



Mr David Fowler
Principal Planner
Camden Planning
5 Pancreas Square
London N1C 4AG

Dear Mr Fowler

Objection to Planning Application 2019/2375/P

Locus: I live a short distance from the school and will be impacted by it.

I write to set out my grounds for requesting that Camden refuse the application above or make such conditions on its approval to meet my concerns. I wish to object on several grounds:

- 1 **Listed Building Status:** The planning application does not fully meet the previous objections and concern on the listed building treatment. In particular, some features of the listed building are not being protected. For example: Alterations to essential features of the Court Room as proposed is totally unnecessary and would constitute vandalism. The room is the most important part of the interior according to EH's listing, is one of the first in England and is intact; it does not need to be converted for business use.
- 2 **The proposal to allow change of use for business use of the "excess" space.** Aside from confirming that this building is far too large for a 210 pupil school, the concept of allowing business units on a quiet residential street is extraordinary and wrong. The school proposes to charge handsomely for these units – a figure of £150,000 a year has been mooted¹.

On planning grounds, I specifically object to the approval for and/or change of use. This is an inappropriate venue for such units being in a residential street. Further these units will increase traffic flow potentially significantly – those claiming to be without cars will merely use taxis as we have seen elsewhere. It will be impractical to expect a school to control business traffic.

Even if planning for the school is agreed, I urge the Planning team to reject this part of the proposal or at least require a separate and fuller discussion.

¹ It appears amazing that a 100% publically funded school owned by a private trust should be allowed to charge large fees for business premises and seemingly pocket the income at public expense. This puts Abacus at a seemingly unfair advantage compared to other state funded schools many of who are have a difficult time financially.

3 An unnecessary school distorting the state funded school system in North Camden:

Currently Abacus is small and this would be a big expansion to 210 pupils. Camden's own figures show that there are more than adequate primary school places, now and in the future, to take the current Abacus pupils and the ones needed to fill those 210 places.

It is argued that a non-faith state school is needed for Belsize Park, yet this site is not in Belsize Park. There are spaces at Fleet Road School, for example, a school that is even closer for many pupils living in Belsize Park.

New End School, also nearby, has publically confirmed that it fears being damaged by the siting of Abacus so close by and being seriously disadvantaged at a time when their own school roll is falling with vacant places.

At a public meeting parents displayed emotional support for the new Abacus site, which is in the context of an improvement from the current site, which is far away. None of the parents will either pay for, or be adversely impacted by, the new site and therefore are arguably their comments must be tempered by their lack of locus. It is surely only natural to support strongly the idea of having your child in a spanking new school at no cost.

At another consultation meeting with Abacus and local parties, a governor of Abacus freely admitted that the location of the school was not ideal and that he would much rather have it in Belsize Park.

The permanent damage to residents in a wide area and to other Camden schools far outweighs any balancing public benefit of having Abacus on the new site.

4 Noise: The application uses a consultants' report. The report however is apparently based on the noise level from the current 30 pupil school with their desk-top extrapolation to the far larger site. It also assumes some features of the school will mitigate the noise.

Fact: A recent visit to the site by current Abacus pupils – less than 30 – was not only noticed by but resulted in complaints by the immediate residents over noise. The noise made by primary school children is high pitched and carries far. It is not as attenuated by heavy structures as are lower frequencies.

The noise of up to 210 children in the outside will be public nuisance beyond the reasonable level in a residential area.

This public nuisance goes beyond any public benefit.

5: Traffic and congestion:

The application makes much of being a *car free* school. While this concept is nice to present to an environmental concerned audience, **it is misleading if not dishonest for the following reasons:**

- A. Car free cannot be enforced as Abacus freely admits.
- B. Car free already applies in some form at other Camden Schools but is ignored by many parents as the congestion around say New End School demonstrates.
- C. Because the site is in "the wrong place" the distance for many parents in Belsize Park to Hampstead is such that young children and those not fully mobile will be physically challenged to walk. Some will have to come by car.

- D. Although parents made claims in public meetings to live without a car, the reality is that they use taxis and specifically Uber when late, as was even admitted in the public meeting.
- E. There is very limited public transport to use.
- F. Promises on walking and cycling change in cold and wet weather.
- G. The additional traffic comprises not just parents leaving and collecting 210 children twice a day but also traffic from the essential business deliveries required by a school for its normal operations. This will mean vans and lorries at all times of the day in the narrow already congested streets.
- H. Downshire Hill and my road, Keats Grove will inevitably become a rat run for traffic to the school from the south and particularly by parents from Belsize Park. To park next to Abacus site, means arriving from the Keats Grove end of Downshire hill otherwise it will be on the wrong side of the street. Keats Grove is a narrow road with mainly old people as residents and with a museum and public library on the narrowest part visited by vulnerable people.
- I. If approved, the business units will generate their own traffic. These units are not bound by the schools car –free policy and while parking is difficult locally, we see how other business manage with permits. Further businesses will simply use taxis; walking is not an option to meetings elsewhere and the distance to the tube is not minor.
- J. The consultant to the applicant made statements at a public meeting which were simply wrong and even suggests that his work may be flawed. He claimed, for example, that traffic from the Police Station when it was operational was substantial and therefor the school traffic would not be a major increase over what existed before. He then admitted that he had not examined that earlier traffic or made detailed studies to back this up.
Fact: The actual traffic from the Police Station was modest and well spread and neighbours lived happily with it. A school of this size is concentrated traffic of another order.

6 **Pollution: The school will itself generate pollution which is additive.** The constant delivery of supplies is going to be additional to the load of lorries and vans in Hampstead.

In summary, I suggest that this application should be declined because

- The pupils currently at Abacus can be housed within the current schools of Camden in the public interest and the Interest of Camden Council. The development of this new site benefits a very few but impacts the many adversely.
- The environmental damage from the school and additional traffic generated outweighs any public benefit of the school
- The business unit proposal is totally inappropriate both for the site and for a state funded school.

Yours Faithfully



Steven Bobasch