

Margaret Rodgers



Camden Council
- Camden Planning -
Mr David Fowler, Principal Planner
5 Pancras Square
London N1C 4AG

11 June 2019

Dear Mr Fowler,

Planning Application Consultation - Planning Ref: 2019/2375/P

I respond to your invitation to comment on the said application submitted for the Abacus School and would ask you to refuse the application for a change of use from police station (sui generis) to school (Use Class D1) including the planned works for the following reasons:

- Principles of development
- Traffic, Health and Safety
- Heritage

Principles of Development

Hampstead already has London's highest density of schools, nurseries and colleges with 37 institutions of which 13 are non-fee paying LA, Voluntary- Aided or Community schools. In the immediate vicinity of the proposed Downshire Hill location already nine schools are located within a distance of one kilometre.

The applicants have not provided sufficient evidence that there is the local need for a new school of any size in either Hampstead or Belsize. In fact, the catchment area of the proposed school does not benefit and excludes Hampstead children who live directly next to and in easy walking distance to the school.

Rather, the setting up of a new school in the former police station and its aim to hire out its premises to other users as a "business and enterprise space" will create significant additional demand from outside the NW3 area with all the consequences in terms of increased traffic and related Health and Safety issues.

Traffic, Health and Safety

Due to the high-density of schools in NW3 with already more than 10,000 pupils and specifically in Hampstead and close to Downshire Hill (both Northbridge House Senior School and the Academy primary school with a comprised number of over 430 pupils are within a three minute walking distance from the proposed school), the area and Downshire Hill already suffer very significantly from school traffic movement and pollution. Despite efforts to encourage alternative means of transportation, there is clear evidence that cars remain the preferred means of school transport.

The proposed school's location on Downshire Hill / Rosslyn Hill is at the furthest possible location from the school's specifically targeted Belsize catchment area and it is therefore highly likely that at least a quarter of all children will be dropped off and collected by car. Additional traffic and noise will also result from school-related services (deliveries, services, waste) as well from traffic resulting from the already proposed extended use of the school outside normal school hours, i.e. in the evenings and on weekends. This will lead to a further major increase in traffic movement, parking problems, road safety hazards as well as air and noise pollution.

Car emission pollution levels - according to research by the Hampstead Neighbourhood Forum - are already double the accepted upper emissions limit in the immediate surroundings. These will increase significantly under the proposed school development, putting public health as well as the facades of the many listed heritage buildings even more at risk. Noise pollution due to increased traffic as well as the proposed use by third parties through hiring out the premises outside school hours and on weekends is an additional major concern that will have an adverse impact on the surrounding residents' quality of life.

Heritage / Design

In its Conservation Area Statement Camden Council specifically recognises Downshire Hill's "... abundance of quality in the buildings with 48 listed houses, mostly from the early 19th century ... including the imposing side elevation of the listed Police Station on Rosslyn Hill". Being in the centre of Hampstead and due to its proximity to Hampstead Heath, the area is enjoyed not only by locals but by a large number of visitors.

The school proposes erecting a 4 metre high "acoustic wall" around its courtyard which is to be used as a playground/ sportsground during school hours up until 17.30 and also available for hire outside school hours on weekends. This proposed screen is in no way in keeping with the historic character of the surrounding gardens. Apart from not being able to guarantee an adverse noise impact on tenants living higher than four metres, this wall risks blocking out light from a number of listed properties closest to the walls.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Rodgers