

HAMPSTEAD CONSERVATION AREA ADVISORY COMMITTEE - HCAAC  
ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSAL – Application 2016/1590/P and 2016/2042/L  
PROPOSED ABACUS NEW SCHOOL Downshire Hill & Rosslyn Hill, NW3

**Summary of main points** in assessing the proposals. Detailed in the following pages.  
The 2016 comments are retained for reflection, with *comments on the 1FE application* labelled **HCAAC 2019**.

### **1. Use of the site and adjoining owned site**

No master plan, no explanation of the need for all the space planned, nor of management while the school is growing. Presence of an adjacent owned site without explanation as to its proposed use indicates further possible school expansion.

#### **HCAAC 2019 –**

1. *The proposal recognises limits to proper exploitation of HPS site by suggesting a more leisurely accommodation of 1FE, facilitating more proper provision of facilities.*
2. *That a modern school is to take up a number of floors rather than the current trend for lateral planning still appears unfortunate.*
3. *HCAAC is not aware of a final likely use for the neighbouring site- the Applicant states it will be sold, indicating non-retention for future school use.*

### **2. Need for a school**

No evidence of Camden education department support for this school. Camden will not have relation to the school as an academy. Camden's reported own borough-wide assessment contradicts developer's claims of need.

#### **HCAAC 2019 –**

4. *Applicant states Camden support the Abacus School. As a school operating in Camden that may be so in limited respect. However, we do not have access to Camden's school places reports, so cannot comment on the Applicant's assumption that support for Abacus and proof of over-subscription is expressed or implied in the 2018 school places report. We note that Ofsted's periodic assessments of schools for grading reports (2018) shows some under-subscription and some full take-up of primary places in NW3.*
5. *Applicant stresses the 'Outstanding' Ofsted assessment in support of a 'right of entry to Hampstead'. The assessment was in 2015 with update due soon. Enlarging the school roll if that occurred would hopefully maintain that grading,*
6. *There is local discussion of some under-subscription on NW3 primary schools – we have seen no evidence of this. However there is considerable concern locally and nationally about central government funding cuts producing pressures on existing schools while free schools and academies are fully funded and under no such pressure. Administrative pressure carries risks for schools' performance – eg 4-day week ?? which may unfairly reflect on existing schools.*
7. *As Abacus proposes to double its roll to a 1FE, from where are the additional pupils to come ? There must be some snatch from the rolls of existing local schools.*
8. *Camden Education Department should be asked for evidence of the need for more school places especially with reference to existing schools.*
9. *Applicants Planning Statement para 2.9 shows Camden's view of limits to growth and the now concerning possibility of a 'raid' in existing school rolls.*
10. *Any perceived over-subscription in existing NW3 schools may well be because of out-of-NW3 catchment, which is not guaranteed over time.*

### **3. Catchment area**

The validity of the proposed catchment area is queried, as is its likely extension. Edge-of-area school location dubious, apparently seeking enlargement or justifying school size excessive for this site, creating traffic pressure.

#### **HCAAC 2019 –**

11. *This point is still in doubt bearing in mind the previously demonstrated wider catchment. How is the proposed restriction to central Hampstead to be applied? What are the addresses of the present families and if not in the proposed catchment how is transition to be achieved, combining a roll reduction by exclusion of wider catchment with an increased roll from less than 100, say, to 210?*
12. *Need to clarify this point, even taking into account the likely inception of a school in HPS at, say, 2022, 6-7 years on from the previously-reported catchment.*
13. *The impression is of a likely raid on existing schools, justified by the 'Outstanding' central government assessment. Para 2.9 of the Travel Plan.*
14. *A restricted catchment also threatens some existing families having pupils at Abacus and seeking places elsewhere.*
15. *All this must be fully assessed and published for Council's decision to preclude disruption and disadvantage to existing schools.*
16. *Catchment should also be assessed to gauge the likely commitment to and feasibility of a green travel plan.*

### **4. Planning of the building**

Many proposed rooms have less desirable characteristics for young children. Tight sunless, airless alley as main building entrance intimidating. Use of air-conditioning admission of failure, underlining the poor air quality of surroundings.

#### **HCAAC 2019 –**

17. *Some of the above criticism applies to the new scheme.*
18. *This Grade II building should be designed with regard to its Listing description and to what is not described.*
19. *The Heritage officers reported statement of suitability of the building for a school seems not to account for its severe limitations particularly in site space, edaylighting and its poisonous locality.*
20. *Any design for use of this building must not 'walk-on-eggshells' and must use the best examples and techniques of new design with heritage buildings to maximise usefulness. .*
21. *This is still not evident in the proposals although room planning seems improved over the previous scheme, appearing a better offer in spatial design for school use.*
22. *Much more daylighting required eg stairs by rearward facing rooflights, for year rooms relative to their depths, etc. While adjoining site in same ownership, possible to have windows on that side pre-sale?*

### **5. Traffic & street use, submission response.**

Traffic submission is flawed, ignoring its own data re car parking and traffic patterns at each end of the day.

#### **HCAAC 2019 –**

23. *The current application ignores the problems with the 2016 application, proposing a Green Travel Plan which assumes non-car use for pupils.*
24. *This is in doubt until catchment and relation to existing schools is verified. Applicants' report admits the need to monitor and control – paras 1.12, 3.3, 3.5 - there will be some car use probably in excess of Applicants' stated expectation, as is said to happen in many travel plans.*

25. *We have not examined the existing travel plan although we are aware of the bussing necessitated; has the existing plan and monitoring reduced or eliminated parents' car use either at Camley Street or Swiss Cottage. ? This must be in doubt – no statement from the Applicant as they will not know of such certainly at Swiss Cottage. Parents who drive will drop off their children at 150 metres from the school if need be.*
26. *Para 2.8 quotes London Plan policy 6.3 – adequacy of transport infrastructure defining a school's roll. Is there a hint of future expansion being impossible due to limited transport facility ? – ie 'it can't happen, can it ?' The proposed insertion of even a proportion of another 200 children to the current transport environment is an imposition. But if that is swallowed, perhaps a doubling might also be, perhaps transport will improve to allow it ?*
27. *A point because the Applicant stresses elsewhere school use of accommodation over business.....*

## **6. Air quality**

Undesirable location and environment for a young children's school, exactly the situation to be avoided, will be exacerbated by a new school's traffic.

### **HCAAC 2019 –**

28. *The above is still true despite desired attempts to ameliorate area traffic impacts and pollution. Electric universality is still decades away.*
29. *Traffic impacts would be a feature of a school's presence, part parents' school run, part deliveries, part bussing to educational venues.*
30. *The Applicants' solution to poor air is more use of air-conditioning, somewhat ingeniously called 'ventilation plant' - the obvious degrading of a sustainability assessment of a school's presence and activity.*
31. *Unfortunately air-conditioning does not affect the street (except as added heat to the immediate environment) nor the school's external areas.*

## **7. Design**

Erroneous claims made for the new rear block appearance, windows etc. Unsympathetic design for a young children's environment.....

Daylight & sunlight seriously compromised for many rooms and that entrance alleyway.

### **HCAAC 2019 –**

32. *The new proposals eschew grandiose extensions as the roll is reduced.*
33. *Daylight and sunlight provision may have improved slightly – but the sense of limitation of design in a Listed building hampers substantial betterment.*
34. *Sunlight is in any case a difficult catch on this site, the south boundary wall entirely blank, west elevation impossible to devote to year rooms, east elevation a brief sunlight catch where the 'alleyway' should benefit more.*
35. *The building would work hard to accommodate any feasible non-institutional use; a school for very young children is a tough test.*

## **8. Heritage Statement response.**

Police station building a statement of police status balanced with considerations of economy. This school design, and the NPPF background cited, is only about economy, not 'school', certainly not young children's school. ....

### **HCAAC 2019 –**

36. *But economy appears to be dismissed, with the expense of land purchase and building refurbishment & replanning.*

37. *The Applicant goes to great lengths to explain the area character etc. as if justifying the existing building, which is pointless, merely suggesting the importance of 'treating the building right' ie, with kid gloves.*
38. *The building's heritage is not in doubt; what is needed is a more robust approach to design for a truly modern school within by adapting single-mindedly while safeguarding the heritage street asset.*
39. *This has been attempted, but much more would be needed for improved daylighting than can at present be envisaged for this building.*

## **9. Amenity**

Almost completely lacking in this proposal.

### **HCAAC 2019 –**

40. *...and remain so. An over-bearing 4 m high green wall is proposed – to cushion noise for neighbours' sakes ! Schools are and should be routinely planned close to housing – precisely the point, surely. There will be concerns about property values but we find the existing relation of school to housing relatively un concerning, preferring investment of amenity in maximum soft landscaping. which should itself ameliorate children's 'noise' The continuing problem is the constrained site for such amenity.*

## **10. Consultation**

Much criticised as flawed process, no pre-application discussion, lack of follow-up to DMF, itself a partial and generally unsatisfactory '2<sup>nd</sup> gear' appraisal, stage-managed, 'developer will be able to answer points raised'

### **HCAAC 2019 –**

41. *More developed careful, targeted consultation, but with backing and features suggesting a done deal, site purchased, boxes ticked, travel plan certifiable. Written evidence of Camden Education Department assessment or involvement ?*

## **11. Objections & support**

Great deal of strong written objection, un-evidenced sudden support surge over last 2 weeks of this consultation period. (2016)

## **Conclusion**

### **HCAAC 2019 –**

42. *Greater mass of objection – 'Hampstead does not want this school'.*
43. *HCAAC considers the HPS is not suited to school use without fundamental adaptation & internal re=planning. Some such has been attempted and appears to strike the right balance but there are severe constraints on natural environmental improvement internally and externally in daylighting and landscaping for beneficial and substantial external space.*
44. *Pollution is still a major problem and the attempt to solve by air-conditioning admits defeat as well as countering*
45. *Hampstead sustainability.*

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