



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: 2014/7847/P

Address: 1-3 Arkwright Road, St Anthony's School, NW3

Description: Ch of Use; school expansion.

Case Officer: Olivier Nelson

Date 5 February 2015

We oppose this application, on a number of grounds:

1. Excessive concentration of schools in Hampstead

For many years, Hampstead has been a magnet for school development in North London, overwhelmingly in the private sector. This has now reached the point of over-development, to the great detriment of the local community.

Some statistics:

Within the small area of NW3, there are (2015) a total of **39** schools, with a total school roll of over **10,250** students. There are 6 LA Community Schools (1 special); 2 Free Schools; 5 Voluntary Aided Schools; 1 Academy ; and 25 Private Schools.

The 6 LA Schools, serving the local population, have a total roll of 2570 students (i.e. 25.07% only of the total).

Of the 39 total number of schools in the area, 5 are Secondary, 10 are Primary/Secondary, and 24 are Primary only.

Some 25 years ago, when this Society, together with our neighbours the Belsize Residents Association, campaigned to try and reduce the schoolrun traffic harm on the area (see 3 below), the total school roll was assessed then at approximately 7000. Today's total of 10,250 shows an increase over this period of no less than **47%**. In other words, uncontrolled growth has been permitted, almost all of it in the private sector.

This concentration of schools in Hampstead and its near neighbouring areas, is completely disproportionate, unsustainable, and justifies restraint, in order to mitigate (although not eliminate) its harmful effects.

In Planning terms, this could be achieved by enforcing a cap on school rolls, with the emphasis on Primary schools, the source of most of the damage.

We call for such a cap to be included in your reasons for refusal to the application.

2. No local benefit arising

Although some locally-based students attend Hampstead schools, it is clear, especially from the nature and extent of traffic congestion during schoolrun times, that the overwhelming majority of students live distant from the area; their parents being attracted by the Hampstead social cachet. Hampstead residents have to bear the cost and significant inconvenience of hosting these “cuckoos in the nest”. This has led to considerable resentment. No compensating local benefits exist, and the situation is widely considered inequitable and unfair.

3. Traffic congestion and parking

This is by far the most conspicuously inconvenient and unjust consequence of the over-proliferation of schools in the area. During termtime schoolrun periods—roughly 8-00 to 9-30 a.m and 3-00 to 5-00 p.m.. traffic virtually grinds to a halt in all the areas where schools are concentrated.

The epicentre of this congestion is the corner of Fitzjohns Avenue and Arkwright Road: the site of St Anthony’s School, the applicant of these proposals.

The congestion is caused by the volume of vehicles delivering or fetching students, their movement and in particular their parking. There is widespread disregard of parking regulations, not helped by an apparently routine absence of traffic wardens. Driving courtesies are non-existent, and tempers frequently raised. Local residents are obstructed and harassed by schoolrun drivers, who seem to think they have priority and rights not available to others.

The increases in air pollution that have occurred by the increased volumes of schoolrun traffic are dangerous. This is made worse by the fact that vehicles are at a standstill in traffic for so long. This unnecessary extra pollution is affecting the health of our children.

During the 1990’s, considerable progress was made, by negotiation with us and our neighbours the Belsize Residents Association, to bring some sense of order into the matter, and schools were persuaded to adopt Travel Plans, encouraging non-motor vehicle transport, cycling, walking, car-sharing and similar measures. A start was made on introducing school busses. Above all, the insidious practice of granting special parking permits to schoolrun drivers was to be reduced and (by 1995?) entirely terminated. A cap on school rolls was also introduced—probably on a voluntary basis-- and statistics gathered on rolls as they existed at that time. Substantial and visible improvements resulted, and local residents no doubt thought the problem had been solved.

Subsequent events have, of course, proved them wrong. School rolls rocketed (see 1 above), traffic congestion increased again, and we are now back where we started.

However, it is still now within the power of the Planning and Highways/Parking departments to regain what has been lost, by:

- a. imposing caps on school rolls by S.106 Agreements, to prevent further expansion,
- b. eliminating entirely all special parking concessions to schoolrun drivers, not available to other categories of road users,
- c. enforcing rigorously the traffic and parking regulations, now routinely flouted

4. Loss of residential use.

The applicants gloss over the loss of 3 residential units by suggesting that their proposals are of a higher priority. We strongly dispute this. The need for maximising residential floorspace in Camden is still very strong, and we categorically disagree that this development benefits the community.

We therefore support a refusal on this ground alone.

5. Overdevelopment of the site

Aside from the issues raised above, we say that the provision of open space and garden area is insufficient and inappropriate for school use, especially for nursery school-age children. It is quite inadequate for 140 children. There are no trees of any size, or provisions for natural shade.

This is the consequence of trying to squeeze too much development onto the site, no doubt for economic reasons.

6. Consultations

The applicants make much of “local consultations”. Some may have taken place, but not with us.

7. Precedent

If permission is granted for this **major** expansion of a Hampstead school, it will no doubt be followed by others from some of the remaining 38 schools; a significant and dangerous precedent will have been created.

The economic value of school-space in Hampstead has already led to the 47% expansion that has already occurred, recently.

Enough is enough. Please refuse.