

Application No:	Consultees Name:	Consultees Addr:	Received:	Comment:	Response:
2016/3252/P	Dr T Blackshaw	16 Stormont Road	26/07/2016 16:30:43	OBJ	<p>I would like to object to this application to demolish and replace No. 4 The Hexagon on the grounds that it will cause substantial harm to this portion of the Highgate Conservation Area.</p> <p>I believe The Hexagon to be an important and unique development, as its architect, Leonard Michaels, had relocated to California in 1950 and does not appear to have worked elsewhere in the UK. He was, however, friendly with Ove Arup, whose nearby house at 6 Fitzroy Park had been completed only a few years earlier, and who may have prompted Michaels' involvement in the project on the basis of the latter's theoretical treatise, Contemporary Structure in Architecture, which Arup reviewed for publication prospects.</p> <p>While I appreciate that the buildings of this period may present challenges to modern-day occupants, the answer is not to demolish them altogether. Rather there should be effort made to restore and update them sympathetically, availing oneself of all the latest technologies which in fact permit great flexibility and success in sensitively handling historic structures. Indeed, the recent and adjacent restoration of No. 3 has been both professionally acclaimed by architects and critically praised by architectural historians.</p> <p>The Hexagon was a relatively new development in 1967, when the Highgate Conservation Area was established. Had it not been deemed at the time to be of architectural merit, it could easily have been excluded from the designation. Therefore, one must accept that this group of six houses as a whole was not only considered worthy of recognition, but also of value for future protection and preservation. Moreover, the much later distinguishing of No. 3 The Hexagon as a positive contributor to the Conservation Area does not imply that the other constituent houses in this development are negative, or even neutral contributors: their significance rests in their conception and existence as a members of a unified group. As Council policy is now that individual buildings within Conservation Areas no longer need the added protection of being Locally Listed, the onus is therefore even greater to apprehend and to respect the wider context of a building's setting and history – not just its stand-alone worth – when making decisions about its future.</p> <p>In terms of the proposed design, I would list the following criticisms:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The façade has a remote and defensive aspect, with only a single window on its first floor. Nor does that window capture or provide the original intended effects of the clerestory awning windows. 2. The materials are more engineered and less grounded in tradition, as was the express purposed of those chosen by Michaels originally. In addition, the superimposition of brick on metal reverses the historic meaning of the existing elevations, and the hierarchical rationale which specifically placed lighter timber atop sturdier brick. 3. There is far less variety in profile, both in terms of height and depth, such that the proposed building presents a uniformly cuboid mass, particularly in the case of the eastward infill extension. 4. The fully glazed rear façade misunderstands the traditional pattern of The Hexagon house designs, whose elevations were carefully broken up through the use of diverse materials arrayed in a range of sizes and proportions. <p>But regardless of the merits or lack thereof in the proposed design, this is neither the site nor the setting in which to impose a new dwelling, one so wholly disconnected and unrelated to the environment of the</p>

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					<p>adjacent homes as this will be. The Hexagon was a carefully planned, designed and built expression of Michaels' philosophies for small private housing developments of low rise and structural economy, built on an intimate human scale for functional and communal living. In contrast, the proposed replacement building is a large, luxury villa visually segregated from the shared forecourt and remaining homes in the cul-de-sac. It cannot be seen to enhance the Conservation Area because it fails to clarify, illustrate or contribute to an understanding or appreciation of the genesis and meaning of The Hexagon development. Nor by definition will it preserve the Conservation Area because to demolish one of its constituent members is to destroy its integrity and permanently erase the architect's original creative vision.</p> <p>The Hexagon is set to feature as one of the principal developments in an upcoming exhibition on Highgate's Modern architecture and I would urge the Council to acknowledge its importance within the historic context of innovative post-War design and building by refusing this application to demolish and replace No. 4 The Hexagon.</p>
