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55 Fitzroy Park, Highgate

Further Structural comments on the Basement Proposals and potential issues at 55 Fitzroy Park, following a review at the documents uploaded to the LB Camden website since November 2018

1. In September 2018 Alan Baxter Ltd (ABA) provided the Fitzroy Park Residents Association (FPRA) and the Superintendent of Hampstead Heath, on behalf of the City of London Corporation (Col), with structural comments on the documents submitted in support of the planning application to build five houses on the site of 55 Fitzroy Park. In October 2018 we produced a summary of areas where important information had not been provided or the information provided was unclear or lacked sufficient detail.
2. In December 2018 we provided further Structural comments on additional documents and information uploaded to the London Borough of Camden (LBC) planning Website during November 2018. This included comments on the Basement Impact Assessment (BIA) audit carried out by Campbell Reith (CR) for LBC. In summary the audit found that there was quite a lot of further information needed to satisfy a number of the requirements of a BIA and that some of the information already provided was not clear. This was summarised on an Audit Query Tracker.
3. During November and December 2018 the developer’s team submitted further reports (e.g site investigation report), a sustainability statement, an addendum to the BIA and a SuDS statement. In February 2019 LBH Wembley also issued a further technical note on the impact of plots 1, 2 and 3 on the Fitzroy Park Carriageway, which were all uploaded to the LBC planning portal.
4. Shortly afterwards CR uploaded their revised final BIA audit which, on the basis of the original BIA documents and additional information presented, accepted that the BIA met the requirements of Camden Planning Guidance: Basements. A review of the audits and in particular the query trackers shows that CR considered that the additional information provided in the period December 2018 to February 2019 addressed some of their comments relating to groundwater monitoring and utilities information. On the question of the stability of the retaining walls they have accepted the developer’s position that there will be negligible impact on the existing retaining walls because the new basement construction is far enough away from the existing walls. The February 2019 technical note shows the designers have moved the basement to plot 3 further away from the boundary (but not the ground floor construction) in order to move it away from the existing retaining wall (see drawing 1675/118 /04). The position is similar with regards to the cumulative impact of the current basement proposals on groundwater flows. As far as we are aware no assessment has been undertaken of the cumulative impact of the basement construction in the area, but CR have “accepted” that the basement proposals will have a negligible impact. They stated that suitable mitigation measures are described to offset potential impacts to groundwater but, go on to note that these still have to be developed into a detailed design. On the questions of slope stability analysis/ the design of the Mechanically Stabilised Earth (MSE) retaining wall adjacent to the pond and discrepancies in the SuDS proposals, CR have now concluded that these are both beyond the scope of the audit although they had been raised previously (see audit query trackers).

They then go on to state in the main text that a detailed assessment should be carried out in due course to ensure that there will be no implication on the stability of the pond and that aspects of the SuDS design relating to the discharge to the nature reserve requires further review and design. It is clear therefore that whilst CR still have reservations regarding the level of detail provided on various aspects of the proposals, they now appear to have accepted that this is beyond the scope of Camden’s BIA requirements despite originally raising concerns.

1. ABA’s brief has been broad and extended beyond the scope of Camden’s BIA requirements to include drainage design, risk of contamination, construction access, vehicle movements and the impact on trees. We have produced a summary schedule of our comments/queries with reference to CR’s initial audit, further information provided and a current status (following CR’s second assessment). A copy is attached. The highlights that there are still gaps in the information provided, that further more detailed design is needed in a number of areas to justify the proposals and that the risk of contamination of the pond and the nature reserve/ Highgate ponds remains.
2. It is known that the ground water regime in the area is complex and that in addition to groundwater flows through the fairly low permeability fill and head deposits there are natural springs present (see Professor Lyne Turner – Stokes letter of 3 July 2008). There are also reports of surface water run off previously flooding onto the site which has made its way into the pond. The ground conditions are also complicated by the presence of the buried river bed feature, filled with superficial/head deposits (see drawings no 1675/118/01-04). Precise details of the current flow regime are unknown but the pond generally maintains a good level even following periods of extended dry weather and water is observed to trickle across Millfiled Lane during even the driest weather. It appears highly unlikely that the construction of the five basements can proceed without affecting the ground water flows in both the temporary and permanent conditions. In the temporary condition sheet piled retaining walls are to be installed which will affect the flows and bunds are proposed around plots 4 and 5 to collect ground water, which will then be discharged to the combined sewer to avoid contaminating the pond. This proposal should be extended to include plots 1 to 3, but the risk of contamination of groundwater entering the pond and then the nature reserve will remain because of the close proximity of the works to the pond. In the permanent condition the temporary sheet piles should be removed to allow groundwater to continue to flow towards the nature reserve. Given the complexity of the current ground flows it will be extremely difficult to design the SuDS scheme to avoid changes in the flows. Consideration should therefore be given to introducing a freer draining material below the basement slabs and around the basement walls to help maintain the natural groundwater flows towards the pond and nature reserve and avoid raised groundwater levels in front of the basements. A similar approach was proposed at 53 Fitzroy Park (see drawing 1675/118/02). Without a free draining material around the basement construction there is a risk that there will be a build-up in the level of the groundwater in front of the new basements similar to that which occurred at 51 Fitzroy Park.
3. We have also reviewed again the need for temporary works to the existing retaining wall along Fitzroy Park. Whilst details of the existing structure are unknown, the wall appears to have performed satisfactorily to date and should not be undermined by the excavations for the basement to plots 1 and 3, particularly now that the basement to plot 3 has been moved away from the boundary/road. However, as noted in September 2018 there will be a lot more HGV’s using Fitzroy Fark and we think it would be sensible for the developer’s team to carry out an assessment of the condition of the wall and install some temporary works if necessary to avoid any movement and damage to the carriageway.
4. Some information on statutory services and the combined sewer in Fitzroy Park has been provided along with a schematic diagramme showing the proposed drainage to the hardstanding in front of plots 1 to 3 connected to the combined sewer. No information has been provided on the foul sewer which serves Fitzroy Farm, Wallace House and the Water House and is noted to run under the tennis court (see drawings 1675/118/06). This will have to be diverted to make way for the construction of the basements to plots 4 and 5, and details should be provided. Ownership of the sewer is unknown but as it appears to serve a number of properties it is likely to fall under the jurisdiction of Thames Water and consent will have to be obtained for the diversion, which may not necessarily be forthcoming.
5. The ABA summary schedule of comments/queries shows that the queries first raised in September 2018 regarding material volumes and HGV manoeuvers, construction access and the impact of the proposed works on existing trees have not been satisfactorily resolved. In particular excavations for the new swale will have a significant impact on the trees at the boundary with Millfiled Lane. These are not issues for the BIA or CR audit but inconsistencies remain in the information submitted with the CMP and subsequent clarifications and these are an ongoing concern for the FRPA and CoL.
6. Based on our review of the information and documents uploaded to the LB Camden website we consider that there are still important gaps in the information provided relating to the BIA and other aspects of the proposals. Whilst CR have accepted that the BIA meets the requirements of Camden’s Planning Guidance: Basements, it is clear that no assessment has been undertaken of the cumulative impact of the basement construction in the area. CR have taken the view that the basement proposals will have a negligible impact, offset by suitable mitigation measures. However, they note that these measures still have to be developed into a detailed design. Because of the complexity/variability of the ground conditions and groundwater flows it is very likely that the groundwater flows will be affected by the works and that this could have implications for the pond, nature reserve and Highgate ponds. On the issues of the slope stability analysis/ the design of the MSE Wall and discrepancies in the SuDS proposals, CR have now concluded that these are beyond the scope of their audit, despite having raised these matters initially. They go on to indicate that more detailed assessments; further review and design are required in due course. We believe that these issues are important, particularly to maintaining the existing hydrology and groundwater flows across the site and should be properly clarified at this stage. We have also made a number of recommendations to help maintain the current flows and avoid raised groundwater levels including the removal on any temporary sheet piles and introducing a free draining material below and around the proposed new basements. To reduce the risk of contamination of the pond and the wider environment we have also suggested that the bunds proposed around plots 4 and 5 should be extended to include plots 1 to 3. We also consider that further information should be provided on the foul sewer which is noted to run under the existing tennis court along with details of proposals for diverting the sewer in order to construct the basements to plots 4 and 5.

While outside the requirements for the BIA we also recommended that an appraisal is carried out of the existing retaining Wall to Fitzroy Park and that temporary works proposals are considered if necessary. Further information and or clarification is also still needed regarding material volumes, construction access, HGV manoeuvres and the true impact of the proposed works on existing trees.