



45 Welbeck Street  
London W1G 8DZ  
020 3409 7755  
info@hghconsulting.com  
[hghconsulting.com](http://hghconsulting.com)

Jennifer Walsh  
Planning Department  
London Borough of Camden  
5 Pancras Square  
London  
N1C 4AG

04 February 2021

Dear Jennifer

**RE: 2017/4156/P – ATHLONE HOUSE, HAMPSTEAD LANE, LONDON, N6 4RU**

**APPLICATION FOR A NON-MATERIAL AMENDMENT UNDER SECTION 96A OF THE TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990**

We are writing on behalf of our client regarding a proposed amendment to the planning permission for the restoration of Athlone House (ref: 2017/4156/P), which we consider to be non-material. We are hereby submitting a formal non-material amendment application under Section 96a of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 in connection with the above permission.

The proposed amendment relates to the location and management of the acid grassland on the site. Following the completion of the works to the main house and the restoration of the historic garden, it has been established that some areas of acid grassland would be more appropriately located elsewhere on the site, in order to protect the quality of the remaining areas of acid grassland. This letter sets out the details of the proposed changes and justifies it in the context of the relevant material considerations.

**Background**

Athlone House is located on Hampstead Lane in Highgate, North London. The house has a long history, having been originally constructed as a mansion house in c.1872, then known as Caenwood Towers, before becoming a Royal Air Force station in 1942 and used as an RAF Intelligence School. Following the end of the Second World War, the house was handed to the Ministry of Health in 1951, converted to a hospital and renamed Athlone House.

The hospital closed in 2003 and the site was sold off into private ownership. Part of the site was redeveloped in the 2000's, which included the construction of three blocks of apartments known as Caenwood Court. Several unsuccessful planning applications were submitted for the redevelopment of Athlone House and upheld at appeal. An application for the restoration and extension of the house was eventually approved in 2016.

**Planning History**

The existing planning permission for the refurbishment and extension of Athlone House and the restoration of the historic gardens was originally granted on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2016 (application reference: 2016/3587/P). The description of development for this application was:

*“Restoration and extension of Athlone House for use as a 6-bedroom single dwelling house; creation of new vehicular/pedestrian entrance from Hampstead Lane and associated part demolition of boundary wall; refurbishment and extension of Caen Cottage and refurbishment of the Gate House, both to be used as ancillary residential accommodation; erection of a summer house on disused tennis court within the grounds; and associated landscaping works and restoration of historic garden.”*

A S.73 application was subsequently approved on 21 September 2017 (application reference: 2017/4156/P) which included minor alterations to the original permission. This permission was implemented in November 2017 and has now been completed. There have been numerous related applications to this permission since which relate to the discharge of planning conditions and several non-material amendments.

### **Planning Policy**

The site is located within the administrative boundary of the London Borough of Camden. The site has a number of existing planning designations, including:

- Open Space (MOL1, SINC Metro);
- Highgate Conservation Area;
- Metropolitan Open Land;
- Hampstead Heath Site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC); and
- Locally Listed Athlone House Grounds (Ref252 – Historic landscape feature).

### **Acid Grassland**

The original planning permission for the restoration of Athlone House (ref: 2016/3587/P) included a series of landscape proposals to restore historic features within the garden and to provide a setting for the building. These proposals were set out in the Ecology Report prepared by Catherine Bickmore Associates (CBA) and included provisions for the establishment of an area of acid grassland and the removal of some scattered trees and shrubs to the west and south of the house which would provide additional acid grassland to benefit biodiversity on the site.

The committee report for the planning permission refers to the acid grass land in paragraphs 6.64 and 6.70. The report notes that the net increase in semi-improved acid grassland would accommodate the requirements of protected species such as bats, grass snakes and nesting birds, and would comprise part of a wider strategy to offset the impact of the approved development on the Hampstead Heath SINC.

The Decision Notice for planning permission 2017/4156/P included a number of planning conditions which captured the references to acid grassland. Part C of planning condition 9 states:

*“Details in respect of the following shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Council before the relevant part of the work is begun: ...*

*...c) full details of ecological enhancements as set out in the Ecology Statement by CBA hereby approved, including methods for the establishment of c0.05ha new acid grassland and c0.04ha wildflower grassland, woodland restoration and the retention of standing deadwood, provision of refugia (e.g. grass piles, log piles), creation of an orchard, improvements to the pond, and native planting.*

*Prior to first occupation of the main house, a landscape management plan for a minimum period of 10 years post-occupation shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Council.”*

This condition (part c) was successfully discharged through the approval of planning application (ref: 2018/1996/P).

## Relevant Planning Conditions

There are also further references to the acid grassland in condition 12 and 14. Planning condition 12 states:

*“Prior to commencement of development (excluding demolition and site preparation works), a wildlife conservation management plan shall be submitted to and approved by the Council. This should provide detail on precautionary methods for the protection of habitats and species during construction and in the intervening period between construction and occupation. They shall include all related recommendations for habitat and species protection as set out in the Ecology Statement by CBA hereby approved, including provision of fencing to protect habitats during construction, methods to protect the acid grassland specifically, methods to protect reptiles and amphibians, and other habitats during construction. This condition may be discharged in phases, subject to agreement.”*

Planning condition 14 states:

*“Prior to commencement of development on any part of the site (excluding demolition and site preparation works), detailed designs should be submitted to and approved by the Council, providing specific detail for that part of the site to show how:*

- a) the extent of works will limit the impacts on the acid grassland on the bank to the west of the main building;*
- b) services for the pavilion will be located to avoid impacts on acid grassland, woodland and the pond;*
- c) access for bats to the loft of the renovated building will be retained.”*

Planning conditions 12 and 14 were both successfully discharged under planning application (ref: 2017/5359/P) and the impacts on the acid grassland were successfully mitigated during the construction period in line with the approved strategy.

The Decision Notice also included a number of planning conditions which relate to the management of the historic gardens and landscape, including condition 9d (as set out above) and 13 (wildlife landscape management plan) which were successfully discharged under planning application (2020/0091/P).

## **Proposed Amendment**

The proposed amendment is for the translocation of a portion of the acid grassland on the site and a revision to the management strategy of the acid grassland. The full details and justification for the proposal are set out in the enclosed Acid Grassland Management Report (January 2021) and the accompanying Management Plan (ref: 0918/21/B/1B) prepared by Tom La Dell and partly described below.

The report sets out that the works to Athlone House under planning permission (ref: 2017/4156/P) have now been completed and the building is now an occupied residential dwelling. As such, the grounds of the house are being used as garden amenity space, particularly the exposed areas immediately around the house. This has especially been the case recently given the ongoing national lockdowns as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The report notes that much of the garden area immediately surrounding the house is comprised of acid grassland and the intensive activity in this area resulting from the use as garden space will prove a major hindrance to the growth and successful management of the acid grassland. This will also impact on the ability of the acid grassland to play a significant role in the biodiversity of the site.

To address this, the Acid Grassland Management Report is proposing the translocation of approximately 20% of the existing acid grassland surrounding the house to alternative areas on the site. These areas are located towards the site boundaries and away from the main house, where there is unlikely to be much human activity and therefore comparatively less disturbance. This will provide a more favourable environment for the growth of the acid grassland and allow it to develop into an improved habitat for the various species set out in the Ecology Report by CBA.

The translocation of this grassland to alternative parts of the site will allow the area surrounding the house to be managed directly as traditional garden lawn which is considered a more suitable given the newly residential context of the building. The proposed garden lawn will link the terraces around the house with the restored formal gardens to the west of the house, as per the historical records. These areas are shown on the plan in Figure 1 below.

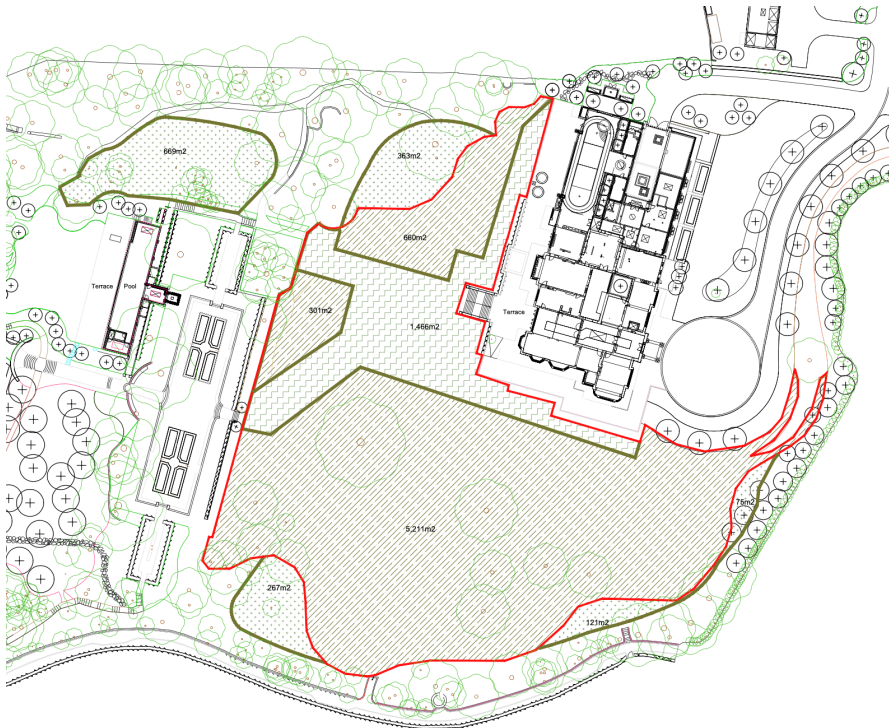


Figure 1: Acid Grassland Management Plan prepared by Tom La Dell (Ref: 0918/21/B/1B)

The Management Plan states that the total area of acid grassland to be converted to permanent lawn will total 1,466 sqm and the area of additional acid grassland formed from the translocation of existing grassland will total 1,495 sqm, as shown in Figure 1 below. This results in a minor net gain of 29 sqm of acid grassland.

Furthermore, the existing Management Plan (prepared by CBA) for the acid grassland which was approved by the local authority (application ref: 2020/0091/P) allowed for up to 25% of the area of acid grassland to be cut regularly. This significantly reduces the habitat value of a large area of acid grassland. Under the revised proposals as set out in this amendment, this would no longer be necessary as the new areas of garden lawn will be retained and managed for intensive amenity uses whilst the entire area of acid grassland on the site will be retained as habitat.

The full details, including the proposed methodology for translocating the acid grassland, are set out in the enclosed report.

### Summary

To summarise, the proposals are seeking to revise the management plan and relocate parts of the existing acid grassland to alternative areas on the site which are considered more suitable for its success in the long term. The

existing location of the grassland immediately surrounding the house poses a threat to the sustainability of the grassland as a habitat for a number of species due to the use of this area as an amenity garden following the reintroduction of a residential use into Athlone House.

The proposals will retain the net increase in acid grassland which was established through the extant planning permissions for the site and will provide a further minor increase in the total area of acid grassland on the site of approximately 29 sqm. The proposed amendment is therefore considered to remain in accordance with the original planning permission and the supporting information provided confirms that the proposals will have a positive impact on the biodiversity of the site.

In accordance with the London Borough of Camden's validation checklist, the following documentation is enclosed:

- Application Forms;
- Cover Letter (hgh);
- Acid Grassland Management Report (Tom La Dell); and
- Acid Grassland Management Plan (ref: 0918/21/B/1B).

We also enclose a payment for requisite fee of £234. We trust that the information is sufficient to validate this application and we look forward to receiving confirmation shortly. If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Your sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ben Stonebridge'.

**Ben Stonebridge MRTPI**  
Senior Planner