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Sent: 23 February 2015 17:58
To: Whittingham, Gideon; Planning
Subject: Highgate Road Schools - 2014/7683/P

We wanted to take account of the arguments used by the developers at the Inspectors Enquiry into the ASF Garage before making these brief comments.

This was always going to be a scheme fraught with problems. In particular a modest budget and continuing to operate the school during redevelopment inevitably meant building mostly on 'virgin' land hitherto accepted as being inappropriate for development.

Building a very substantial school building close to the neighbouring Mansions (which contribute positively to the Conservation Area) all along the southern boundary not only risks the amenity of neighbouring residents in the usual planning sense, it precludes the maintenance of a buffer between significantly different land use types which would normally be thought essential. The continuous bulk of the proposed building makes this considerably worse.

The defence of 'operational necessity' cannot be applied to the 'sixth form centre' building. It is a new and welcome facility which could be built elsewhere on the schools' site after older buildings have been removed and, for all the half-hearted reasons advanced by the applicants, would impact hugely less than existing building to be removed whether viewed from the Heath looking towards the school or from the school building looking out to the Heath.

The case against significant building in or near the green corridor along Highgate Road has been made by the Council, with the support of the Advisory Committee, over many years and most recently during the ASF Garage appeal Enquiry on the 18th. The Council has always emphasised the importance of protecting the whole green corridor rather than just that protected by 1931 Squares Act and particularly the areas which front the thirty or so mostly Grade II* listed buildings. Arguments applicable to protecting the setting of listed buildings apply equally to the protected squares. This was central to the argument at the ASF Garage Enquiry where the developers are hoping to be able truncate the corridor earlier. Whilst what is proposed isn't a three story building it is arguably in an even more sensitive location given its proximity to the point where the corridor joins the Heath. We also have the same historic building line argument which, in the case of the schools, was South Grove and where the main Parliament Hill School is to be found. The argument of balancing gains doesn't apply to the proposed sixth form centre because it could be located elsewhere on the site and outside the green corridor.

The views are 'protected' by the Council's CAAMS for the Conservation Area and are with the local and London plans viewing corridors around the Heath.

It is clear that the Architects responsible for the scheme are aware of the importance of the green corridor, even offering to enhance it elsewhere on the site but smothering a somewhat boxy building with shrubbery doesn't begin to make it acceptable. This is particularly so since the history of schools maintaining such shrubbery isn't promising and would require a revenue stream over decades at a time when revenue streams are hard to come by.

Given the development pressures on the area, it must be obvious that developers will take as precedents the arguments used to defend not only an encroachment but building virtually to the edge of Highgate Road.

This isn't an argument about the desirability of renewing the schools, there is strong support for this in the area, it is about the need to this in a way which preserves and enhances the Conservation Area.