trees would absolutely transform the area. With the Church next-door and its trees, it would add a classic and majestic style to the building. I am so worried the children's play area will look tacky - I have seen some very beautiful Council playgrounds, for instance, in Victoria Park, where beautiful wood and rope are used. The natural materials are so handsome and age beautifully. I am hoping there won't be large plastic and multi-coloured objects that will look tacky.

I think in general there needs to be a balance struck between landscaping and softening and a greener effect, and safe places for children to play. The gates are a fantastic idea, as I have tutored children in the area behind the building and worried about leaving them alone for even a minute. Gates would be just super, and prevent teenagers from hanging out late at night, and littering, and of course, will keep us all safe.

I love the roses that have matured and are in the raised beds. Can we preserve them?

I hope we can encourage residents to be tidy with their toys. Maybe there could be a large square pen for the toys to be kept at night. It does look kind of like a slum at the moment, a sort of inner-city scene that you wouldn't expect in Hampstead. I'm sure that every single resident would love a softening and the hard 1970s concrete and ugly functional railings really do look so dated, and there is a danger that if a few raised beds, a pagoda, and so on are simply plastered on top, it will look like one of those public spaces between office buildings, and not really a parkland, as it ought to be.

Can we be sure the lighting will be classic London lampposts, and not harsh Estate lights - that would be just awful, as our bedrooms face the rear.

Also, in time, this renovation will look dated, whereas the landscaping of the Heath never dates - it is forever classic and elegant, and will grow more beautiful with time.

I just wish we could have soft areas of grass and trees, and not have such a sea of ugly concrete. I would help in any way I can - man-hours, design, contributions - anything! I really do feel so passionately about this.

Best wishes

Martha Richler