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# Planning Statement

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Athlone House, Hampstead Lane, London

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## 1. Introduction

1.1. This statement has been prepared in support of the planning application submitted to the London Borough of Camden relating to Athlone House, Hampstead Lane, London.

1.2. Full planning permission is sought for the following development:

*“restoration and extension of Athlone House, and use as a single dwelling house; restoration of the historic part of the grounds and some remodelling of other parts; new vehicular/pedestrian entrance from Hampstead Lane; refurbishment and extension of Caen Cottage, and use as a separate but related dwelling house; refurbishment of the Gate House and use as a separate but related dwelling house; and creation of a summer house on part of the site of a disused tennis court within the grounds.”*

1.3. Athlone House has a chequered planning history, with two unsuccessful attempts having been made in recent years to redevelop it with a modern large house. This planning application seeks to achieve what the Council and the principal local amenity groups have been seeking for many years; namely, the restoration of the existing building and its conversion back to a dwelling house, with only a modest extension necessary to bring it up to modern standards.

### Supporting Documents

1.4. This planning statement outlines the application proposals in more detail and relates them to local, regional and national planning policy. This planning statement should be read in conjunction with a number of specialist reports, as follows:

- Arboricultural Implications Assessment – Catherine Bickmore Associates Ltd;
- Design and Access Statement – SHH Architecture;
- Heritage Statement – Dr Mervyn Miller;
- Ecology Statement – Catherine Bickmore Associates Ltd;
- Historic Landscape Statement – Catherine Bickmore Associates Ltd;
- Structural Report and Construction Sequence Methodology – engineersHRW;
- Sustainability and Energy Statement – Slender Winter Partnership;
- Basement Impact Assessment – Geotechnical and Environmental Associates;
- Flood Risk Assessment – Price and Myers;
- Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment – JFA Environmental Planning;
- Transport Statement – Motion;
- CDM Pre-Construction Information – Approved Inspector Services;
- Construction Management Plan – Walter Lily; and
- Acoustic Report – Hann Tucker.

## 2. Site Context and Background

### The Site

- 2.1. Athlone House is situated on the south side of Hampstead Lane, directly opposite Highgate School's playing fields. The site, as it now exists, extends to approximately 2.88 hectares (7.10 acres). It is bounded to the west and south by Hampstead Heath, and to the east by the Caenwood Court apartments. The building is located on a plateau, from which the land falls in all directions. It is well screened by a wall and trees along the Hampstead Lane boundary, and by extensive tree cover on the other sides, though there are long views, particularly of the distinctive roof and tower, from viewpoints in the surrounding area.
- 2.2. Until the mid-2000s, the site was larger. Subsequently, the Caenwood Court apartments have been built on the eastern part, and a strip of land to the south was donated to the Heath as part of a Section 106 arrangement associated with a 2005 planning permission. The remaining Athlone House site also includes Caen Cottage and the Gatehouse: two small dwelling houses located close to the northern boundary, both of which have been vacant for many years. Athlone House and the two small dwelling houses currently share a vehicular/pedestrian access with Caenwood Court, an arrangement which is not entirely satisfactory due to congestion in the shared apron.
- 2.3. Athlone House is an eclectic Victorian building, once flamboyant, but extensively remodelled during many years of institutional use, and is now derelict. It is neither statutorily nor locally listed (despite having been submitted for listing on more than one occasion). The bulk of the grounds lie to the west of the building, and are of some historical interest. They are locally listed. Full details of the site's historic evolution are included within the supporting Historic Statement.

### Surrounding Area

- 2.4. The area to the north and east/south-east is mainly residential, some of the houses being substantial; whereas the area to the south-west and west is Hampstead Heath. The site is located about 1km from Highgate High Street, which is to the east.
- 2.5. Highgate Underground station is about 1km away, and the site is served by regular buses (there being bus stops immediately outside the site, on Hampstead Lane).
- 2.6. The site sits within LB Camden's Highgate Conservation Area, and adjacent to LB Haringey's Highgate Conservation Area. It is within an area of Metropolitan Open Land, which covers the whole of Hampstead Heath. To the west, on the Heath, lies Kenwood House (a Grade I listed building) and several associated buildings and structures (some of which are independently listed), and the Kenwood estate (a Grade II\* registered landscape). A little distance to the east lies Beechwood House, a Grade 2 listed mansion within extensive grounds.

## 3. Planning History

- 3.1. Athlone House occupies the site of an earlier building, Fitzroy House, built c.1760 with grounds (reputedly) landscaped by Capability Brown and, subsequently, Humphrey Repton.
- 3.2. Fitzroy House was demolished c.1870, and replaced by Caen Wood Towers (later re-named Athlone House). The house was built for a wealthy Northern industrialist, Edward Brooke, and was designed as a showpiece - richly eclectic architecture, red brick with abundant stone dressings, mullioned windows with Gothic tracery; a tall tower with an outlook turret and crenulations; florid stone-coped Dutch gables; and tall Tudor style chimneys, with intricate twisted shafts. There were elaborate service outbuildings to the north, and a long conservatory on the western terrace, leading to a tall garden pavilion close to Hampstead Lane. The interiors of the house were elaborately decorated, and the grounds were embellished with a lake, rockeries, a model farm and observatory tower.



**Figure 1: Athlone House as it originally stood in 1881**

- 3.3. The house had numerous owners during the initial years who maintained its grandeur. Alterations were made to the interior in the 1920s by the architect L. Rome Guthrie, and the gardens were embellished with a formal garden designed by Gertrude Jekyll.
- 3.4. Around 1935 a large two storey modern service block was built, extending the eastern service range northwards. Some glasshouses were demolished, though the long conservatory remained in situ.

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## 1948 position

- 3.5. In 1940 after the outbreak of the Second World War, the house was requisitioned by the Royal Air Force and used as a school for intelligence officers. Some alterations were made; however, it is clear from aerial survey photographs taken by the Royal Air Force in 1947 and 1949 that most of the structure remained intact.
- 3.6. The sketch below shows the extent of Athlone House as it stood in 1948.

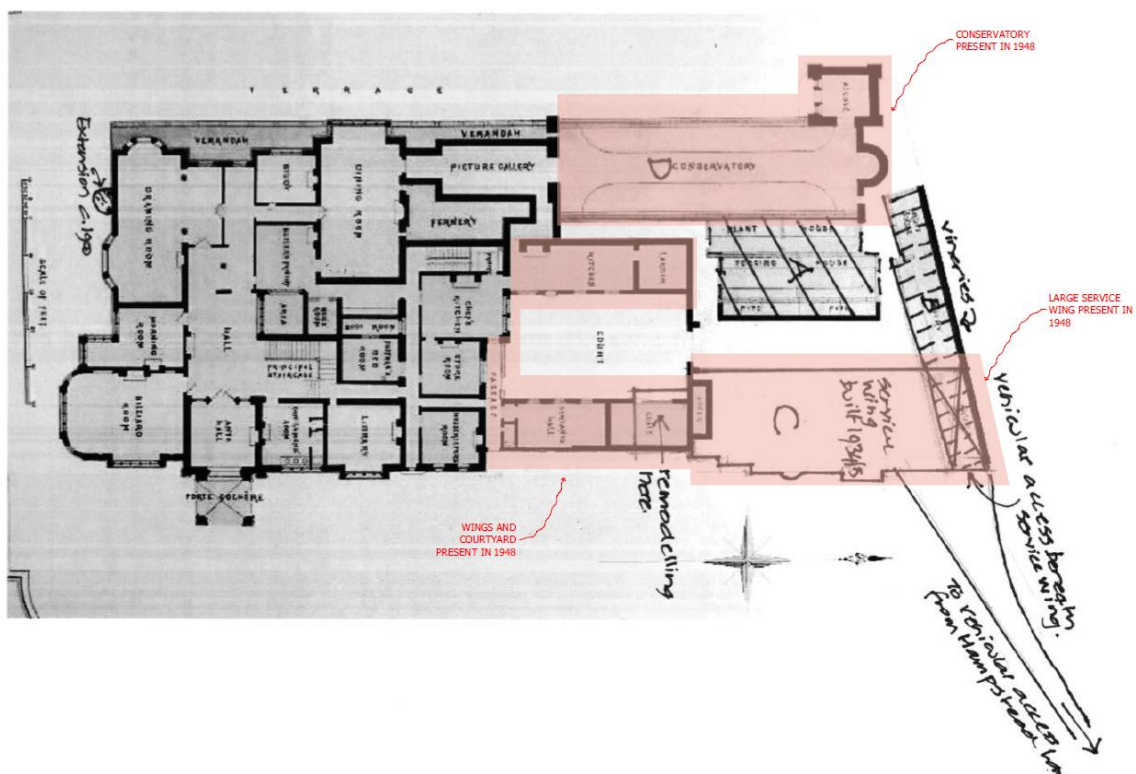


Figure 2: The extent of Athlone House in 1948

- 3.7. After the war, the building was leased by the National Health Service (NHS) and converted for use as a hospital. In 1953, it was purchased and renamed Athlone House. Extensive demolition then took place, including the conservatory, garden pavilion, and some of the service wings. The exterior was radically simplified, with loss of the Dutch gables, virtually all the chimney shafts, window tracery, and the crenulations of the tower. Many of the most important original decorative features of the interior were removed (with the exception of the main staircase). Later, in the 1960s, single storey flat-roofed timber system-built hospital extensions spread to the north.

## Athlone House and the 1999 Planning Brief

- 3.8. In 1999, prior to the NHS vacating Athlone House, LB Camden designated the site as a major developed site and produced a planning brief (Athlone House Planning Brief 1999).

## 2005 Planning Permission and Conservation Area Consent

3.9. Following the NHS vacating the site, Athlone House was purchased by developers and in October 2005, planning permission and Conservation Area consent<sup>1</sup> were granted for a comprehensive treatment of the whole site. Athlone House itself was to be restored/alterd and converted from a hospital back into a single dwelling house, with a large 2 storey garage block to the rear; the extensive postwar hospital buildings were to be demolished, and three new blocks of apartments (22 in total) built in the eastern part of the site. Caen Cottage, the Gate House and the Coach House were to be restored for residential use (with various alterations/extensions). A 0.98 hectare plot of land was to be donated as an extension to Hampstead Heath.



**Figure 3: 2005 Extant Planning Permission: Site Plan and Garage Block Elevation**

<sup>1</sup> Refs 2003/2670/P & 2003/2671/C

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3.10. The planning permission was partially implemented, through the construction of the apartments, the conversion of the Coach House, and the demolition of various post-war buildings, and so remains extant. Nothing further was done, however, to convert Athlone House back into a dwelling.

## Recent Appeal Schemes

3.11. After the Caenwood Court apartments were built, the rest of the site was sold by the developer to buyers who acquired it for their own occupation. The latter submitted a planning application<sup>2</sup> in July 2009 for the demolition of Athlone House and the erection of a replacement 8 bedroom single dwelling house with underground parking, designed by the modern classical architect, Robert Adam. The applications were refused by LB Camden on 12th April 2010, and subsequent appeals<sup>3</sup> were dismissed on 21st April 2011.

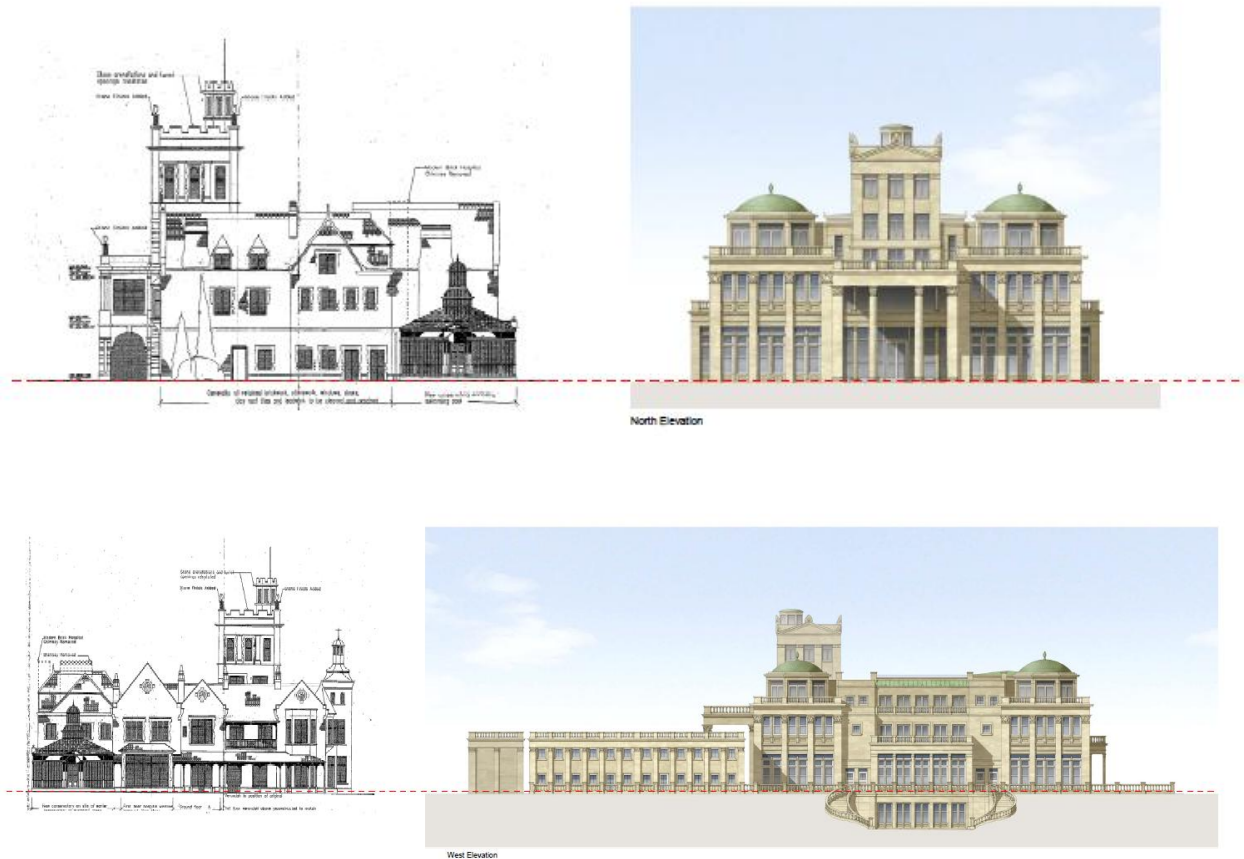


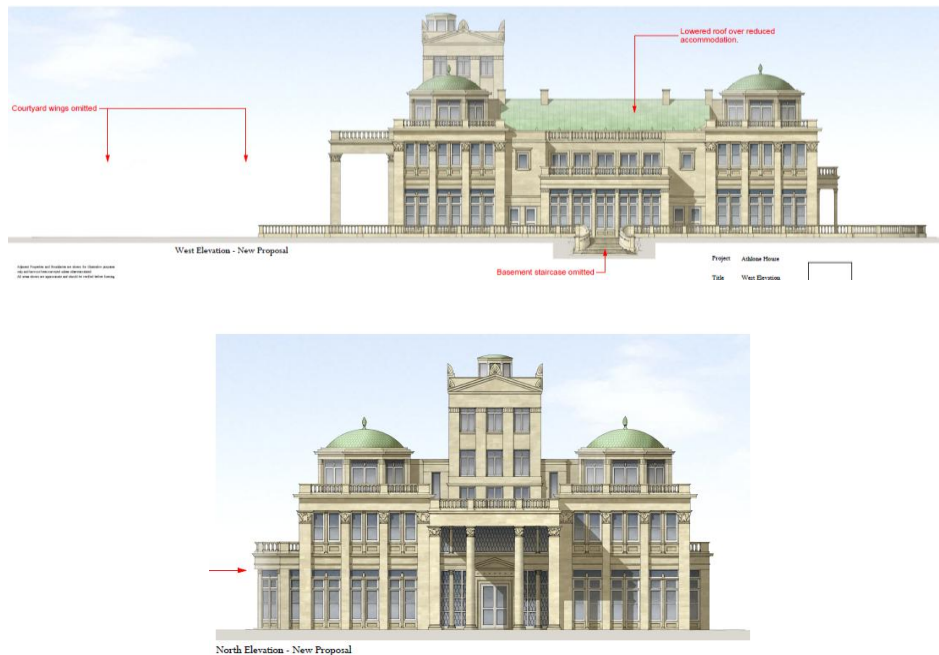
Figure 4: 2009 Dismissed Appeal Elevations

<sup>2</sup> Ref 2009/3413/P. A conservation area consent application (ref 2009/3422/C) was submitted at the same time.

<sup>3</sup> Refs APP/X5210/A/10/ 2135359 and APP/X5210/A/10/ 2135357



- 3.12. A further planning application<sup>4</sup> was submitted to LB Camden on 15 November 2013. This also proposed the demolition of Athlone House and the erection of an 8 bedroom single dwelling house, but it was reduced in scale. This scheme too was refused, and the subsequent appeal<sup>5</sup> dismissed on 8 June 2015.



**Figure 5: 2013 Dismissed Appeal Elevations**

### The Current Scheme

- 3.13. The Athlone House site was sold conditionally to a new owner, Mr Fridman, in early 2016 (the sale being conditional upon a new planning permission being granted). Mr Fridman is an international financier and industrialist, who spends much of his time resident in the United Kingdom. He is purchasing the building with a view to restoring it and converting it back into a house for his own occupation.
- 3.14. Mr Fridman not only wants to retain and adapt Athlone House to meet his requirements, but to go even further in terms of building conservation, restoring the external features that were lost in the mid twentieth century, and many of the internal features that have been lost over the years. His objective is to restore the building to its former glory as a great house, with only a relatively modest extension (on the site of the previous ancillary wings) to create sufficient accommodation to meet modern requirements. He also proposes to restore the historically significant part of the grounds, with the area in the immediate vicinity of the building and to its east being laid out with extensive tree and shrub planting. The scheme is described in detail in the Design and Access Statement, and the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment.

<sup>4</sup> Ref 2013/7242/P

<sup>5</sup> ref: APP/X5210/AJ141222087Z

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- 3.15. Extensive pre-application and stakeholder engagement has been undertaken during the formulation of the current planning proposals. Meetings have been held with L B Camden (LBC), the Athlone House Working Group (AHWG), the City of London Corporation (COL) (as the body responsible for Hampstead Heath) and residents of Caenwood Court. There has also been consultation with L B Haringey (LBH) over the proposed new access point. The scheme has been amended in detail as a result of these discussions, though the principle has been applauded by all consultees throughout the process.
- 3.16. The proposed scheme is described in detail in the Design and Access Statement.

## 4. Planning Policy Context

- 4.1. The 2004 Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act requires that determination of any planning application must be in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 4.2. In this case, the development plan comprises;
- The London Plan (As amended, including by the Minor Alterations to the London Plan (MALP) published in March 2016);
  - The London Borough of Camden Core Strategy and Development Policies (both adopted November 2010).
- 4.3. Other documents of relevance to the application are:
- The National Planning Policy Framework, adopted March 2012;
  - The Planning Practice Guidance, first published March 2014; and
  - Various Camden Planning Guidance documents which offer more detailed advice with regard to specific aspects of development in the Borough.



## 5. Planning Considerations

5.1. The main planning considerations are judged to be the following (not necessarily in this order):

### Metropolitan Open Land - Paragraph 89 of the NPPF

- 5.2. National policy towards Green Belts is contained in the NPPF, and the London Plan (Policy 7.17) confirms that MOL is to be treated as though it were Green Belt. The fundamental aim is to keep MOL open, to the extent that it is already open.
- 5.3. Para 89 of the NPPF acknowledges that there will be existing buildings within MOL, and that it would be unreasonable to prevent them being extended to some degree. In principle, therefore, it accepts that an extension is not to be regarded as inappropriate provided *“it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building”*. *“Original building”* is defined within the NPPF glossary as *“a building as it existed on 1 July 1948 or, if constructed after 1 July 1948, as it was built originally”*.
- 5.4. As explained already, as a result of a detailed review of Historic England’s photo archives, it has been established which parts of the structure of Athlone House existed on 1 July 1948. These have been subjected to a detailed measuring exercise, with the surviving structure having been accurately measured by laser survey, and the dimensions of the now absent structures estimated with reference to archival drawings and photographs (see Appendix 1). The results are summarised in the table below:

(ft2) (GIA)	Original (existing in 1948)	Proposed
Lower Ground Floor	2,492	3,714
Ground Floor	8,711	12,670
First Floor	7,542	7,168
Second Floor	4,029	3,995
Third Floor	330	330
Rear wings	Ground Floor 4,251 First Floor 2,167 Conservatory 1,868	Included in Ground Floor Area.
<b>Sub-total (main building)</b>	<b>31,390</b>	<b>27,877</b>
Caen Cottage	2,421 <sup>6</sup>	2,434
Coach House	990	990
Summer House	0	1,872
<b>Total (all buildings)</b>	<b>34,801</b>	<b>33,173</b>

<sup>6</sup> Including the extension(753sqft) that was consented under planning permission refs: 2003/2670/P & 2003/2671/C, but excluding the extension that would be demolished (124sqft) as a consequence.

- 5.5. The table also shows the floor areas of the proposed scheme. It is immediately apparent that the proposed floorspace, at 3,082sq m (33,173 sq ft) is smaller than the original (1948) floorspace. Hence the NPPF test is easily passed, and there is no need even to consider whether the proposed new space is “disproportionate”. The same applies if the main building is considered in isolation.

## **Refurbishment, restoration and extension of the existing building**

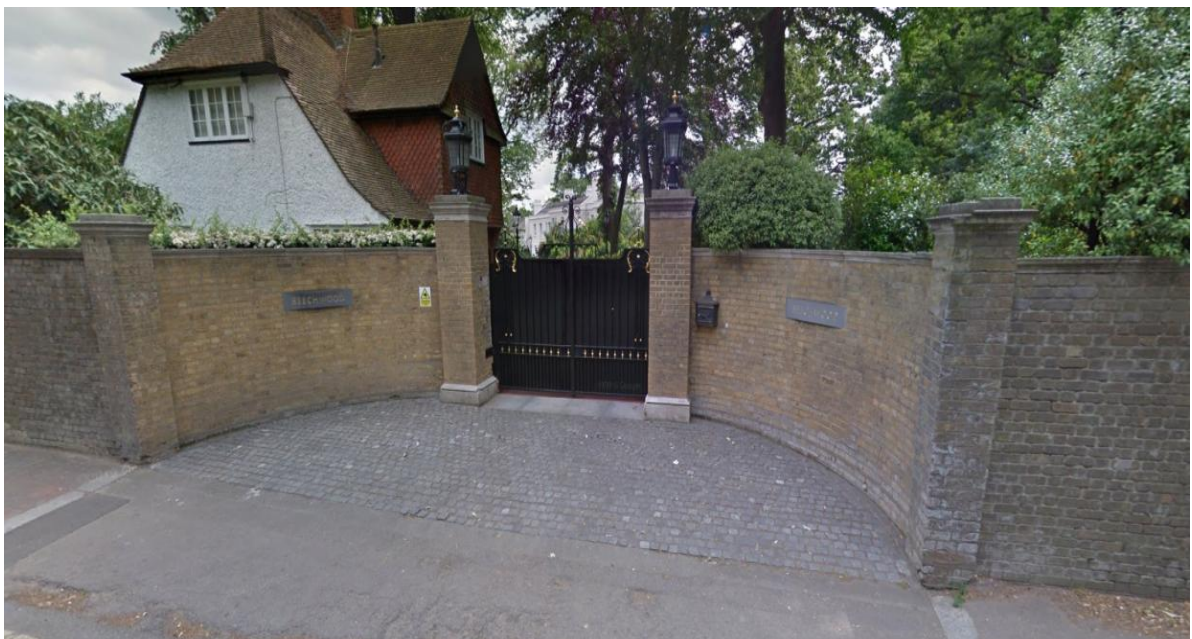
- 5.6. Chapter 7 of the NPPF attaches great importance to the design of built environment, specifying that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development and should contribute positively to making places better for people.
- 5.7. At the London level, Policy 3.5 of the MALP relates to the quality and design of new housing and seeks to ensure that all new development enhances the quality of local places. Policy 7.1 provides that new development should be designed to ensure that the layout, tenure and mix of uses interface with surrounding land and improve access to relevant infrastructure. Development should enable people to live healthy lives and new buildings should help reinforce the character, legibility, permeability and accessibility of the neighbourhood. Policy 7.2 seeks to ensure that developments incorporate inclusive design whilst policy 7.3 seeks to reduce the opportunities for criminal behaviour. Policy 7.4 seeks to ensure that new buildings, streets and open spaces provide a high quality design.
- 5.8. At the local level, Policy CS14 of the Core Strategy requires development to be of the highest standard of design, including the promotion of high quality landscaping.
- 5.9. Policy DP24 of the Development Policy Document echoes policy CS14(a) in seeking the highest standard of design. The supporting text explains that, “*The Council is committed to design excellence and a key strategic objective of the borough is to promote high quality, sustainable design*”.
- 5.10. Camden’s Design Supplementary Planning Guidance CPG 1 highlights the Borough’s commitment to design excellence, specifying that development proposals should consider:
- The context of a development and its surrounding area;
  - The design of the building itself;
  - The use of the building;
  - The materials used; and
  - Public spaces.
- 5.11. The current proposal is largely a restoration project, handled with great sensitivity by the architects, whose approach they detail in the Design and Access Statement. The external changes to the existing building are almost all recreations of what existed prior to the simplifying alterations made during the twentieth century.

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- 5.12. The main new work is the wing attached to the northern side of the proposed house. This is single storey in height, designed to appear from the north and east as reminiscent of a walled garden, and visually very subservient to the main building. The western elevation is in a restrained contemporary style that sits comfortably alongside the existing building, the junction between the two being marked by a new bay that blends elements of the contemporary and the historical.
- 5.13. The new access gateway is designed in a simple and traditional style, inspired by the gateway leading to 'Beechwood', further to the east along Hampstead Lane. It comprises a semi-circular apron, with a pair of timber gates in the middle, and the brick boundary wall (which is unlisted, albeit within the Conservation Area) being rebuilt in matching semi-circular form.



**Figure 6: Beechwood Entrance Gateway**

- 5.14. The Gate House is to be restored without material external alteration. Caen Cottage is similarly to be restored, with an existing (unoriginal) rear extension replaced with a single storey extension to contain garaging for three cars and storage for gardening equipment or similar. The Summer House is a new proposal: a small (1,872ft<sup>2</sup>) building located within the restored historical garden, on part of the site of the tennis court, intended as a base for picnics, barbecues or quiet enjoyment of the garden.
- 5.15. The historic part of the grounds is to be restored in accordance with a conservation-based scheme drawn up by Catherine Bickmore and JFA. This is virtually identical to the scheme proposed previously in connection with the two Robert Adam schemes, and which was universally supported.
- 5.16. Internally, many of the alterations made to Athlone House to accommodate its change to institutional use are to be reversed, and much of the floorplan and many of the surviving features restored. Because the building is not listed (or even locally listed), the architects have not been constrained in the manner they would otherwise have been, but they have nevertheless applied a similar degree of care and sensitivity.

- 5.17. It is submitted that the approach very fully exemplifies the “*high quality, sustainable design*” that policy seeks.

## **Impact on the Character of the Conservation Area**

- 5.18. Athlone House is located within LBC Highgate Conservation Area, and is visible from the contiguous LBH Highgate Conservation Area.
- 5.19. The NPPF and various policies at London and local level<sup>7</sup> seek to ensure that development within Conservation Areas preserves and enhances the character and appearance of the area, respects its setting, makes a positive contribution, takes into account appraisals and management plans, and preserves trees and garden spaces.
- 5.20. The LBC Highgate Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (HCAAMP) refers to Athlone House as being representative of the large private villas which formerly occupied the Fitzroy Park sub-area of Highgate, and notes a number of features that have long since been removed. The building is said to be a positive contributor to the Conservation Area, but, in its current form ‘*detracts from the character of the area and would benefit from enhancement because of the vacant buildings on the site*’.
- 5.21. The LBH Highgate Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan 2013 (HCACAMP) identifies views across the Heath and the grounds of Kenwood as contributing to the character of Hampstead Lane, but does not refer specifically to Athlone House.
- 5.22. As noted already, the proposed external works will reinstate many features that have been lost from the exterior of Athlone House, including the tower turret and castellation, cupola roof, chimney shafts and Dutch gables. The whole of the exterior will be cleaned and repointed, and damage repaired with materials to match the existing. This will make a positive contribution to the Conservation Areas. The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) affirms that reinstating the lost features will reinforce Athlone House as a prominent landmark mansion building, especially when viewed from Hampstead Heath and Highgate School playing fields.
- 5.23. As also noted already, the new work is single storey in height and designed to be unobtrusive. It will be invisible or scarcely visible when viewed from the various vantage points (see LVIA). Insofar as it will be visible, it will be a clearly subordinate part of the building, will be on the site of wings that existed prior to the period of institutional use, and respectful in form and materials.

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<sup>7</sup> Note policy 7.8 of the London Plan, CS14 of the LBC Core Strategy, DP25 of the Development Plan Document

## Landscaping, Access, Ecology and Biodiversity

- 5.24. Development plan policy places emphasis on the importance of protecting landscapes, protecting and improving parks and open spaces, and encouraging biodiversity. Part k of Policy CS15, which specifies LBC's ambition to work with the City of London, English Heritage and Natural England to manage and improve Hampstead Heath and its surrounding areas. Part l of the policy refers to the protection of the Metropolitan Open Land, public and private open space and nature conservation designations of sites. Development Plan policy DP24 specifies that, when considering the design of new development, it is necessary to assess the provision for protecting existing natural features, such as trees, and also encouraging the provision of appropriate hard and soft landscaping and boundary treatments.
- 5.25. Athlone House is within a designated area of Open Space within the LBC development framework. The grounds are included within LBC Local List (ref: 252) and are thus identified as a '*non designated heritage asset*'.
- 5.26. As has been noted already, the proposed scheme will enhance the landscape insofar as it restores the historic roof profile of Athlone House, visible from various viewpoints through or above the trees. In most other respects, it will make no material difference to the landscape. Almost all existing trees and shrubs will be retained, and brought back into responsible husbandry, and some new trees and shrubs planted. Specific proposals include further work on the restoration of the Milner folly and Pulhamite fern clad ravine, dropping well, waterfall and stream. The effect should be to make the landscape even 'greener' than at present, as well as enhancing ecological and biodiversity value. Access to this private garden will be as it has been.

## New Access

- 5.27. The proposed new access has been described above. It has been designed by independent highway engineers, in discussion with highway engineers at both LBC and LBH, and found to be acceptable in all respects. Inter alia, it will alleviate congestion associated with the existing access, improve safety associated with the westbound bus stop; and will result in the Coach House once again facing the entrance it was originally designed to serve.

## Sustainability and Renewable Energy

- 5.28. Policy at all levels encourages high standards of sustainability and energy efficiency<sup>8</sup>.
- 5.29. As detailed within the BREEAM Domestic Refurbishment Pre Assessment report that is submitted in support of this planning application, the development proposal will target an *Excellent* rating, with a score of 72.88%. Features of particular note are that heating for the building is to be mainly provided by the utilisation of a ground source heat pump, which will provide more than 20% of the site's energy demand. Furthermore, all water fittings will be specified as such so that the total water consumption for Athlone House will be less than 107 litres/person/day.
- 5.30. The restoration of Athlone House will create a building that is far more energy efficient than the building in its current form.

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<sup>8</sup> See, in particular, MALP Policies 5.2 and 5.7; Core Strategy Policy CS13 and Development Policy DP22



## Neighbourly Matters

- 5.31. Particular care and consideration has been given to preserving the amenity of neighbouring residents, primarily those at Caenwood Court.
- 5.32. The scheme has taken into account the views of Caenwood Court residents about the boundary planting between Caenwood Court and Athlone House, aiming to achieve effective visual screening close to the Caenwood Court apartments, but with lower and less dense planting further to the south, intended to preserve views towards the Heath. It has also been amended to remove the refuse bin store from the shared access apron, and to bring it fully within the Athlone House curtilage.
- 5.33. The draft Construction Management Plan (CMP) pays particular attention to the potential impact upon Caenwood Court residents. Accordingly, the CMP addresses how impacts associated with the proposed works, and any cumulative impacts of other nearby construction sites, will be mitigated and managed. There will be further consultation with them before the final version is produced.

## 6. Conclusion

- 6.1. The proposed restoration and extension of Athlone House, and its conversion back into a grand dwelling, is believed to correspond very closely with what LBC, AHWG and others have long sought; indeed, by restoring features lost during the mid twentieth century, and returning the building to a condition close to its original flamboyance, the scheme goes further than had been sought.
- 6.2. The proposed development will have a positive effect upon the two Conservation Areas, and upon other heritage assets in the vicinity. The reinstatement of upper level features will maintain the silhouette, which is regarded by many as the most important feature of Athlone House, and will enhance it by restoring decorative features lost long ago. The extension is so low, so discreetly designed, and sited on the northern side of the proposed house, as to be invisible or virtually invisible from most viewpoints, and certainly not to have any negative impact even where it can be seen.
- 6.3. There is no MOL issue, because the proposed development has a lesser total floorspace than the "original": 1948 floorspace.
- 6.4. The extensive part of the gardens which is of historical interest is to be restored, in accordance with a scheme very similar to that proposed (and generally applauded) previously. The proposed Summer House is designed and sited discreetly, on the site of a disused tennis court, so as to allow residents to enjoy the gardens, but without it having any adverse impact upon them. The gardens in the immediate vicinity of the proposed main house, and between it and Caenwood Court, will see new tree and shrub planting. The overall effect will be to increase screening to an even greater extent (especially from Caenwood Court), as well as contributing to biodiversity.
- 6.5. The proposed new access raises no objections on highways or conservation grounds. It will relieve congestion on the apron shared with Caenwood Court, and so make a positive contribution to the amenities of Caenwood Court residents. The Gate House will be restored, and will once again face a gate. Caen Cottage will be restored and extended at the rear in a manner similar to the extant 2005 planning permission. Both will be brought into use (for staff and guest accommodation) in connection with Athlone House.
- 6.6. The scheme has been drawn up through extensive consultation with all parties, and it is therefore hoped the planning application will readily find favour and be granted.