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## **55 Fitzroy Park, Highgate**

### **Open Space Assessment (Policy A2)**

Prepared by LUC on behalf of The Turner Stokes Family & The Springer Family

V3 – Final, 14<sup>th</sup> May 2019

**Project Title:** 55 Fitzroy Park, Highgate: Open Space Assessment

**Client:** The Turner Stokes Family & The Springer Family

Version	Date	Version Details	Prepared by	Checked by	Approved by
V1	16-04-2019	First issue, draft	RH	BS	RH
V2	01-05-2019	Second issue, draft	RH	BS	RH
V3	14-05-2019	Final issue	RH	BS	RH

## **1 Background**

- 1.1 This assessment has been produced at the request of the Planning Officer, Charles Thuairé (email to Stuart Minty, 15.03.2019). This request follows Thuairé's analysis of advice to the London Borough of Camden from Simon Bird QC. This advice centred on the need to consider the value and quality of open space in addition to quantum. Issues of quantum have already been addressed through such measures as plot ratio already covered by the Application.

## **2 Assessment method**

- 2.1 There is no known standard or accepted method for establishing the value of open space. We have therefore taken the Conservation Area Appraisal (Highgate Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Proposals, 2007) as a starting point, in particular its identification of aspects that contribute to the Conservation Area's special character. This is taken as the baseline condition.
- 2.2 The likely effects of the re-development proposals are then considered in order to estimate the net effect on this special character and its open space. These effects are then considered in relation to the three salient parts of Policy A2, Open Space within the Camden Local Plan.
- 2.3 Cross reference to material already submitted as part of the planning application is used where relevant.

## **3 Conservation Area Appraisal**

- 3.1 The summary of the Area's special interest notes Highgate's elevated position, its southerly views over London and a number of notable houses dating from the 17<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The well-known architectural critic Ian Nairn is quoted as noting the positive contribution of various contemporary buildings working in combination with leafy streets.
- 3.2 The appraisal splits the Conservation Area into a number of sub- areas, Fitzroy Park being Sub-Area 2. The appraisal notes an 'impression of heavy foliage and mature trees as well as a sense of open space denoted by the Heath at the bottom of the hill. There is also a sense of seclusion as the road is private and is gated at its northern end'.
- 3.3 It also notes:
- The Sub-area's many mature trees and boundaries
  - The road of Fitzroy Park acting as a green pedestrian approach to the Heath
  - The informal, unmade style of the road and its rustic appearance
- 3.4 The property itself is described as:
- A flat-roofed two-storey red brick 1950s dwelling with a slightly later extension,
  - A setting of 'generous gardens' that stretch to Millfield Lane and contain a sizeable pond
- 3.5 There is no further comment as to the contribution of the property to the Conservation Area, or the condition or value of the property in particular its performance as open space.

## **4 Baseline assessment of the site's contribution to local open space**

- 4.1 We have assessed the following attributes of the site to establish an understanding of its current value:
- Openness
  - Screening/edges
  - Inter-visibility with the Heath
  - Landscape
  - Tree/vegetation
  - Biodiversity
  - Heritage

4.2 **Openness:** The site's contribution to the openness of the Conservation Area is currently very limited. Inward views are almost totally blocked by a combination of dense perimeter vegetation, fencing and built form. There is very little awareness from either Fitzroy Park or Millfield Lane of the scale and interior of the site, its landscape features and the pond. Verified views 3.6.1 and 3.6.2 from the Design and Access Statement (DAS) illustrate this lack of openness.

Current degree of openness: Low

4.3 **Screening/edge treatment:** The Millfield Lane frontage provides effective screening but its concrete panel fencing and air of neglect present an appearance that is at odds with the character of the Conservation Area (Verified view 3.6.2 applies). The Fitzroy Park frontage is better but its fencing and the glimpsed views of the somewhat dilapidated building do not make an especially positive contribution to its streetscape.

Current value: Neutral in relation to Fitzroy Park, negative to Millfield Lane.

4.4 **Inter-visibility with the Heath:** Verified view 3.6.3 included in the DAS shows very limited inter-visibility between the Heath and the site. This is because of a combination of topography and the screening effect of dense intervening perimeter woodland within the northern edge of the Heath. Buildings on the site do not affect the views of Highgate from the Heath. Visible trees add to the general effect of a wooded slope with glimpsed buildings on other properties.

Current contribution: Positive

4.5 **Landscape assets:** Section 4.1.1 of the DAS describes the character of the site landscape as one of largely unmanaged disrepair including a derelict hard tennis court reverting to secondary woodland, a heavily silted and over-shadowed pond, partially overgrown shrubberies and a number of semi-derelict greenhouses and sheds.

Current value and contribution: Generally low.

4.6 **Trees and vegetation cover:** the tree survey submitted with the Application provides information on the number and condition of existing trees. Whilst numerous, trees are generally over-crowded self-sown products of a gradual decline in active 'gardening' or ageing/over-mature remnants of an orchard. Others such as Cupressus are arguably at odds with the character of the Conservation Area. Section 4.8.1 of the DAS considers the value of most trees to be unexceptional with a majority being Grade C or Grade U.

4.7 The updated version of the submitted Arboricultural Impact Assessment states that 'The two trees protected by tree preservation orders are listed for removal under the proposed scheme (T519 & T551). These were classified as C- grade trees during the survey because they don't have attractive crown shapes or any outstanding features. Indeed it is difficult to understand why it was decided to protect these particular trees when the tree preservation order was made. The trees in this part of the Site (alongside Millfield Lane) that are being retained are larger and more prominent than the two protected trees that are scheduled for removal. Therefore, at this moment in time, there is no compelling reason to retain the protected trees rather than any others in the vicinity.'

Current value of asset: Low

4.8 **Biodiversity:** Section 4.1.1 of the DAS summarizes the Enhanced Phase 1 Ecology Baseline survey (2018) of the site as lacking any habitats of particular value and supporting no protected species. Parts of the site are infested by Japanese Knotweed (a notifiable weed). The site is currently used by toad, garden and woodland birds.

Current value: Low

4.9 **Heritage:** Section 2.3.2 of the DAS notes that it is only the edges of the site that contribute to the Conservation Area and that the pond, although a historical asset, is not visible from outside of the site. It concludes that the site makes at best a neutral contribution to the Conservation Area.

Current contribution: Low

## 5 Current overall value of the site's open space

- 5.1 The actual value of the current open space is limited with each of the above criteria showing a relatively small contribution to the Conservation Area and its special character. This is in part because of the limited awareness of the site beyond its edge, and in part because of its low value per se when the separate attributes are considered.
- 5.2 Perhaps the site's greatest value in terms of open space is psychological, where the site is perceived as being part of the wooded slopes between Highgate Hill and Heath, slopes in which the majority of development remains screened by trees and vegetation.

## 6 Likely effects of the proposed development

- 6.1 The proposals have been developed as part of an ecology and landscape-led site plan, the objectives of which have been closely informed by analysis of the site and its context. The overarching aim is to maximise integration of the development with its surroundings. The Landscape Strategy (section 4.2.1 of the DAS) has three principal Initiatives each of which is closely related to retaining and enhancing the quality of the site and its open space...
- Creating a sense of openness
  - Reinforcing local landscape character, and
  - Bolstering Biodiversity
- 6.2 Landscape proposals have been taken forward in conjunction with and to the satisfaction of Camden Council who described the proposals as 'a high quality scheme with sufficient detail to ensure that it will be sustainable and more than adequate replacement tree planting to ameliorate the loss of trees felled to implement the proposal.' (Tom Little, LB Camden Landscape Officer quoted in Thuairé email to Stuart Minty 15.11.18)
- 6.3 The application and DAS (in particular Sections 3 and 4) analyse the likely effects of the development. These effects in relation to the value of the site's open space are summarised as follows:
- 6.4 **Openness:** the overall perceived openness of the site will be increased. The pond will be visible from Fitzroy Park and awareness of the interior of the site and the Heath beyond increased by the provision of gaps between Plots 1-3 (instead of the existing continuous single building frontage). This will be counter-balanced in part by a slight increase in the heights of Buildings 1-3 (although this is likely to be experienced only by residents of houses on Fitzroy Park immediately opposite the site).

Within the site subdivisions between gardens will be minimised with the gardens of Plots 1 -3 being a shared, family, garden.

Likely overall effect: an increase in openness

- 6.5 **Screening/edge treatments:** the Millfield Lane boundary will be significantly improved by the replacement of inappropriate fencing by fencing incorporated into an informal native hedge. This will provide substantial enhancement of the local rural landscape character - both of the Conservation Area and of the immediate setting of the Heath. These benefits will be experienced by pedestrians using the lane to access the Heath.

Likely effect: noticeable and positive reinforcement of local landscape character.

There will be changes to the Fitzroy Park edge principally through the creation of access points to the three proposed dwellings. This will lead to some loss of continuity of the current site boundary planting. This loss is mitigated by the creation of an informal native hedgerow in lieu of the current ivy covered fence, and an awareness of higher quality proposed buildings which allow glimpsed views of the interior of the site. (Compare to the existing unbroken and lower quality single built elevation). The character and materiality of the road itself will remain unchanged.

Likely effect: negligible and very localised overall reduction in landscape character

6.6 **Views from the Heath:** Verified view 3.6.3 shows how the new buildings will be screened by retained tree cover when viewed from the Heath; and the recently updated and submitted verified view 3.6.2 when viewed from Millfield Lane.

Likely effect: The views from the Heath and Millfield Lane will not be affected.

6.7 **Landscape assets:** The principal landscape asset – the pond - will benefit significantly from the proposals. It will be carefully protected during construction by means of the Construction Management Plan. Selective tree removals will improve light levels and water quality so removing the principal threat to its survival. Its water supply will be augmented through run-off from green roofs. Marginal and aquatic planting and associated swales will increase habitat diversity. The pond will be managed in accordance with a management plan to be agreed with Camden.

The green footprint of the site on completion will actually be greater than the current situation. This will be achieved through the widespread use of green roofs. Comparative figures from Appendix 9 of the Ecological Appraisal are as follows:

Existing		Proposed	
Built development	Greenspace	Built development	Greenspace
29%	71%	22%	78%

Likely effect: noticeable positive change

6.8 **Trees and vegetation:** Section 4.8 of the DAS shows how the total numbers of trees will be increased as part of the development (39 removed, and 82 replacements; 1:2.1 replacement ratio). The proposals have been generated in conjunction with Camden, use a high proportion of native species appropriate to the Conservation Area and retain and enhance the relict orchard. Trees will be managed in accordance with an agreed management plan to ensure their continued health and safety.

Likely effect: minor improvement

6.9 **Biodiversity:** The site has been designed with ecological corridors to provide a number of important fauna movement routes between Heath and Highgate woods. These corridors are strengthened by the use of swales, and native hedges to provide a highly connected ecological framework. Extensive ecological mitigation includes ecologically based planting, an increase in the area of woodland, the introduction of semi- improved grassland, water quality and general ecological enhancement of the pond.

The Ecological Appraisal that accompanies the application states that 'the proposed development can be delivered whilst enhancing the value of the Site for wildlife' (Section 5.1).

Likely effect: minor positive

6.10 **Heritage:** It is the green edges of the Site that contribute most to the significance of the conservation area. The pond on Site, whilst a picturesque feature dating from the time of the former farm, is screened in views from the street. The Proposed Development will enhance the visual quality of the site edges to both Fitzroy Park and Millfield Lane, providing a boundary treatment of a greater quality and more appropriate appearance. In doing so it will enhance the significance of the conservation area, albeit to a limited degree (the inclusion of additional access points will not affect the significance of the conservation area). The retention of the pond on site, which will remain as a legible element of the historic landscape from within site, will ensure there is no harm to significance.

Likely effect: noticeable improvement

6.11 As set out above at 6.6 Views From the Heath, the Proposed Development will not affect the views from the Heath or Millfield Lane.

Likely effect: no change

6.12 The new houses on Site continue the pattern of high quality architect designed dwellings set in garden landscape, which are characteristic of the area and contribute to the significance of the conservation area.

## 7 Overall effect on the value of open space

7.1 Collation of the above likely effects would result in the following likely outcome.

Attribute	Current value	Likely effect of proposals	Resultant value
Openness	Low	Minor increase in openness	Medium Low
Screening/edge Millfield Lane	Low	Noticeable improvement	Medium
Screening/edge Fitzroy Park	Medium	Negligible overall negative change	Medium
Views from the Heath	Positive contribution	No change	Positive contribution
Landscape assets	Generally Low	Noticeable improvement	Medium
Trees & vegetation	Low	Minor improvement	Medium low
Biodiversity	Low	Minor improvement	Medium low
Heritage	Low	Noticeable improvement	Medium low

7.2 On balance this would indicate a likely minor increase in the value of the site's open space. At worst there would be no overall diminishment of value. The site's contribution to the character of the Conservation Area is likely to have a similar overall effect.

## 8 Summary of effects in relation to Policy A2, Open Space

8.1 The analysis of Simon Bird QC's opinion concludes that there are three key parts of Policy A2 that could be affected by changes brought about by the development proposals. These are:

- Part A, protection of the quality of open space
- Part C, avoiding detriment to the setting of designated open space (the Heath)
- Part F, conserving/enhancing heritage value/character/appearance of the Conservation Area or to the setting of heritage assets

8.2 The other parts of the policy are not relevant.

8.3 **Part A, Protection of the quality of open space:** The Council will '*protect all designated public and private open space as shown on the Policies Map and in the accompanying schedule unless equivalent or better provision of open space in terms of quality and quantity is provided within the local catchment area*'.

- 8.4 The site is designated private open space. The above assessment proposals and other material submitted with the Application demonstrate compliance with Part A by:
- 8.5 Quantum: The quantity of open space has not been adversely affected and has arguably been actually increased as has been demonstrated by:
- Plot ratio data submitted within the DAS, section 3.2
  - Green space data submitted above (an increase of 7% site cover)
- 8.6 Quality: The above qualitative assessment clearly demonstrates that most quality indicators show some degree of improvement in the quality of the open space. Only one indicator showed a potential minor reduction in quality. The assessment shows that on balance the quality of open space will be slightly improved.
- Noticeable improvement of Millfield Lane frontage and landscape assets
  - Minor improvement in openness and biodiversity
  - Neutral or minor improvement on trees and vegetation
  - Neutral effect on views from the Heath, and
  - Negligible or minor reduction in quality on Fitzroy Park frontage
- 8.7 **Part C, Avoiding detriment to the setting of designated open space (the Heath):** The Council will '*resist development which would be detrimental to the setting of designated open spaces*'.
- 8.8 Verified view 3.6.3 in the DAS shows that the proposed development will not be visible from the Heath. Proposed enhancement of Millfield Lane will be directly beneficial to the immediate setting of the Heath. The proposals comply with Part C.
- 8.9 **Part F, Conserving/enhancing heritage value/character/appearance of the Conservation Area:** The Council will '*conserve and enhance the heritage value of designated open spaces and other elements of open space which make a significant contribution to the character and appearance of conservation areas or to the setting of heritage assets*'.
- 8.10 The site and its open space have little heritage value and no heritage assets. The site makes limited contribution to the Conservation Area and certainly falls short of making 'a significant contribution' as stated in the Policy. The contribution to the setting of the Heath (an assumed heritage asset) is shown to be limited with no inter-visibility with the proposed development. There are no listed buildings that will be affected by the proposals.
- 8.11 Those elements which contribute most to the significance of the Conservation Area, the boundary edges to Fitzroy Park and Millfield Lane, will be enhanced. The pond is retained as part of new enhanced landscape design on Site, and there are no harmful visual effects in views from the local area.

## 9 Conclusion

- 9.1 The assessment shows that the quality of the existing open space is relatively low and the site's contribution to the character of the Conservation Area is limited.
- 9.2 The development proposals are considered to result in a qualitative improvement to the open space and will certainly avoid any reduction in quality on balance.
- 9.3 The development proposals are also considered compliant with relevant Parts A, C and F of Policy A2, Open Space.

LUC, 14<sup>th</sup> May 2019