David Fowler
Planning Officer
London Borough of Camden

3rd June, 2019

Dear Mr Fowler,

***Planning Application 2019/2375/P: Abacus School***

We are writing as the Governors of New End Primary School to object to the application for permission to use the former Hampstead police station in Rosslyn Hill, NW3, as a primary school.

**Amenity, traffic and environmental reasons**

We understand that the application asserts that the school will not create any impact on traffic movements.

As a school which is only three minutes walk from the tube – and therefore even better situated in relation to public transport than the Hampstead police station – we find this unconvincing. At New End we have taken all the steps possible to try to reduce car journeys in the vicinity of the school; we encourage pupils and parents to walk or cycle to school if possible, and otherwise to use public transport. Despite all our efforts, we have significant issues with parents driving to school, parking illegally in roads around the school, causing significant disruption for local residents and contributing to already excessive local pollution levels.

While most New End parents don’t routinely plan to drive their children to school, circumstances result in a significant number of car journeys to school. Bad weather, moving house to further away, and simply being late in the morning are the key reasons why parents resort to driving.

There are so many schools within a mile of Hampstead Underground Station, and the traffic situation is so difficult, that Camden has discussed implementing measures to address the issues, up to and including closing local streets during school drop-off and collection times.

As a school we have no powers, beyond persuasion, to stop parents using their cars. Wardens are relatively impotent as there is a 10 minute rule before they can issue tickets.

Based on our experience, it is simply not credible that any new school will not generate extra traffic, pollution and tensions with residents.

Yet under the local Camden Plan 4.33 there is a clear and unambiguous statement:

*“The scale and intensity of use of some community facilities, such as schools, colleges and higher education facilities can lead to adverse impacts on residential amenity. This is principally related to the movement of large numbers of people at certain times of day, impacts such as noise and air pollution and the pressure on the transport system. The Council will ensure schemes satisfactorily address the impacts of changes to the balance and mix of uses in the area, including the cumulative impact of schemes with planning permission or awaiting determination. Hampstead and Belsize Park have a very high concentration of schools where significant issues exist concerning the ‘school run’. We will refuse applications for new schools or the expansion of existing schools in these areas, unless it can be demonstrated the number of traffic movements will not increase. Policy A1 Managing the impact of development refers to how the Council will manage the impact of traffic movements.“*

Allowing a new school in the former police station would breach the unequivocal policy statement that the Council “will refuse applications for new schools or the expansion of existing schools in these areas, unless it can be demonstrated the number of traffic movements will not increase”.

**Demographic and planning reasons – the impact on existing schools**

We are very concerned about the impact of this planning submission on New End and other state-funded primary schools in the area. Intense pressures on school funding are already being exacerbated by the effect declining pupil numbers has on school funding. At New End school we are already experiencing this impact: despite our best efforts, we currently have 79 unfilled spaces. Every unfilled place results in a loss to the school of £5,048 a year – a total of £398,792.00 for 79 vacancies. The cumulative effect, if such losses continue and mount up, will be to undermine the efficiency of the school. If additional school places are created through the expansion or creation of new schools such as Abacus, there is bound to be a further worsening of existing schools’ financial position.

The combination of funding pressure, declining pupil numbers and increasing capacity will be toxic: there will simply not be enough children or money to go round.

I believe that the two relevant planning areas in relation to the proposed location of Abacus school at the Hampstead police station are PA1 (which includes New End School, Hampstead generally and the Hampstead police station) and PA3 (which includes Belsize Park and the proposed Abacus catchment area).

When Abacus put forward plans for a two form entry school in 2016, the demographics looked very different. School capacity and pupil numbers in both PA1 and PA3 were projected to remain broadly in line with each other. Now, three years later, the demographics have changed significantly according to Camden’s own figures.

In particular the latest set of demographic projections show:

* The birth rate is falling in both PA1 and PA3, as well as in Camden generally.
* After minor increases in the next couple of years, the number of 4 year olds declines relentlessly from 2020 to 2038 in both PA1 and PA3. The total decline in PA1 and PA3 taken together amounts to about 12% (approximately 170 children).
* The numbers of unfilled places in Camden, in PA1 and PA3, are all projected to increase over the coming years.
* All the key demographic forecasts have been reduced since 2016.

In PA1 the total surplus of places for 4-10 year olds will grow from 146 now to 216 in 2027. In PA3 the situation is more dramatic, with surplus spaces growing from 264 to 394. PA1 and PA3 combined have 410 surplus spaces today which is projected to increase to 610 surplus spaces in 2027.

Put simply, that means there is surplus space amounting to almost two single form entry schools today and this is projected to grow to nearly three whole single form entry schools in 2027.

We note that these numbers already include Abacus, but even excluding Abacus there is significant spare capacity.

Finally, we understand that in addition to being given a £14m building, plus a reported further £7m being spent on the fit-out, Abacus will earn and keep a significant income from managing a new business centre in some of the surplus space. This will amount to a very significant subsidy to Abacus School that is simply not available to other state schools.

Put together, the brand new facilities coupled with very generous space, and a very significant subsidy from the business centre, amount to significant unfair advantages for Abacus School when, at the very time when, as described above, the proposal creates even more unnecessary spare capacity and will result in other local schools being starved of desperately needed funds.

For all the reasons outlined in this letter, the Governors of New End School are strongly opposed to the granting of planning approval to Abacus School for its use of the former police station. If such a development were permitted, it would pose a serious threat to the future financial stability of New End (and of other local state primary schools). The increased numbers of parents driving their children to school in the Rosslyn Hill area would also serve to undermine our long-term campaign to persuade New End parents to adopt more environmentally friendly modes of transport in order to mitigate the unacceptable levels of pollution and congestion in the centre of Hampstead. We urge you to reject the Abacus application.

Yours sincerely,

**Governors of New End Primary School**

Linda Davies (Chair)

Helen Andrews

Susan Blake

Stephen Buzzard

Mirit Eldor

Tony Millard

Bianca Mollura

Regis Peyraque

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