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Mr John Diver
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November 13th 2017

Dear John,

Re: App. No. 2017/5178/P - Comments on pre-application plans for the lower ground floor front and rear extension semi-basement and associated works at 26 West Hill Park, N6 6ND

We are joint owners of 27 West Hill Park (WHP) where we have lived for 44 years. We are implacably opposed to the two planning applications (2017/5176/P and 2017/5178/P) made by 26 WHP, our immediate neighbours. Our house, together with 25 WHP and 23 and 25 Merton Lane, will be most impacted by the lower ground floor front and rear extension and associated alterations and the erection of the two-storey building. We elaborate here why we are opposed to what is basically a huge semi-basement (2017/5178/P). Our opposition is based on a number of separate but partially linked concerns as summarised below: 1) the design and size of the semi-basement and its impact; 2) the hydrological issues involved; 3) its planned use; 4) the loss of amenity (trees, garden, wildlife); 5) the impact on traffic, parking and road safety; and 6) construction work and noise.

1) The design, size and impact of the semi-basement

The design and size of the extension is not comply with the HNP (Highgate Neighbourhood Plan - DH3-4) or the Camden local plan. It is effectively a new basement complex rather than a refurbishment of the existing structure. It does not complement the design, proportion, materials or details of the original dwelling or that of any others on the estate. The proposed patio windows on the new pool will form a long row that would be totally out of keeping with anything

else in WHP and will be seen by residents of the Estate, 23 Merton Lane and passers-by in Merton Lane. The result will detract from the appearance of the Estate from a south-west perspective.

If successful it would set a precedent for other WHP residents who may wish to extend their own properties in what is a beautiful conservation area that has never been blighted, as yet, by major construction works. In fact, the Camden Unitary Development Plan contains the following enthusiastic reference to WHP, which makes it clear why it is one of the most sought-after residential areas in Highgate: *'West Hill Park by Ted Levy, Benjamin and Partners is an example of low level high density brick and concrete housing carefully sculptured to the falling terrain and screened in a manner that makes it almost invisible from the surrounding public spaces. The standards of maintenance and control of the buildings and landscape within this estate should be a model to others.'*

The owners of 26 WHP did not consult the Management Company for prior permission despite working on the project for approximately the last two years. Neither the WHP management committee nor the residents were aware of their intentions.

2) Associated hydrological issues

The hydrological implications are significant. The houses at nos. 26, 27 and 28 WHP are located in an area of great hydrological sensitivity because of the underlying geological makeup. The properties are constructed on the Claygate Beds, a layered succession of sandstone, siltstone and claystone, but in close proximity to the underlying London Clay, a highly impermeable claystone unit. The sandy horizons of the Claystone Beds are permeable and, hence, act as aquifers, which give rise to an alignment of cold-water springs along the subhorizontal contact between the two geological units. The spring line extends along the eastern side of Highgate ponds, themselves located on the impermeable London Clay, and provides a critical water source for pond replenishment. Two of these springs, one in the garden of no. 27 and the other in Millfield Lane, just beyond the boundary fence of 28 WHP, confirm the existence of surficial ground water that is of particular relevance and concern in the context of deep excavations. Both the previous and current occupants of no. 26 have complained of flooding in the existing swimming pool for many years.

As a geologist, it is clear that the proposed size and depth of the proposed semi-basement development poses potential dangers for both local ground-water flow and land stability. Changes to ground-water flow patterns and levels in the Claygate aquifers may cause consequences that are difficult to predict

without more detailed site investigations, but would be anticipated to cause ponding behind the planned basement and water deprivation in front of it. Any such perturbation to the flow regime could deprive trees and other vegetation of water supply, as noted further below, as well as cause instability and even possible localised collapse of existing structures. In this regard, the boundary walls with both 23 Merton Lane and Merton Lane itself, both topographically lower than no. 26, would be the most at risk. Also of concern is the potential impact on the sewer pipes (which run between both properties under the communal path to the Hampstead Heath) and which would be directly affected by the new semi-basement. The pipes have been a source of recurrent problems over the years. Furthermore, on a broader scale, any proliferation of new basements in the immediate watershed of Highgate Ponds is considered likely to have deleterious cumulative effects.

3) Its planned use

The application implies a substantial increase in the volume of the property and a much-enlarged swimming pool and would not be subordinate in scale to the original dwelling. It would be large enough to constitute a separate residence. This could increase the density of the Estate and increase already-existing parking problems.

4) Loss of amenity: trees, garden, wildlife

Policy OS2 page 48, HNP has not been adhered to.

A successful tree application was made earlier this year (Jan 2017) and involved removal of a mature sycamore, which 26 WHP believed to be dangerous, together with a series of bushes/small trees. We now believe that this tree-felling was in preparation for the two-storey extension and semi-basement because it would facilitate access from Merton Lane for the construction materials. However, no attempt has been made to replace the sycamore despite it being subject to a TPO.

There will be a major loss of garden space. The residents intend to cover the semi-basement with a 'green roof', the depth of which is less than that recommended by Camden guidelines. The splendid mature oak tree, which matches the oak in the neighbouring garden of no. 25, will be threatened. The plans proposed to protect the oak, covered by a TPO, are insufficient. The tree would be unlikely to survive as it stands in the way of materials that would be delivered from the proposed Merton Lane access.

There are smaller trees and shrubs in the rear garden of no. 26 which are not shown on the plans, including the landscaping plan, nor mentioned in the D&A

statement. The CGIs that were submitted omit some trees and give little impression of the nature and size of those shown. The trees are certainly intended for removal because they are on the line of the basement. WHP is a positive contributor to the CA. (See picture below as an example).



View of no. 26 from Merton Lane showing some of the trees that do not appear on any of the planning applications.

Even if the proposed scheme can be carried out without tree felling, which seems improbable, the semi-basement development runs the serious risk of both physically damaging the tree roots as well as depriving them of essential water because of deviation of ground-water flow.

Clearly, any loss of or damage to the trees will have a direct impact on the ecology of adjoining parts of Hampstead Heath and the well-being of wildlife, particularly the birds and bats that use the gardens of nos. 26, 27 and 28 as a direct Heath extension. These trees form part of the canopy enveloping Merton Lane.

5) Impact of traffic, parking and road safety

Temporary access is planned from Merton Lane to carry out the works, notwithstanding the fact that road level is nearly 6 feet below the level of 26 WHP, with obvious negative consequences for the general public. It will limit the number of metered parking spaces available, which are at a premium for users of the Heath during the spring and summer months and at weekends year round. It would further pose a potential risk to both pedestrian and vehicular traffic because of the narrowness of Merton Lane at this point and the absence of a pavement on the side from which access would be required. This risk would be particularly acute during the construction stage. Please note that other major construction schemes are about to begin in Fitzroy Park and Millfield Lane, adding to the impact because of increased heavy vehicle movement along Merton

Lane. No. 26's CMP shows little understanding and consideration of the impact that either planning application will have.



View of Merton Lane showing where vehicles will be parked and materials stored (wall and fence of 26 WHP on the right). Note absence of a pavement.

6) Noise and disturbance from construction work

(SO 5.3 to mitigate the effect of building work on neighbours: HNP)

We are not aware of any attempt to give consideration to neighbours while any of the construction work is taking place. Clearly, both the short- and long-term quality of life of residents in the lower part of WHP estate, including ourselves, is likely to be diminished by the proposed construction works.

It is our firm belief that any major construction works of the type proposed at no. 26, within a sensitive conservation area close to Highgate Ponds, Hampstead Heath and one of their principal pedestrian and vehicular accesses, needs to be carefully scrutinised in a wide context that not only takes account of the interests of local residents but of the public at large.

Yours sincerely

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cc: Charles Thuairé, Senior Planning Officer, London Borough of Camden