

**Eileen Willmott's comments on planning application 2020/3461/P, the proposed Chester Road homeless family hostel.**

I am a member of the Dartmouth Park Conservation Area Committee (DPCAAC), where I am the voluntary tree officer. We have not reached a consensus of opinion on the plans, so I am sending my comments as a private individual.

The DPCAAC appreciates the need for temporary accommodation for homeless families in Camden. The current late 1970's building, designed by Bill Forrest, in late modernist style, part of phase 2 of the Highgate Newtown Masterplan, was built for the single mentally handicapped. It is therefore not fit for, or designed for, family accommodation. However, its proposed demolition will release carbon and increase air pollution.

In addition, the hostel is not listed as having either a positive or negative contribution to the DPCAAC in its 2009 Conservation Area Statement.

As the building is to accommodate 50 families, this may be up to 200 people. I have concerns that the local infrastructure could be overloaded, as in addition, the Highgate Newtown Community Centre (HNCC) site is currently being re-developed, including blocks of flats, and also plans are proposed to accommodate elderly residents at the nearby Mansfield Bowling Club site. I understand that the children will be bussed to their local schools, but this would prevent them from being fully integrated into the local community.

The size of the 50-home proposed hostel is of concern, with four storeys at the top of Dartmouth Park Hill. This is much higher than the nearby properties and also the current hostel.

I appreciate the attempts at reducing the environmental impact of the development by using a prefabricated 'Volumetric Modular Construction' method. It is imperative that the building be compartmentalised and fireproof so as not to repeat the Grenfell tragedy.

The 'External Facade Study' proposes single glaze fireproof green terracotta tiles with 'perforated aluminium cladding and a steel structure' to cover the upper storeys. I prefer the building colour to blend in with the red bricks of Edwardian Chester Road opposite, and local Victorian homes. The Planning statement says the tile colour will match that of the green railings in the Highgate Newtown Phase 2c, but these are bright green in colour and even less suitable! We previously asked that the colour of the HNCC development blended with the red brick of the 'Homes for Heroes' of the Brookfield Estate. This they are doing.

I appreciate the development meets the Home Quality MARK (HQM) 4.5 star rating and the 52% carbon reduction due to underfloor electric heating, air source heat pumps (ASHP) to provide hot water and green roofs with solar voltaics and a roof top thermal array for the summer, as they will not be visible from the street.

I approve of the 46 cycle storage spaces for residents and guests, two disabled parking bays for residents, delivery and service bays. However it would be useful if the derelict cars could

be removed from the bottom of Colva Walk to provide more car parking spaces.

I appreciate that the two refuse stores on Chester Road would separate general and recyclable waste, but hope that will not encourage fly tipping locally.

I approve of the retention and improvement of Colva Walk, removing steps, replacing with a ramp, thereby allowing easier access for young, old and the disabled. Upgrading the artificial lighting will also hopefully reduce antisocial behaviour. However, I do have concerns that the taller building will reduce the light even more in Colva Walk and that the trees will receive even less sun light than now.

I approve of the three-storey planting of the central courtyard with a wide range of trees, shrubs and flowers. Although only residents, staff and visitors will have access, it will add amenity value to the site and reduce the stress levels of residents and staff. The pocket garden will also do this.

Although ten trees will be lost from the site, mainly from the courtyard garden, thirteen new ones will be planted. The setting back of the building in Chester Road, with its 'buffer' planting in front, will increase the amenity value of the site, improve air quality and reduce resident's stress. I note that the police recommend, for security reasons, 'prickly plants' at one metre height to deter antisocial behaviour and that the tree canopies must be over two metres in height so light to the windows is not reduced.

The Horse Chestnut (T27) street tree in the Arboricultural report, reported as dying in 2019, was felled earlier this year. I approve its replacement by the conifer *Metasequoia glyptostrodoides* (Dawn Redwood). It will add both amenity value to the site and also increase Camden's arboricultural biodiversity.

I approve the removal of impermeable tarmac to certain of the street trees and that it will be carried out by hand. The designation of tree root protection areas (RPAs) during demolition and construction is appreciated and necessary.

Most importantly the implementation of a 2/3 year maintenance plan for the new plantings must be carried out, especially the watering of street trees around the site.

## **Conclusions**

The replacement of the hostel with the proposed building will make it more fit for purpose, energy efficient, sustainable and with disabled access. However, I do have concerns over its size and method of construction, with tile fire resistant cladding as opposed to brick. I would prefer the colour of the building to blend with, rather than contrast, the local buildings. I appreciate that the energy efficiency of the building would conform to modern standards and approve removing the steps in Colva Walk to enable disabled access. I approve the tree, shrub and flower plantings on and around the site and ask that their 2/3 year maintenance plan, especially watering, be strictly followed enabling them to become established.

