

Dartmouth Park Conservation Area Advisory Committee

Comments on 2017/5395/P Parliament Hill School William Ellis School & La Swap Sixth Form Highgate Road NW5 1RN

Sports Hall and Teaching Block

The main changes from the existing scheme that we are concerned about relate to the Sports Hall and Teaching Block.

The design of the sports hall is very boxy, with little in the way of interesting detail. This is a massive frontage onto the main road and will be the main thing people see of the new development as they walk along Highgate Road (other than the new LaSwap building). We believe the proposed facade is unimaginative and disappointing architecturally. It is simply a completely blank wall. We think this is unacceptable for the principal street-facing facade of the new building. We are disappointed that a more sophisticated design has not been developed for this significant elevation.

The cladding on the sports hall will now be reflective green aluminium. The DAS asserts that this will complete the 'bookending' of the Morant Building with the Performing Arts (PA) Building. However, it will be a different colour green from the PA building, which is likely to create a discordant appearance. It would be preferable to have a copper cladding like the PA building or, at a minimum, a more neutral coloured and non-reflective cladding.

The current project is a compromise between cost and 'value'. It seems to us that Camden is getting 'less for more' in that the latest estimates suggest the footprint of the school will now remain broadly similar in size (in fact slightly smaller) and the cost has risen to c. £36 million. We understand that the justification for this is that it will offer more modern facilities and better "flow" around the campus. However, we are still concerned that overall the development may not be value for money.

Landscaping

Section 2.7 of the Arboricultural Report states 'Liaison with the council tree officer should be sought regarding the tree pruning required and tree protection measures employed'. A formal agreement **must** be agreed and followed, otherwise trees and shrubs may be irreversibly damaged.

There are 216 trees on the site, of which 24 are Category A (high quality), 65 Category B (moderate quality), 109 Category C (low quality) and 18 Category U (poor quality). Of these, it is proposed that one Category A (tree No. 181) (a sycamore) is to be felled for purposes of construction, together with eight Category B (cherries, silver birches, hawthornes and a holm oak).

In addition, it is proposed to remove a number of trees on the basis that they are in poor condition. This includes a large horse chestnut centrally located in front of the school. The report states that this horse chestnut (175) is in the final stages of decline'. This cannot be confirmed from the photo. A second opinion is needed, preferably including internal structural imaging. The removal would be a big change in the appearance of the school and lead to a loss of a significant bit of greenery. The loss of the amenity value of this tree will be detrimental to the Conservation Area. Any removals should be fully justified as essential for safety reasons, with a clear demonstration that the tree cannot be preserved with appropriate maintenance measures.

We are also concerned about the 57 trees which will have resurfacing works carried out within their Root Protection Areas (RPAs). Root protection works, such as fencing, with no ground excavations carried out, unless a tree officer approves, are proposed. It is essential that these proposed measures are adhered to.

From the Design and Access Statement, we welcome the proposed lawned areas, tree planting with for example *Liquidambar styraciflua* and the tulip tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*), wildflower meadows, habitat areas such as log piles with wood from the site, bird boxes and the inclusion of nectar plants. We hope that such measures will increase both plant and animal diversity and encourage students and staff, both to enjoy, and to study them; together with the nearby Heath.

We note that green planting is still proposed for the new La Swap building. The use of greenery appears to be an attempt to disguise a lack of good design detail and materials. We believe the La Swap building should be constructed of high quality, durable materials that will last for the minimum 30 or 40 year span expected of such buildings. In addition, green walls are very capital intensive, not only for initial construction (with the need to use the correct plants for the conditions in each area of the wall, such as light, shade and dryness) but also for maintenance. This remains the case, even if the specific method chosen is, as the DAS asserts, the least maintenance intensive. This seems an obvious target for any cost cutting, either initially or over the longer term. We are not convinced that the school will be able to maintain a green wall over the longer term.

We are pleased to see that the application retains the park-style metal railings for the boundary treatment. One change would be welcome. The pavement in front of the school currently is very crowded, especially at school letting out time. This creates difficulties for residents, in particular those attempting to use the bus stop on Highgate Road. This area has been recognised in the developing Neighbourhood Plan for Dartmouth Park as an area of pavement congestion. This would appear to be an ideal opportunity to relocate the railings slightly towards the school, in order to create more space on the pavement. This would be a benefit both to students and to local residents with little dis-benefit to the school due to a slight reduction in the premises.