



The Heath & Hampstead Society

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The Society examines all Planning Applications relating to Hampstead, and assesses them for their impact on conservation and on the local environment.

To London Borough of Camden, Development Control Team

Planning Ref: 2014/6845/P

Address: Royal Free Hospital, Pond Street, NW3

Description: New Institute of Immunology.

Case Officer: Charles Thuaire

Date 24 November 2014

This is, plainly, one of the most important buildings to be constructed in Hampstead in recent years. It is not only large (more than 8000 sq.m), forming an extension to the area's currently largest building--the Royal Free Hospital-- but prominently sited in the centre of Hampstead close to the Grade 1 listed building, St, Stephens Church. For these reasons, the application has attracted much public interest.

We recognise that it is also planned to be a building whose function will have national, indeed international, importance. The research work to be carried out in it on immunology will have a significant impact on medical knowledge.

We, and many others, would have preferred to see such a large new building sited elsewhere. The Royal Free Hospital site has been developed over the 40 plus years of its existence without any coherent master plan, and the site is already grossly over-developed and congested. It cannot function as efficiently as such a major hospital should, for this reason. However, it exists, whether we like it or not, and this has to be accepted. It also has to be accepted that this Institute building has been planned over some years, and is inextricably bound to the Royal Free. We know that it could not be sited elsewhere at this point.

Our comments and concerns can be expressed:

1. Siting and form

Notwithstanding our concerns over car parking (see 5 below), we think that its form and height, creating a screen between St Stephens Church and Rosslyn Hill and the crude unsightly bulk of the main hospital building, is positive, and would form an elegant backdrop for Hampstead Green. Its cranked plan echoes that of the old Hampstead General Hospital buildings that stood on this site.

2. Relationship with St Stephens Church

St. Stephens is listed Grade 1 by English Heritage, not only because it is S.S.Teulon's largest and best surviving building, but because of its hugely strong, robust character.

Its architecture is finely proportioned, with powerful detailing, but also massively eccentric for its time. Few buildings in London can stand up for itself better, and although due deference to its status and style is appropriate, it does not need over-fussy protection; it will continue to dominate the scene anyway.

The new building is at least 25 metres away from St Stephens, and downhill from it, and we do not think there is any danger of it harming its setting.

We hope that the choice of new brickwork will reflect something of the sombreness of St Stephens.

3. Relationship with other neighbours

a. The School. This stands quite close to the new building, and adjoining the pathway leading up to Rosslyn Hill, and we are concerned that the school could suffer loss of privacy by being overlooked from the building's upper floors, and noise and tobacco smoke pollution from what may be large numbers of people using the terraced seats on its West side adjoining the pathway. We call for better screening of the school's boundaries to alleviate this.

b. The listed buildings in Pond Street. These have always faced a busy, noisy road, and the main hospital building, and are not likely to be harmed greatly by the new building, although overshadowing will occur.

4. Loss of the existing Heath Strange Garden

We were very concerned over this when we were shown preliminary designs some months ago. This quiet secluded space is well-used by many visitors to the hospital. We are pleased to see it re-provided in a location with good public access, over the Linac rooms below, provided that there is sufficient depth of soil for the planting of trees--that is not clear from the Section drawings.

5. Loss of public car parking

This is a major concern, affecting many people visiting the hospital, whether as outpatients attending clinics, as carriers of A&E patients, or as in-patients visitors. Whilst it is true that fair (not good) access to public transport exists, this is not helpful to many people who have a legitimate reason to visit. Transport links from many parts of London, some not distant from South End Green, are tortuous and extremely time-consuming, and disabled people, who cannot use public transport, are left with no alternative to car travel. Those bringing casualties to A&E plainly cannot use public transport.

It is not clear whether hospital staff, or hospital contractors, are free to use the car park. If so, then public access is severely restricted. These, and many other issues, are not properly addressed in the Travel Report.

We think that authoritative research is needed to examine all matters related to public access and car parking. This should be available and consulted before final decisions on car parking are made.

The fact is, that the existing car park, for 91 cars, is itself much too small, and cannot cope with demand. The other car parking provisions in the hospital forecourt, are minimal, and never available except at night.

The provision of disabled spaces is particularly deficient; there is only a handful to serve a hospital of this size.

This is now to be reduced by 42 spaces, to a total on site of 58. This is a scandalous underprovision at a major hospital, and certainly not properly dealt with in the Transport Report. Most supermarkets provide their customers with more than this, with much the same constraints on site availability.

Irrespective of any conclusions reached on access research (see above), we call for a redesign of this aspect of the project, so that, at the very least, the existing total is re-provided—perhaps at an additional basement level.

We also call for a much higher proportion of whatever spaces that are provided to be for disabled users. Where else but at a hospital can the need for disabled parking be more urgent?

6. Basement Impact Assessment

This BIA is disappointing, with little or no reference to subsoil protection for adjoining buildings. No Burland Scale assessments are made; only a vague statement (para 6.2): “... ground movements should thus be kept within tolerable limits.” This is extraordinarily vague, and not good enough.

We are naturally concerned about subsoil movement effects on St Stephens Church, which, though 25 metres distant, is founded on Victorian-style brick foundations, and could be affected by vibration, subsoil water drainage, or other disturbances. The land slopes down appreciably from St Stephens towards the hospital. The church tower stands closest to the site.

The area is known for subsoil irregularity, and underground water disturbance; why else is it called Pond Street?

We call for more work to be done on this; we must be 100% secure on this potentially vital issue.

7. Construction Management Plan

We had been given the impression from earlier discussions that all site traffic access would be from Rowland Hill Street; this would be acceptable. However, the CMP calls for a one-way traffic route through the site, entering in Rowland Hill Street (Gate 1) but exiting via the main hospital entrance in Pond Street (Gate 2). We think this would lead to serious congestion at Gate 2, especially since this is not only the main access point for short-term hospital traffic (taxis etc) but also ambulances. This junction is already congested and unsatisfactory; site traffic would make it intolerable.

There also do not seem to be satisfactory provisions for pedestrian movement in the area of Gate 2. This is a major pedestrian access point to the hospital.

There is also reference to the desirability of establishing an incoming lorry holding point. Good idea—but where? We need to know; it must not be in an adjoining residential street.

The Camden Guide for Contractors Working in Camden is included. This is an excellent document (which plainly few contractors have read in view of their general behaviour). We think it, together with registration with the Considerate Contractors Scheme, should be made a condition of this, or any other, permission relating to this site.