

Case Name: Mental Health Hostel, 2 Chester Road, London

Case Number: 1473382

Background

Historic England has been asked to assess the former Mental Health Hostel at 2 Chester Road for listing. A Heritage Statement has been prepared in support of the planning application; this was used in the preparation of the consultation report.

Asset(s) under Assessment

Facts about the asset(s) can be found in the Annex(es) to this report.

Annex	List Entry Number	Name	Heritage Category	HE Recommendation
1	1474112	Former Mental Health Hostel	Listing	Do not add to List

Visits

Date	Visit Type
11 December 2020	Partial inspection

Context

There is a current planning application for redevelopment of the site, replacing the building with a new hostel for homeless families.

The building stands within the Dartmouth Park Conservation Area.

Assessment

CONSULTATION

We invited the applicant, the owner, the owner's representatives, the local planning authority, the Greater London Historic Environment Record (GLHER), the Twentieth Century Society and other interested parties to comment on our consultation report.

A response was received from the APPLICANT who noted that the report looked very thorough, and did not wish to make other comments. It should be noted that the original application suggested that since the hostel was the work of Bill Forrest with his life/work partner Oscar Palacio, the building should be assessed as a building with LGBTQ associations, under Historic England's Pride of Place project. The involvement of Palacio is mentioned in the History section; in our view this aspect of the building is adequately addressed, and does not constitute a claim to special interest. The Pride of Place project is now completed, although of course we continue to consider relevant associations in this area.

A response was received from the OWNER'S REPRESENTATIVE, who expressed satisfaction with the factual information contained in the report, and did not wish to make any further comments.

A response was received from the LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITY, considering the hostel in the light of the DCMS's Principles of Selection for Listed Buildings (November 2018); the relevant principles are set out in

the introductory paragraph of the Discussion below, and the building is considered in relation to those principles. Specific points relating to this building made by the correspondent are as follows:

COMMENT: with regard to architectural interest, the hostel is a relatively late example of the Modernist style and is not a particularly innovative or ground-breaking design. The merit of the design is limited to addressing the topography of the site and meeting the brief of providing privacy and seclusion for the residents. Beyond that there is little decoration or craftsmanship on the facades. By the 1970s the use of concrete blocks, timber frame windows and glass blocks was not innovative or novel.

RESPONSE: the merits of the building are considered in the Discussion below, which addresses its architectural claims, and use of materials, as well as its response to the brief and the site allocated.

COMMENT: with regard to historic interest, the building is a response to a local townscape and context and not to an important national event or individual. The association with mental health provision is at a local rather than a national level.

RESPONSE: the hostel's significance is considered in the context of mental health care provision at both a national and local level in the Discussion below.

COMMENT: regarding group value, the correspondent notes that the hostel is quite distinct from any of its immediate neighbours in terms of age, materials, appearance and architecture. The building has an introverted design, turning its back to the public realm, resulting in a building which has little connection with its surroundings. There is however a limited connection with the remaining buildings of Highgate New Town, of which this hostel forms a part.

RESPONSE: the relationship of the hostel to the surrounding buildings, and its significance as a part of Highgate New Town, is considered in the Discussion below.

COMMENT: regarding fixtures, fittings and curtilage buildings, it is observed that the building has undergone a number of alterations over the years, and that although many original features survive, these features in themselves are unremarkable and would not be eligible for listing in their own right. At the same time, the boundary wall is a functional block structure the main role of which is to provide privacy to residents, and has no architectural or historic interest in itself.

RESPONSE: the internal survival of the building, and the boundary wall, are considered in the Discussion below.

COMMENT: the hostel falls within the Dartmouth Park Conservation Area, but is not noted as making a positive contribution.

RESPONSE: whilst the hostel is not specifically mentioned, the Conservation Area Appraisal does note the remarkable mix of contemporary and C19 architecture in the area of Chester Road and Dartmouth Park Hill.

COMMENT: regarding selectivity, it is observed that a number of Modernist buildings have already been listed, and that locally there are listed examples of the Camden Architect's Department's output which are much better representatives of the style, including the Alexandra Road Estate, listed at Grade II*, Dunboyne Road Estate and 22-32 Winscombe Street, both listed at Grade II.

COMMENT: the building has a limited level of local interest through its connection with the other buildings of Highgate New Town, and its connections with healthcare provision.

COMMENT: it is acknowledged that the exterior of the building is largely still made up of its original construction materials.

A response was received from the GLHER, but no comments were made.

A response was received from the TWENTIETH CENTURY SOCIETY, reiterating support for the listing application. Specific comments made by the correspondent are as follows:

COMMENT: the Society draws attention to the life and career of Bill Forrest, providing additional details of his education and career, and indicating that there is growing interest in the architect and his work among academics and architects.

RESPONSE: we have now adjusted the History section to give more detail regarding Forrest's life and career, making use of the information provided in the response. The significance of Forrest as an architect and as part of the Camden Architect's Department is considered in the Discussion below.

COMMENT: Forrest's work at Camden was unique in both its Dutch influence and in his ability to respond to changing briefs and requirements and still produce successful outcomes.

RESPONSE: our view is that the early-modernist influence visible in Forrest's work is also seen more widely in the output of the Department, for example in the work of Neave Brown, Gordon Benson and Alan Forsyth. At the same time, we cannot agree that Forrest was unique in being able to adapt successfully to changing briefs, the story of Brown's success in developing the Alexandra Road estate, despite an evolving brief, being one significant example.

COMMENT: the role of Dr Wilfrid Harding in the creation of the Camden hostel should not be underplayed. Harding was an important figure who pioneered an individually-orientated local authority health service which received national attention. Following Harding's advice, the Chester Road hostel was carefully planned and designed to meet the specific needs of its inhabitants.

RESPONSE: the role and significance of Dr Wilfrid Harding is considered in the Discussion below; however, it should be noted that neither the correspondent nor the applicant has provided clear evidence of the national attention paid to Camden's health service. It should also be noted that the hostel was designed, not for people living with mental illness, as the correspondent states, but for people with learning disabilities, as indicated in the consultation report.

COMMENT: it is noted that Peter Watson's 1973 Kentish Town Health Centre, in the creation of which Harding was closely involved, has been demolished, a fact which places greater importance on understanding the remaining health buildings built following Harding's briefs, such as the Chester Road hostel.

RESPONSE: Harding's role in other Camden buildings, including the demolished Kentish Town Health Centre, and the listed special school at Alexandra Road, is noted in the Discussion below.

COMMENT: the consultation report records that the building survives in a good condition, with many original exterior fixtures still in place. Whilst the interior has been altered, the correspondent asserts that these changes – several of which are likely reversible – have only a minor impact on the significance of the building.

RESPONSE: the level of survival, both externally and internally, are considered in the Discussion, together with the impact on significance made by internal changes in a building of this type.

A response was received from an INTERESTED PARTY, who formerly worked in the Camden Architect's Department, providing information regarding the role of Oscar Palacio in the design process. The correspondent also confirming that the building had gone through many design iterations before construction started, and that during the period of construction, many design detail changes were made, including some made necessary as a result of cost-cutting.

RESPONSE: this information has been considered and the report amended accordingly. Forrest's name remains the only one in the Summary section, since he was the job architect. It should also be noted that the building was designed from 1970, and that Palacio did not join Camden until after that date.

A response was received from another INTERESTED PARTY, also a former member of the Camden Architect's Department, confirming the close involvement of Oscar Palacio in the design. The correspondent also made the following comment:

COMMENT: regarding architectural influences, the correspondent notes that Forrest was part of a loosely constituted group of Architectural Association graduates who were considered as 'purists', in reference to their interest in early Modernism, influenced by architects such as Oud and Reijnders, mentioned in the consultation report; the correspondent also notes the influence of works by Swiss architects published in Alfred Roth's 'The New Architecture' of 1939. Other members of the relevant group are named, some of whom undertook work for Camden. It is suggested that architectural ideas were developed in and around Camden which had significance beyond the often modest architectural production of the time.

RESPONSE: the significance of this aspect of the design of the Chester Road hostel is considered in the Discussion. Whilst we acknowledge the interest of the wider revival of early Modernism, a building of this date

would have to be a very significant example of a significant architectural movement or trend to be eligible for listing on those grounds.

A response was received from another INTERESTED PARTY, suggesting a number of changes to the History section, particularly with relation to the development of Highgate New Town, and its significance. Where appropriate, the History section has been amended. The correspondent also makes the following specific comments:

COMMENT: at 6.1 hectares Highgate New Town was one of the largest as well as one of the most inventive of the housing redevelopment schemes conceived under Sydney Cook, second in scale and ambition only to Neave Brown's Alexandra Road.

COMMENT: the dramatic blank wall of the canted end of the hostel facing Dartmouth Park Hill acted as a marker not just for the (relatively modest) hostel but for the entire scheme, the design of which was changing even while the hostel was being built. The correspondent suggests that importance of the hostel in terms of urban design needs greater recognition.

RESPONSE: the role of the wall mentioned, and of the hostel, as an element within the urban design of Highgate New Town is considered in the Discussion.

COMMENT: the correspondent suggests that all the main internal spaces and spatial sequences appear to be intact, with internal changes being largely reversible. The building could be returned to its original state or modified for use as a different kind of hostel.

RESPONSE: as noted above, the level of internal survival is considered in the Discussion. Possible future changes regarding the fabric or use of the building cannot be considered as part of the listing assessment.

Another INTERESTED PARTY also commented on the possibility of reversing internal changes, noting that the exterior seems to be mainly intact, and to possess a great deal of visual interest and architectural importance.

Another INTERESTED PARTY responded, commenting that the hostel is extremely incongruous with the surrounding houses, and that architectural cohesion would therefore not be compromised by its removal. Other comments made by the correspondent relating to the replacement building proposed for the site cannot be taken into account as part of the listing assessment.

Another INTERESTED PARTY, who is currently working on a monograph on public mental health facilities in Britain, 1948-1973, offered a substantial response in support of listing, noting that the listing application provides ample information regarding the building's association with a major and exceptionally successful housing experiment in Camden, its overlooked architect Bill Forrest, its elegant Modernist design, and the role of Dr Wilfrid Harding. The correspondent endorses these points, and makes the following additional comments:

COMMENT: the provision of specialist admission units for remedial care in the grounds of Victorian asylums from the inter-war period, reflected the deinstitutionalisation emphasised by the Mental Health Act of 1959. Such buildings have been little studied until recently, and this gap in scholarship led to the loss of two significant admission unit buildings built by Powell and Moya for the Oxford Regional Health Board in 1956 and 1964.

COMMENT: with regard to the internal reconfiguration of the Chester Road hostel, it is noted that many Victorian asylums have been listed despite numerous and extensive alterations and additions which may have been made to them during the course of their long and intensive institutional lives. The correspondent states that it is imperative that similar allowances should be given to more recent architectural interpretations of mental health care.

RESPONSE: as noted in the Discussion below, the Principles of Selection state that progressively greater selection will be required for buildings from 1850, with careful selection after 1945, another watershed for architecture. Post-war buildings will, therefore, be expected to show particularly high levels of interest, with completeness being one of the factors considered in an assessment.

COMMENT: several features of the hostel position it firmly in the forefront of specialist design of the period: one of these is the provision of bed-sitting rooms, rather than wards or mere bedrooms, aligning with the move away from a medical model of care and towards normalisation.

RESPONSE: whilst the available account of the brief notes that 'the spaces should be such that they give variety, with the bedrooms planned to be used as bed-sitting rooms', the plan shows that the majority of the bedrooms were of nearly identical size and shape, and very small. Whilst the will to provide variety and space may have been there, the site and the number of places required appears not to have allowed for this to be fully realised. A similar situation appears to have been found at the hostel Parkwood Centre, Derbyshire, a complex completed in 1967, and hailed as one of the most successful of its kind, of which it was commented that whilst the provision of single rooms was admirable, the lack of variety in the shape or design of the room was unfortunate. This aspect of the design is noted in the Discussion below.

COMMENT: the emphasis on the outdoor space available to residents, and linked directly to their rooms, shows key similarities with several of the early NHS admission units where wards were offered direct access to external spaces. The provision of a garden protected from noise and given the best orientation in a particularly difficult site further highlights the quality of the design; this is facilitated by the L-shaped plan, reminiscent of the cruciform plans used for several early NHS admission units.

RESPONSE: as the correspondent notes, outdoor space had long been considered an important facility for those with mental illness and learning disability; the provision of an enclosed garden at Chester Road is an important part of the design, but does not reflect new thinking. Other contemporary hostels, in both rural and urban settings, were provided with outdoor space. The placing of residents' bedrooms overlooking the garden was considered, but cannot be described as giving direct access. The two three-bed rooms did have direct access, via balconies, which is thought to be unusual and a notable feature of the design. The role of the garden is considered in the Discussion below.

COMMENT: a key difference between this hostel and the earlier admission units is that the hostel is in an urban location rather than with generous asylum grounds.

RESPONSE: the significance of the urban location of the hostel is considered in the Discussion below.

COMMENT: the hostel demonstrates the early application of inclusive design, in the form of bedrooms for wheelchair users, and a ramp; this is remarkable, as facilities for the mentally ill or those with learning disabilities were broadly considered not to need special adaptation of the kind required for physically handicapped people.

RESPONSE: this aspect of the building is certainly of interest; we are not aware of such provision being made in hostels for people with learning disabilities before this date, and its inclusion here undoubtedly reflects a consideration paid to the needs of the community characteristic of the integrated services at Camden during this period. However, such facilities were by no means new by this date, awareness regarding provision for disability having become more widespread during the 1950s and 1960s, and particularly following the publication of Selwyn Goldsmith's 'Designing for the Disabled' in 1963; this provision within one particular building type cannot serve as a strong argument in favour of listing.

COMMENT: it is argued that the Chester Road hostel was a particularly early example of a purpose-built hostel for the mentally handicapped in an urban setting. Only a few accounts of hostels for those with learning disabilities have been found to date in the architectural press for the 1960s and 1970s, and it is suggested that this gives an indication of the rarity of the building type represented by 2 Chester Road, particularly in view of the fact that a somewhat larger number of specialist housing projects, special schools, and training centres appear. It is noted that the subject of hostel design appears to be given greater attention during the 1970s. A number of the published hostels are considered by the correspondent, who concludes that none compares well with the Camden hostel in terms of architectural interest or provision of external space in an urban setting; where appropriate these examples appear in the Discussion below.

RESPONSE: it does appear that a relatively small number of purpose-built hostels were constructed during the 1960s, with local authorities acknowledging that provision of this kind was inadequate; at the same time, it appears that a much larger number were built, or provided in existing buildings, during the 1970s and 1980s. However, the fact that fewer hostels were published than schools or training centres may simply suggest that such buildings were regarded as being of greater complexity and interest. It is noted that the Camden example was not published.

COMMENT: a 1983 study of housing for people with learning disabilities is cited, in particular figures given in a table which indicates that only seven hostels for mentally handicapped adults in use at that time in England and Wales were purpose built.

RESPONSE: whilst the data used in this study have not been scrutinised, and purpose-built hostels might no longer have been in the same use in 1983, the findings of the study suggest that the number of such buildings was small. However, we have evidence of at least eight such hostels having been built before 1976, and it seems unlikely that we have found every example.

COMMENT: it is noted that Camden responded promptly to legislation during the 1970s giving recognition to the responsibility of housing authorities for mentally ill and intellectually disabled people, and that the inclusion of the hostel in the Highgate New Town scheme is remarkable.

RESPONSE: the role of Camden's Housing Committee, and the interest of the hostel's inclusion in the housing estate is acknowledged.

COMMENT: the importance of the urban location of the hostel is stressed, in the context of contemporary thinking about the inclusion of those with learning disabilities within the wider community.

COMMENT: the correspondent claims that the hostel represents ground-breaking developments in the long history of mankind's response to mental disorders, representing the intention to end spatial and social exclusion of people with learning disabilities.

RESPONSE: the position of the hostel with relation to wider developments in the response to provision for people with learning disabilities is considered below. The fact that a building is representative of wider developments is unlikely to be sufficient justification for listing.

COMMENT: the association of the building with Highgate New Town not only adds to its significance, but would be sufficient justification for protection in its own right.

RESPONSE: the building's association with Highgate New Town is considered in the Discussion below.

DISCUSSION

The Principles of Selection for Listed Buildings, (DCMS, 2018) sets out the statutory criteria and general principles against which buildings are to be assessed for listing. Special architectural and historic interest are the statutory criteria, and a building which is clearly of special interest will merit designation; however, age and rarity are of importance here, and as a general principle, the more recent a building is, the greater the interest it must exhibit in order to be considered 'special'. According to the Principles, 'particularly careful selection is required for buildings from the period after 1945'. The Historic England Health and Welfare Selection Guide (2017) gives more detailed guidance on buildings of this type, indicating that good Modernist inter-war buildings, and those that reflect major innovations in medical practice, are eligible for listing. It is noted that very few post-war examples of health and welfare buildings have been designated to date, but those that display outstanding architectural and historic interest may qualify. Individual buildings must be assessed on their own merits; but it is important to consider the wider context and where a building forms part of a functional group with one of more listed (or listable) structures this is likely to add to its own interest.

The former mental health hostel, built in 1972-4 at the junction of Chester Road and Dartmouth Park Hill as part of Camden's Highgate New Town estate, needs to be considered in the context of ongoing reforms in mental health provision. As noted in the consultation report, the Mental Health Act of 1959 gave responsibility for occupational, training and residential care of what was then referred to as 'mentally disordered' people (the term covering all forms of both intellectual disability and mental illness) to local authorities; the 1960s saw a range of developments both in the provision of these facilities, and in the thinking around the form these facilities should take, but overall progress was slow. Shortage of residential capacity within local authorities was widespread, and few purpose-built hostels were constructed, with the majority of hostel places provided in adapted buildings; many residents were housed by neighbouring authorities. Nonetheless, the contemporary architectural press does highlight a small number of schemes built in the years leading up to and immediately following the design and construction of the Camden building. Following the reorganisation of the National Health Service in the early 1970s, mental health provision came into focus, with residential provision greatly increasing in both re-purposed and purpose-built buildings.

Camden was clearly a progressive authority, and the significance of its architectural approach, particularly to housing, is well known. In health care, too, Camden was in the vanguard of wider developments; Dr Wilfrid Harding, who joined the borough as Medical Officer of Health at its formation in 1965, was an energetic reforming figure. In that year, the new London boroughs were asked by the Ministry of Health to prepare ten-year plans setting out their aims for health provision. Camden's report demonstrates Harding's detailed and progressive thinking in planning for an integrated and comprehensive health service, mental health

provision being an important element. Harding was certainly recognised within his profession for his commitment to the development of community medicine, as is evidenced by his co-founding of the Faculty of Community Medicine in 1972, becoming its president three years later. As is noted in the consultation report, the local Hampstead and Highgate Express claimed that 'Few medical officers of health are better known or more quoted than Dr Wilfrid Harding'. However, Camden was part of a wider national movement with regard to the development of community health, and at a national level, comparable figures come to the fore, including Robert Wofinden, Medical Officer of Health for Bristol, known as a public champion of health centres, whose obituary noted that he 'had no superior in his generation as the complete visionary community physician', or John (later Sir John) Reid, a spokesperson for the promotion of integrated community health services, his own work as Medical Officer of Health in Buckinghamshire including the provision of services within the establishment of Milton Keynes.

Harding's stated ambition in 1965 was to build seven hostels for people with learning disabilities and an existing council hostel in Hampstead was converted to this purpose in 1967; as far as we know the Chester Road building was the second hostel provided, if we do not know the location of any others. Harding had a close working relationship with members of the Architect's Department and the legacy of a considerable number of buildings for those with special needs erected during Cook's time as Borough Architect speaks of Harding's involvement. He was involved in the creation of the Kentish Town Health Centre (originally intended to be one of a series, and now demolished), and his key role in developing the design of the special school for the Alexandra Road estate was acknowledged by Neave Brown. We know that Harding and Cook discussed the proposal for the hostel at an early stage, before requesting that part of the site at Highgate New Town be put aside for that purpose; we do not have any detail regarding Harding's involvement in the development of the building itself. The inclusion of the hostel as part of the Highgate New Town estate is certainly of interest, reflecting the theory that such accommodation was best placed within the community. However, the integration of healthcare-related buildings into estates was not new; the first health centre, built in 1949-52 following the formation of the National Health Service, formed part of the London County Council's flagship Woodberry Down estate in Hackney, and is listed at Grade II. Harding's contribution to Camden's architectural output is aptly recognised by the Grade II-listing of the Alexandra Road school, which reflects that building's planning and educational interest as well its architectural quality and close association with the celebrated estate.

Formal guidance on the design of residential buildings for people with learning disabilities was issued by the Ministry of Health in 1967; unfortunately we have not had the opportunity of studying this document, though in the opinion of at least one expert in buildings of this kind the guidance was ill-suited to the task. Nonetheless, evolving thinking on the subject is reflected by accounts of buildings of this type in the architectural press. In particular, a number of issues pertinent to the current assessment are raised by commentary on the 1965-7 centre for the mentally handicapped at Parkwood, Alfreton, Derbyshire, which comprised adult and junior training centres together with an adult hostel (all built using the CLASP system). First, the remote location of the centre, in the grounds of a country house, is called into question, reflecting contemporary opinion that such facilities were in general better situated at the centre of a community, providing opportunities for integration and for more 'normal' living patterns. Second, it is noted that 'the grouping of twenty-two subnormal people in a single hostel is open to criticism as it is very difficult to create the family, domestic atmosphere that should be the objective'. It is noted that given the size of the hostel, the massing and external treatment give as domestic and friendly an appearance as is possible; attempts to use interior finishes to achieve a warm domestic atmosphere in some areas are praised. It is observed that the ideal of the single bedroom (providing the greatest encouragement to personal awareness) is provided for each resident, though the uniformity of the rooms is regretted, as discouraging visiting between rooms. It is suggested that the building could have been improved by dividing the bedrooms into clusters, thus avoiding the corridors which create an institutional character.

The Chester Road hostel was not published, but seen in the context of the considerations outlined above, it is clear that great care was taken in setting, and meeting, the brief. However, the building had to accommodate 25 residents (the maximum recommended by 'Better Services for the Mentally Handicapped', published in 1971) together with accommodation for three members of staff, on a triangular sloping site, and a number of shortcomings were probably inevitable. (The description by the Social Services Committee of the Housing Committee's allocation of a site deemed unusable for housing as 'ungenerous' suggests that co-operation between the services was not always complete). The L-shaped plan allowed Forrest to provide south- and west-facing aspects towards the garden, leaving the noisier eastern side of the bedroom range for corridors. However, despite Forrest's efforts in breaking the eastern range into two sections, there is no escaping the fact that rows of bedrooms open off stretches of corridor with what is now a thoroughly institutional feel. The bedrooms themselves, with the exception of slightly larger ones provided for wheelchair users, and the two irregularly-shaped three-bed rooms, are small and uniform, their only interest being provided by the view to the garden. The garden, whilst enclosed by the two wings of the building, relies on a stepped wall with a

timber fence to screen the private space from Chester Road; whilst possibly no more creative solution for enclosing the space could be found within the constraints of the site, the result is in no way equivalent to, for instance, the 'secret garden' Neave Brown created for the special school at Alexandra Road. When planning permission was given in 1971, it was noted that no plans for landscaping had been submitted; the detail of the garden itself seems therefore not to have been fully considered as an integral part of the scheme. The dining and hobbies rooms opened on to the garden, but the experience of the living area enclosed by the glazed structure to Dartmouth Park Hill must have been seriously impaired by the presence of a high wall in front of it. The common living areas, with flexible divisions, particularly the linked ground-floor living and dining rooms, are clearly intended to create a sense of space and minimise corridors and were probably successful in this, though these areas have been reconfigured and cannot now be appreciated. An attempt to provide a common area on the first floor – identified as a 'living area' on the plan – in a wider section of corridor, seems inadequate. A contemporary account noted that the internal finish of the building, with wooden floors and yellow walls, was warm and homely, and that the hostel 'had nothing of an institutional air' (Hampstead and Highgate Express, 7 October 1977); it is acknowledged that subsequent changes to the plan and decoration of the building may have coloured the impression it now makes. It should be noted, however, that Forrest himself was disappointed by changes to detail and finish made necessary by economy.

Another useful comparison can be made with the hostel for 22 adults planned for Shellgrove Road in Hackney as 2 Chester Road was being built. Like the hostel under consideration, this one formed part of a housing estate. The designs were published in 1974, and show an L-shaped building with central common areas, and bedrooms clustered around shared spaces allowing residents to sit and eat within their groups, and with additional stairs to vary circulation and allow vertical as well as horizontal mixing, seems in some ways a more flexible approach. The exterior designs appear less imaginative than at Chester Road, but the more traditional form, and the stated intention of blending with the housing estate, may be a response to requirements that accommodation for those with learning disabilities should be domestic in character and, as far as possible, indistinguishable from other housing. By 1978, a review of a hostel for intellectually disabled children commented on swiftly evolving attitudes to provision, concluding that ordinary housing was preferable to purpose-built homes or hostels. An update on 'The Mental Health Revolution' published in the Architect's Journal in 1985 indicated that accommodation in smaller groups was preferable, noting that successful purpose-built facilities would be neither large nor prominent, and would need to take make allowances for changing philosophy and needs.

Forrest's skill and versatility as an architect, and his significant part in Camden's building programme, is recognised, and architecturally, the Chester Road hostel was probably more interesting than most. The building is an example of what was to become the recognisable Camden idiom of dark-stained timber against concrete or blockwork, and a noteworthy one as a response to this specialist brief, as opposed the more familiar – though varied – housing produced by the Department. Stylistically the hostel is an example of the revival of pre-war modernism which engaged some English architects in the late 1960s and 1970s; Forrest was a fairly early exponent of this trend, though it was felt more widely at Camden in the work of Brown, Gordon Benson and Alan Forsyth and others. The influence of small-scale housing by architects such as Gerrit Rietveld, JJP Oud is pertinent to the assessment of the hostel; though the building must surely have been a conspicuous one at the time of its construction, Forrest's intention of designing in a domestic idiom is apparent. However, whilst the entrance front has a welcoming, open aspect, the blank Dartmouth Park Hill elevation, relieved only by sharp bands of glazing, has a forbidding look which seems unlikely to have been reassuring to either residents or the wider community. The opening up of the elevation into the glazed lean-to section, only to be closed off again by the front wall, is infelicitous. The garden facing elevations with their horizontal glazing serve their purpose well, but overall the differing external elements do not add up to a building of clear special architectural interest. The listing application points to the historical association between healthcare and Modernism; certainly earlier-C20 advances in healthcare provision were reflected in that forward-looking architectural style. However, comparison with a building such as Sir Owen Williams's Pioneer Health Centre of 1934-5, and the ground-breaking project in community medicine which it represents, does not reflect well on the later building.

The hostel's association with Highgate New Town is complex. As detailed in the consultation report, the hostel was intended to form part of the second phase of the estate's development, assigned to Forrest, but was designed and built in tandem with Peter Tábori's original phase. Stylistically, though it uses the same materials as the Tábori housing, the hostel is more in line with prototype housing built by Forrest for phase 2 in the early 1970s, reminiscent of Brown's 1963-6 private houses at Winscombe Street. Subsequent delays in and obstacles to the development of phase 2 ended with Forrest and Palacio producing housing of quite different types in two phases, of which the 1976-8 phase, with shops, has been demolished. The surviving housing built adjacent to the hostel in 1978-80 is quite unlike the earlier building, being of brick with colourful post-modern details. Nonetheless, the area between the two elements has been skilfully landscaped, creating a harmonious transition. A 1981 appraisal in the Architect's Journal observed that the painted concrete

planters outside the new housing linked back to the hostel, 'itself tied to the new development almost like a great planter', drawing attention both to the incorporation of planters which is a merit of the hostel design, and to the element of greenery which the garden and surrounding planting was intended to contribute to its vicinity. One of our consultation responses has drawn attention to the role of the blank canted southern end wall of the hostel; the suggestion that it serves as an announcement of the entire Highgate New Town scheme is an interesting one, but in our view the wall is an insufficient architectural moment to perform this role effectively. Certainly contemporary opinion regarding the desirability of discretion in buildings of this kind would be at odds with such an intention. At the same time, special planning interest in a scheme of this date will generally relate to design elements intended to contribute to a whole, rather than the serendipitous accumulation of features. Whilst the hostel's status as an interesting feature of Highgate New Town is acknowledged, overall, the piecemeal nature of the estate's development – and the demolition of part of Forrest's contribution there – makes it difficult now to see the hostel as an important element within a planned scheme from an architectural point of view. Again, the comparison with the special school at Alexandra Road is instructive, as a building fully integrated architecturally and functionally with an overarching estate scheme of exceptional interest. It may also be worth mentioning here the slightly later elements by Tom Kay at Alexandra Road; though in some ways distinct from the main body of the estate, these mixed-use buildings are of special architectural and planning interest in their own right, at the same time as making a contribution to the scheme as a whole.

The hostel building has seen a number of changes over the course of its relatively short history; the majority of these relate to its change of use to a hostel for homeless people; it is not known when this change took place. Externally, the building survives well, the majority of its timber windows and doors seemingly in place, together with the tubular fencing which is a feature both of Forrest's work and of Camden's output more generally. Some changes have been made to the garden access from the northern wing, with a doorway having been removed from the former dining room and that part of the wall rebuilt. Internally, the alterations are much more extensive, with the principal common spaces having been reconfigured, as well as some bedrooms and the staff flats. In many cases these changes are the result of partitioning, though more permanent alterations have been made in other areas. Whilst in strong candidates for listing a level of alteration may not detract from special interest, here, where the principal interest lies in the building's original function, the reordering of key internal spaces and loss of finishes – and of features such as dividing screens – considerably lessens the impact of the structure as it stands today.

The former mental health hostel at Chester Road is an unusual building of real interest, with layers of significance which may now be appreciated only with some understanding of the circumstances in which it was built. We are very grateful to have had the opportunity of assessing the site, and of carefully weighing its claims. Having considered the building in its national historical context, our conclusion is that the construction of this early-1970s hostel for people with learning disabilities represents a wider trend, rather than being innovative. In terms of its functional design it appears to have been broadly representative of current thinking – though the provision for physically disabled residents appears to have been forward-looking – with success somewhat modified by the constraints of the site. Whilst the development of mental health provision is undoubtedly a subject of national importance, we have not found evidence that this building is of special interest in the national context, or that it is of international significance, as the application claims. Architecturally, and as part of Camden Architect's Department's Highgate New Town estate, the building has some interest, but does not meet the rigorous criteria necessary for buildings of this date.

CONCLUSION

After examining all the records and other relevant information and having carefully considered the architectural and historic interest of this case, the criteria for listing are not fulfilled. The former mental health hostel at 2 Chester Road is therefore not recommended for listing.

REASONS FOR DESIGNATION DECISION

The former mental health hostel designed in 1970-2 and built in 1972-4 by the Camden Architect's Department as part of the Highgate New Town estate, with Bill Forrest as job architect, is not recommended for listing for the following principal reasons:

Degree of architectural interest:

* The hostel has a considered and ably modulated design, with elevations varying to according to function and orientation, adapting to a difficult site, but is not of the high level of special architectural quality which would justify listing a building of this date;

- * whilst the building demonstrates the influence of early Modernism, reflecting an interesting trend of which Forrest was a fairly early exponent, this does not in itself give the building national significance;
- * although the attention given to the function of the building is clear, the success of the design in terms of its specialist provision was modified by the constraints of the site;
- * the building has received extensive internal alterations which, though for the most part of limited structural impact, cumulatively significantly detract from the interest and legibility of the building.

Degree of historic interest:

- * seen in the wider context of mental health provision, the hostel is not innovative as a building type, and broadly reflects contemporary thinking and practice in this field;
- * the role of Dr Wilfrid Harding in the creation of this much-needed hostel facility is acknowledged, but his involvement is not of sufficient significance to confer special interest;
- * the integration of the hostel as part of a housing estate by the celebrated Camden Architect's Department is of interest; however, such integration of buildings for health and social care was not new by the early 1970s.

Countersigning comments:

Agreed. We have considered the building's claims of special interest very carefully and acknowledge those elements of architectural and historic significance that 2 Chester Road possesses. However, the bar for listing such buildings of this date is very high and we find that the building does not possess the level of innovation, design distinction or historic interest in the national context to merit listing. SG 8/2/21

Annex 1

Factual Details

Name: Former Mental Health Hostel

Location: Chester Road Hostel, 2 Chester Road, London, N19 5BP

County	District	District Type	Parish
Greater London Authority	Camden	London Borough	Non Civil Parish

History

Highgate New Town (now the Whittington Estate) was built in the 1970s, in two phases. The site was identified for redevelopment by Camden in 1966, in a scheme to be built jointly with Islington (Dartmouth Park Hill forms the boundary between the two boroughs); responsibility within Camden was given by Sydney Cook, Borough Architect from 1965 to 1973, to Richard Gibson. Initially the requirements for the estate included a library, a clubroom for those with physical disabilities, an old people's home, swimming baths and, possibly, a maternity/child-welfare clinic and medical group practice, as well as a day centre for those with mental health issues. By the end of 1968, the cross-borough scheme had been abandoned and Gibson had left Camden; Peter Tábori was then given responsibility for the overall scheme. The plan for the scheme as presented to Camden's Housing Committee in February 1970 divided the area into four clusters, with two clusters of Tábori's distinctive low-rise high-density terraces to the north and two southern clusters containing further housing together with community facilities including, at the southern tip of the estate, a building now envisaged as 'a mental health hostel for accommodation for severely subnormal adults'; Bill Forrest – who had joined Camden in 1966, completing Elsfeld, a housing block in Highgate Road in 1970 – was identified as architect for the hostel. The triangular site, sloping to the north, had been allocated by the Housing Committee as being 'less suitable for housing purposes'. (The chair of the Social Services Committee later observed that the Housing Committee had been 'ungenerous' in allocating this site for the hostel. Hampstead and Highgate Express, 23 July 1971.) Phase 1 was realised as planned; work began in June 1972. Phase 2 was rejected, due to desire to keep a greater number of existing buildings and concerns about the generation of traffic; the re-planning of this southern part of the site was given by Cook to Forrest. Forrest's plans for the site, produced with his partner Oscar Palacio, met further obstacles; in the end a small development of shops and flats using asbestos cement panels was built in 1976-8 (demolished in 2011), and a brick range with post-modern details facing Dartmouth Park Hill, adjacent to the hostel site, was built in 1978-81. The proposal for the mental health hostel, made by Camden's Health Committee, was taken forward; the Ministry of Housing and Local Government had agreed in principle to the appropriation of the site for this purpose in December 1969. Forrest's designs were approved by the new Social Services Committee in July 1971, and construction took place in 1972-4.

Bill Forrest (1938-1990) graduated from the Architectural Association in 1965 and then studied at the Carlisle College of Art; he worked briefly for Gordon Michel and Partners before joining Camden in 1966. Forrest was given responsibility for the Elsfeld, a 24-unit housing block in Highgate Road, which was completed in 1970. Following the completion of Highgate New Town, Forrest designed the Russells Nurseries housing in Belsize Park, begun in 1987 and completed in 1993 after his death. Remembered by Neave Brown as 'an architect who ought to be much better known than he is' Forrest worked closely with his partner Oscar Palacio, who joined Camden in the early 1970s.

The mid-C20 was a time of changing approaches to mental health provision in Britain. In 1957 the Royal Commission on Mental Illness and Mental Deficiency (the Percy Report) recommended building more outpatient facilities and hostels, in line with the deinstitutionalisation of mental health care and the movement away from asylums and 'mental deficiency colonies'; these recommendations were implemented by the Mental Health Act of 1959. In 1961, Enoch Powell's 'Water Tower' speech signalled a policy of closing the large asylums, together with an increased focus on community medicine and care; this was taken further by the Hospital Plan of 1962, which predicted the closure of half of all mental health beds in hospitals by 1975 and indicated that local authorities were being asked to review services and draw up long-term plans for development. However, the provision of community services was relatively slow to develop; this was confirmed by the 1968 Seebohm Report on Local Authority and Allied Personal Social Services, which recommended that mental health hostels for all ages should be the responsibility of new social services departments within major local authorities. An expert on the design of mental health buildings writing in the Architects' Journal in 1970 observed that the 1960s had been 'a period of gestation instead of major

implementation' in this field. Nonetheless, the provision of care for the intellectually disabled saw a significant shift in the 1970s, marked by the government's second green paper on the reorganisation of the NHS in 1970, and the 1971 white paper on 'Better services for the mentally handicapped', which confirmed the desire to move from institutions to local and community care, recommending that local authorities should consider more 'homely' settings; home and hostel provision doubled in the decade from 1974.

Guidance on the building of residential facilities for mental health provision was limited. In 1959 the World Health Organisation had published guidance on the design of buildings for psychiatric services (A Baker, R Llewelyn Davies, P Silvadon, *Psychiatric Services and Architecture*), including hostels, day hospitals and working settlements as well as hospital accommodation; many of the principles outlined in that document, regarding siting of facilities, planning and materials, were also generally regarded as being applicable to facilities for those with learning disabilities. In 1967 the Ministry of Health issued a Building Note on the design of 'Residential Hostels for the Mentally Disordered', though this was dismissed in the *Architects' Journal* as 'quite inadequate', being based on an incomplete understanding of the requirements of the building type. The hugely influential principle of 'normalisation' developed in Sweden during the 1960s, emphasised integration into the community, and engagement in 'normal' community activities and routines, with related work taking place simultaneously in the UK, US and elsewhere (a key publication in this field was *Changing Patterns in Residential Services for the Mentally Retarded*, ed. RB Kugel and W Wolensberger, 1969); this significantly affected service provision in the US, the UK, and beyond. Hostels frequently made use of existing buildings, which were frequently thought to have the advantage of not being conspicuously different from other housing; both purpose-built hostels and conversions were provided in greater numbers from about 1970. A location at the centre of a community was generally thought to be preferable, but schemes were also built in remote locations.

Dr Wilfrid Harding, Chief Medical Officer of Health from the creation of the London Borough of Camden in 1965 until 1974, was instrumental in the development of the building under consideration; early consultations on the subject between Harding and Cook were noted, though the detail of Harding's input to the design of the building is not known. A champion of community medicine, Harding was chairman of the Society of Medical Officers of Health and in 1972 co-founded of the Faculty of Community Medicine (now the Faculty of Public Health Medicine at the Royal College of Physicians). The local newspaper the *Hampstead and Highgate Express* claimed in 1970 that 'Few medical officers of health are better known or more quoted than Dr Wilfrid Harding'. Certainly he played a key role in the borough's progressive and generous approach to provision for community services and medicine; the listed special school (designed circa 1969 and completed in 1978) forming part of the Alexandra Road housing development was built at his request, and architect Neave Brown recalled his effective collaboration in the initial design; Harding was also closely involved in the design of Peter Watson's acclaimed Kentish Town Health Centre (1973, demolished). Harding's Royal College of Physicians obituary notes that while at Camden Harding 'introduced many innovations in the fields of mental health and family planning' without providing examples; undoubtedly Camden's provision of community health services was in advance of many other local authorities. There has so far been no detailed consideration of Harding's work at Camden.

The new mental health hostel undoubtedly filled a need within Camden; in 1965 the borough had no hostels for those with mental illness or learning disabilities, and aimed to build three for the mentally ill and seven for people with learning disabilities. A council property was converted for use as a hostel for people with learning difficulties in 1967, providing 12 places; 2 Chester Road was Camden's next hostel project. The brief specified a residential hostel for '25 severely mentally handicapped adults not requiring medical supervision' (Social Services Committee Minutes 14 July 1971, Appendix C). It was envisaged that the residents would be able to live socially, and that they would go to an industrial centre during the week; such training centres formed a key part of care for the intellectually handicapped at that time, and residents at Chester Road probably attended the centre at Fitzroy Road, Primrose Hill, which opened in a council property in 1968. The brief noted that 'it is hoped to use the resources the community has to offer to enable them to become as independent and secure as possible'. It was expected that for the majority of residents the hostel would be home for most of their lives.

A number of 'important disciplines' in the design of the building were noted by the architect, namely the shape, levels and orientation of the site, together with the requirement for a two-storey building as being appropriate for the intended use, and for the inclusion of wheelchair users, an increase in traffic noise was anticipated as a result of the proposed widening of Dartmouth Park Hill. Seclusion was to be an important element of the design, with a private garden being part of the requirement; plans for landscaping were not included with the planning application, and were requested. Internally, the spaces were to offer variety, with the bedrooms planned to be used as bed-sitting rooms. The building originally provided 17 single bedrooms, with an additional two single bedrooms for wheelchair users, and two three-bed rooms. Shared facilities included living areas, a hobbies room, and a dining room and kitchen; these were linked open-plan spaces,

designed to avoid the use of long institutional corridors where possible. The staff accommodation included flats for a warden and deputy warden, together with a bed-sitting room for a third residential member of staff, a staff dining/rest room, and a cloakroom for non-residential staff. There was also an office and an interview room. Polished wooden floors and bright yellow walls were intended to create an atmosphere of warmth and domesticity, though Forrest later noted that financial limitations showed in cheap finishing materials.

Stylistically, the long low building with its stepped profile, flat roofs, and bands of glazing with the use of glass bricks, is in a Modernist idiom; Forrest was one of the earlier architects to engage in the late-1960s/1970s revival of pre-war Modernism. Forrest visited the Netherlands in 1966, studying the work of Gerrit Rietveld and JJP Oud; the mental health hostel particularly demonstrates the influence of Oud's small-scale housing projects. The Hampstead and Highgate Express described the completed hostel as 'one of Camden's most attractive new social services buildings' (7 October 1977).

The hostel has undergone phases of internal reconfiguration, with substantial changes indicated by plans made in the 1980s, and further alterations since that time. The change of use to a hostel for single homeless people has led to the creation of additional bedrooms, several with adjoining bathrooms for disabled residents, and for the provision of additional kitchens allowing residents to cook for themselves, replacing communal dining facilities. The flats for the warden and deputy warden have been integrated into the hostel provision, residential staff no longer being required.

Details

Former mental health hostel for the accommodation of people with learning disabilities, designed in 1970-2 and built in 1972-4 by the Camden Architect's Department, with Bill Forrest as job architect. The builder was Stox Ltd. The building forms part of the Highgate New Town housing estate.

MATERIALS: concrete blockwork, now painted white, and painted timber-framed windows, with some replacement following the original designs, together with some glass bricks. There is extensive use of green-painted tubular metal railings and timber fencing.

PLAN: the building occupies a large, triangular or flat-iron site in the wedge between Dartmouth Park Hill and Chester Road, forming an 'L'-shape with one range running along Dartmouth Park Hill to the east, and the other running at right angles to the north; to the south-west is a garden enclosed by the building, the third side of the triangle being formed by a wall and a wooden fence along Chester Road. The northern range originally contained common areas and staff accommodation, with residents' bedrooms in the south-east range.

EXTERIOR: the flat-roofed building is arranged over two storeys, with a basement at the north-west corner. The north-facing elevation is in two halves, and in two planes, alternating between ground and first floor, linked by bands of horizontal windows. In the eastern section, the first floor is set back, behind a walkway at first-floor level, which at ground-floor level provides a sheltered entrance to the east, whilst to the west the space is filled by a planted wall. The entrance is approached by stairs hugging the building to the west, enclosed by a long shallow ramp, square on plan to the west and elliptical to the east. Stairs and ramp are protected by tubular metal railings. A further stair, protected by a concrete wall with a chamfered top, rises from the east of the entrance, curving to the first-floor walkway accessing the former staff accommodation; the walkway is enclosed by painted timber fencing, and sheltered by a glass canopy which extends around the eastern elevation. In the western section of this elevation, the ground floor is set back, with a band of windows immediately beneath the projecting first floor, and a narrow band of windows to the first floor. The ground falls towards the west, with two basement doorways accessed by steps to an area. The variation of this elevation, particularly the eastern section with its balconies and spacious approach, creates an impression of openness. The east elevation, running along Dartmouth Park Road, is also in two halves, the southern section being a long wall rising directly from the pavement, broken only by two narrow bands of windows lighting corridors, those to the ground floor being of glass bricks. The northern end is set back behind a wall; against the building is a tall glazed lean-to section, with a narrow band of windows above. To the south, the building turns the corner with a blind wall set at an obtuse angle; at the west end of this, turning the corner to Chester Road, is a low projecting block providing a small terrace at first-floor level, approached by a straight stair rising against the south-eastern garden wall. Viewed from the garden to the south-east, the two ranges meet at a right angle, with the main garden entrance in a glazed section at the eastern end of the northern range. The northern range has a projecting ground-floor block to the west, with a horizontal band of windows to either side of glazed double doors; there has been some reconfiguration here, with the loss of a pair of doors. The roof of this block provides a wide terrace at first-floor level, narrowing to a walkway/balcony above the garden entrance. The eastern range is in two sections, the section to the south being set back. Horizontal bands of windows run continuously across the two sections at ground- and first-floor level, lighting the bedrooms; as planned, all residents' bedrooms looked on to the garden. At the north end the ground-floor

windows form a high narrow band, serving bathrooms. The eastern elevation reflects the form of the northern range in a blind T-shaped wall to the north, with a garage opening at basement level with two metal doors; to the south is an angular basement projection with stairs leading to a small terrace with an integral planter, backed by the projecting ground-floor section. A low wall continues around the triangular corner of the site, creating a large raised planter.

INTERIOR: during the site visit (December 2020), only limited access was available to bedrooms; those seen indicate that most internal fittings are new. What appears to be an original fitted cupboard, of very simple design, was seen in one bedroom, and others may survive. Wooden flooring has been covered with lino throughout. Some plain flush or glazed doors survive, set in plain architraves or glazed screens; a number of glazed screens have been inserted across corridors. The original plan-form has been considerably altered, particularly within the northern range; many modifications are achieved by partitioning, though more substantial changes have also been made.

On the ground floor, the main entrance is through a door in a glazed screen, leading to a lobby, which now has a window to the reception/office, and glazed doors to the stair hall. The area of the reception/office has been reconfigured, taking in a former residents' cloakroom, opening off the lobby, together with the original office. The original interview room, adjacent to the east, is now a store. A second glazed screen leads from the lobby to the main hall, lit from the south by the glazed screen with two sets of double doors opening to the garden, and from the east by a further screen with double doors opening to a small paved area. The wide stair rises straight against the south wall, with flat timber balusters and handrail rising from a boarded closed string and supporting structure, all now painted black. The wider, western part of the north range was formerly occupied by areas for recreation and dining, with a residents' dining room to the north, and living room to the east, which could be divided or opened into a single space; the living room opened to a terrace to the south, and the dining room to a kitchen to the west. To the west of the living room was a south-facing hobbies room. The south-west corner of the range was occupied by the staff rest room and cloakroom. The residents' dining and living area has been subdivided, with a bedroom and adjoining bathroom to either side of a central corridor. The former kitchen has been divided to form a bedroom with bathroom, as has the staff area. The former hobbies room has now been combined with a small chair store to form a kitchen. Towards the east of the range, a spiral stair with timber treads turning around a plain newel, contained by a circular concrete stairwell and lit by a roof-light in the terrace above, provides access to the basement. Access to the south-east range is from the eastern end of the main hall, which originally opened directly into a living area, bounded to the east by the glazed lean-to structure. This living area has now been divided into two kitchens and a laundry. To the west is a bathroom and a row of bedrooms, including two larger ones originally for wheelchair users; one of these now has sole use of the bathroom, whilst the other now opens to a bathroom formed from a smaller bedroom. The passage is lit to the south by glazed double doors. The northern part of this section is filled by a block of WCs and utility rooms with modern fittings; the addition of a large cupboard to the south narrows the passage as it turns at right angles towards the eastern edge of the building. The corridor then runs along this eastern wall, lit by the narrow strip of high-level window; five single bedrooms of equal size open to the west, their configuration unchanged. At the end of this corridor, filling the irregular wedge shape at the southern tip of the building, is one of the rooms originally intended for three beds, with a door opening to the garden; this room has been converted to a kitchen.

On the first floor, the stair opens to a landing protected by a balustrade continuing from the stair, now reinforced by a full-height glazed screen. The western part of the north range formerly contained the staff accommodation: the warden's flat at the western end had two bedrooms and a living room with dining recess; the former kitchen area is lit by a roof light. The smaller flat for the deputy warden had a single bedroom, and to the east was a bed-sitting room with bathroom. All staff accommodation shared the large first-floor terrace to the south. This area has been considerably reconfigured internally, providing bedrooms and kitchens accessed from short corridors. In the south-east range, the wide northern corridor is identified in the original plans as a living area, and remains unchanged, as does the configuration of the rooms opening to the west, though a utility area is now a kitchen. The first-floor layout of the southern section of the range is identical to that on the ground floor, though one of the single bedrooms has also become a kitchen, together with the large southernmost bedroom. This southernmost bedroom, now a kitchen, opens to a small terrace with stairs leading to the garden, against the garden wall; the stairs have a tubular metal handrail.

The basement remains much as built, with double garage, laundry and boiler room; the area is floored with terracotta tiles.

SUBSIDIARY FEATURE: the south-western boundary with Chester Road is defined by a garden wall, also of painted concrete blocks, descending in steps with the fall of the land from the south-east, and then being replaced by a painted timber fence set on a dwarf wall, until the wall rises again to the north-east to contain the stairs rising to the terrace above the basement.

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Map**National Grid Reference:** TQ2894386553

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