

The developer Almax has commissioned a full array of supporting documents which take an unbelievably optimistic and unrealistic stance.

The whole area has at present a rural aspect. As the Hampstead Conservation Area Statement (mentioned in the **Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment** under 3.23) says on p.42 ('Branch Hill/Oakhill'): *'The area is principally woodland on the western slopes of Hampstead Heath in which buildings play a subordinate role. It is designated a borough Site of Nature Conservation Importance by the London Ecology Unit.'* But the huge proposed building would hardly play a subordinate role and would **dominate** the area, especially the low-rise Spedan housing estate to the immediate west. It is a domination that would be **felt** as much as experienced visually, not only at the building stage but for ever after with the constant comings and goings that 34 households would create.

I disagree with the **Heritage Statement's** assessment that the proposed development would make a positive contribution visually to the present Branch Hill Lodge, and I would disagree with its evaluation (under 7.3) of the Lodge as being of no architectural significance because it is not 'characteristic' of its Edwardian era. Actually, historic one-offs have a value of their own. And if the Lodge is of no architectural value, why build more of the same with the proposed development?

For that is what the massive extension would be: lamely mimicking the Lodge's style with its string courses, mullioned windows, pediments, tall redundant chimney stacks etc. As an architectural scheme it is a **banal solution** to extending the accommodation possibilities of the Lodge. I would argue that the Lodge requires no extension, but if there needs to be further building a more obvious solution would be to retain part of the ground plan of the 1960s addition, remodelling it with sympathetic materials and finishes to provide an interesting **contrast** to the style of the Lodge, not going above the height of the present addition and even retaining a flattish roof for solar photovoltaic panels to add to the energy efficiency of the development.

That would of course be a much less expensive project altogether and it might enable a proportion of the proposed flats to be offered at **Affordable Housing** rates. Under Almax's document of that name it is really a disgrace that the standard plea is wheeled out offering affordable housing off-site somewhere else. I might add here that I grew up on Branch Hill when the neighbourhood was full of young families, doctors, teachers, writers, artists etc. (commemorated in earlier times with numerous 'blue plaques'). That era is of course over, but it is a great shame that those who could afford to buy into the development as presently proposed would be restricted to the extremely wealthy.

The hugeness of the proposed extension, extending to 4/5 storeys, also has other drawbacks. The **groundworks** will need to be immense, involving very heavy equipment and much noise disturbance for many months, contrary to the bland assertion of the **Sustainability Statement** (under 4.35) that *'it is not considered that the construction phase will yield an adverse level of disturbance'*. Such machinery and the heavy lorries would daily have to negotiate the small access roads.

In this same area, the **Transport Statement** is both lacking and misleading. For it mentions (under 4.11) only one access road to the development, Spedan Close; but there is another, **Heysham Lane**, and that is the one which will no doubt be used by vehicles travelling to and from the north via West Heath Road. From that direction they wouldn't be able to manage the hairpin turning from Branch Hill into Spedan Close. This means that two properties on Branch Hill either side of Heysham Lane will be very adversely affected by increased traffic – namely Lower Lodge and West Heath Lodge. Branch Hill itself is a very narrow and dangerous road (especially as it is blind near the top of the hill).

The Transport Statement also minimises the daily **transport needs** should the development ever be realised. The residents (exc. for 4 disabled) are to be allowed no cars or parking spaces, and there will need to be constant journeys by taxi and Uber, also for any visitors. And then there are the service vehicles, the plumbers, builders, furniture deliverers, and the very many food deliveries by Ocado etc. The Transport Statement lists the various local amenities, Tesco, chemists etc. and gives the time in minutes required to walk to them; but it seems not at all to realise that this area of Hampstead is the hilliest in the whole of London, and only really fit inhabitants would be able to walk to the Hampstead Tube in the specified time (6 mins) or to the bus stop the other side of Whitestone Pond (5 mins) – especially if they are carrying a heavy briefcase or (on the way back) weighed down with shopping bags and in the rain. So, again, more taxis and commercial deliveries. Reasonably fit residents would be able to cycle – there would be housing for cycles in the proposed plan but one would be hard put to find any secure cycle racks in Hampstead village or in London generally, unless there happened to be a designated cycle lock-up at one's place of work.

In short, this proposal is ill thought through, unrealistic, detrimental to the area, and in its present form unworkable.