

Objection to Application 2021/1327/P, St Christophers School, 32 Belsize Lane

This application looks innocuous: on the face of it, it is a modest increase in the size and height of two existing classrooms in a separate single storey building. This is to enable the school to admit 'only 14' more reception age pupils, with an increase of probably only '3 extra cars' to the school run. I have no objections to this aspect of the plans for the new enlarged schoolrooms.

The application is accompanied by very long and detailed reports of Transport Surveys, Transport Assessment, School Travel Plans, TFL Local Cycle Guides, Parent and Staff travel surveys, and a Parking Beat Survey. All these reports draw attention away from and obfuscate the real issues. There is no consistency within this application about the current actual number of pupils and car journeys. The fear going forward, is how we can be certain the school does not further exceed their permitted number of pupils.

The real issues, which I address below, are:

- I. Number of pupils at the school
- II. Traffic, transport and parking
- III. Impact of noise and air pollution and quality of life of neighbours

I) Number of pupils at the school

The school has already exceeded the permitted cap on pupils and the Conditions, set by Camden Council in 1995, stating that pupil numbers shall not exceed 235 (PL/9500653/R1). This cap was upheld in 2006 (2006/0793/P). This cap on pupil numbers was partly put in place because of the objections at the time of increasing pupil numbers by the Belsize Residents Society.

Within the accompanying documents submitted, there are inconsistencies of exactly how many pupils there are. The Transport Assessment report cites variously:

1.2 The school is currently permitted to provide 235 pupil spaces. The proposed extension seeks to facilitate an increase in 25 pupils.

2.2 There are currently 246 pupils attending the school of the 235 school spaces available. Table 2.1 total has a total of 247 pupils

The application states the school would like to have 2 reception classes of 20 pupils each, as all other years have two parallel classes. This will enable 14 more children/siblings to stay at the same school for all their primary schooling. They state the school will then have a total of 260 pupils.

Going forward, however, there would therefore be 40 children per each year group, so that after only a few years, there could be a total of **280** children in the seven different year groups.

However, if the school stuck with its traditional number of approximately 18 pupils per class, as per Table 2.1 on p5 of the Transport Assessment shows, going forward, this would entail only an additional 6 pupils from the present number of 246 to 252. This would also alleviate many of the other problems detailed below that an assured future intake of 40 pupils per year would exacerbate.

II) Traffic, transport and parking

Most of my comments concern "Zone 1" which runs alongside nos 5 – 15 Belsize Lane as delineated in the Travel and Parking surveys. I live at 17 Belsize Lane, immediately opposite St Christopher's north vehicular gate and the northern single storey classroom building which is the subject of this application.

1) THE TRAVEL PLAN AND TRANSPORT STATEMENT which is just a wish list merely hopes " *that no additional car trips be generated by a school extension, will be achieved*". As the title "Objectives and Targets" of section 3 of this report (p19), these are targets only. Table 3.1 has the disappointing goal of "90% of parents to be aware of the School Travel Plan and of its objectives".

Para 2.50 Table 2.7. claims there will be an increase of only 3 extra cars from an additional 14 extra pupils. It is highly likely that most of the new pupils in reception, who will be aged 4, will be brought by car. The Transport Assessment para 2.22 acknowledges "but in reality few, if any, pupils currently cycle to the school, given the age of the pupils and the busy London roads in the wider surrounds of the school".

Para 5.16 and 5.17 of the School Travel Plan include comments from parents that there has been an **increase** in parents and pupils blocking the footway near the school during pick-up and drop-off times. I comment on this at greater length later.

2) **PARKING** The Parking Beat Survey was to assess St Christopher's School parking demand in the streets immediately facing and closely surrounding the school. This was done on one single day, 9 December 2020, two days before the start of the Christmas break and not necessarily a typical school day.

Appendix E, of the survey is summarised as:

"The total number of parking spaces in the surveyed range 107 spaces, this equates to 25 unrestricted spaces, 76 permit holder spaces, 4 pay by phone spaces and 2 coach parking bay spaces for pick-up and drop-off. In addition to these parking spaces, areas with both single and double yellow line road markings, which do not obstruct dropped kerbs or junctions, may also be used for pick-up and drop-off purposes. "

The number of total parking spaces of 107 which is claimed is totally unrealistic. This number also included the private forecourts of two Belsize Court block of flats 2-26 and 15-37 in Wedderburn Road. (See Transport Assessment p11 Figure 2.5: Kerbside Activity Survey Scope). In addition, contrary to the above, parents claim to be fined for parking illegally.

The report states that in Zone 1 only 41% of spaces in the morning and 45% of spaces in the afternoon pickup were 'utilised', and has similar findings for the other five parking Zones. The conclusion therefore is that there is ample space in the neighbourhood for more cars to park. This flies in the face of the actual lived experience of all the residents in Zone 1, who are currently daily experiencing extreme stress and hardship due to the lack of parking in the residents' bay, and which is currently subject to a separate Camden public consultation for a dedicated disabled residents' bay (Ref: DDB-11/BelsizeLaneNW3). Another resident in Zone 1 is now also applying for a dedicated disabled bay.

The Table in Appendix E also shows that residents Permit bays in all sections of Belsize Lane, and especially Zones 1 and 2 opposite the two school gates, and Zones 4 and 5 around the southern bend of Belsize lane were extremely stressed at the busiest drop off and collection times, especially at the southern school entrance. If every parking space, yellow line, pay by phone, residents bay etc. was occupied, Belsize Lane would be untraversable. The bends and narrowing of the road would make it impossible for cars to move in any direction if 100% so-called capacity was even nearly filled. So the so-called percentages of 'utilisation' of available spaces is dangerously misleading.

The impact of this on three households with disabled residences especially in Zone 1 is especially severe as they have been restricted by fears of not being able to park anywhere near their homes if they have been out on in their cars. Frequently we are either blocked from leaving or unable to return into our driveway by a parent's car blocking the crossway, so we cannot even get into our house. Oftentimes the offending driver has not returned to their car for as long as 15 minutes. The Travel Survey itself agrees with our lived experience, stating that the 'average duration of stay for vehicles' during the afternoon period (15.00-17.00) 'was just over 15 minutes for parent'.

Parents parking for even 15 minutes in these resident spaces cause great misery. In addition, since the first lockdown in 2020, NHS health workers from the nearby Royal Free Hospital have been permitted to park in residents' bays. Despite the Parking Beat survey results, there is very rarely any spare capacity at any time of the day during the week in Zone 1.

The Parking Beat survey also did not see any cars parked on the western side of the street in Zone 1. Cars or vans frequently park there, thus severely impeding all vehicular movements at this narrow junction with Wedderburn Road. At busy times, if we did not have our crossover at no 17 Belsize Lane which allows for any vehicle to pull into to make space for others oncoming, there would be gridlock in the street. I also dispute the accuracy of the findings for a normal school day of the total number of parking bays utilised in Zones 1 and 2. As all bays in Zone 1 are resident permit bays only, they are almost always full to capacity. At school drop off and collection times, the pay and display bays as well as residents bays and yellow lines in Zone 2 often exceed the so-called 100% utilisation because of double parking. This totally obstructs traffic flow in this dangerous junction.

The Parking Beat survey also missed seeing the impact of the coach bay just below the north vehicular school gate. Whenever a coach is in the bay, its greater width severely impacts the traffic flow in this turning because of the narrowing and curves of the road.

3) TRAVEL SURVEYS

5.22 of the School Travel Plan states "It is understood that approximately 92 vehicles (as per the travel survey questionnaire) are generally driven to school and that the location of where the dropping off / picking up process takes place for this may, on occasion, lead to minor localised congestion.

This is a gross understatement and most of this congestion takes place in front of our house at our crossover, which is directly opposite the school's vehicle entrance, and in Zone 2 at the southern gate, as para 5.23 quoted below attests.

5.23 of the vehicle activity survey details that 80 and 53 vehicles were recorded dropping off and picking up pupils from the school, **with the majority stopping on Belsize Lane between Ornan Road and the school gates.** [Emphasis added]

The Parking Beat survey says that there were only two cars at any one time seen to be dropping off or fetching children. Our experience, plus the comments in the parent survey, proves this to be false. Parents now have to queue up for their allotted time slot for admitting and fetching children, so arrive early in their cars in order to not miss their slot. There are frequently more than 20 vehicles at any one time along zones 1 and 2 collecting children at the same time, with one or two of these obstructing my crossover, and many double parked, and others parked on both sides of the street especially in Zone 2.

In Appendix B of the Parent Travel survey, the remarks made by many of the 182 responses paint a truer picture of the traffic and parking conditions than the single audit undertaken in Dec 2020. The responses complain about: cars riding up on the opposite sidewalk when cars are passing in two directions; dangerous crowding on pavements at the school entrances; buggies and parents making sidewalks impossible to pass through; Cycling/walking on the pavement in front of the school too dangerous; parents and children have to spill onto the street due to crowding; too many very large cars; pollution; the road being too blocked at drop off and collection times; Belsize Lane being narrow; cars driving too fast; dangerous parking, dangerous parking at junctions crossings or on double yellow lines. Parents talk of the dreadful time finding parking every day; having to park too far away and fears of parking tickets.

In this application, the school has not even given thought to the residents of Belsize Lane who are at the receiving end of this each congestion and overcrowding every school day. Some adults, many with buggies or dogs, are often totally unaware they are standing and occasionally actually sitting in our driveway at No 17; blocking it; and have even been seen throwing things into our bins. Our crossover and the pavement outside no 15 have thus become a public gathering space for at least a half hour each school morning and an hour or more each school day afternoon.

I doubt the school would even be able to entertain their new plans if our crossover and driveway did not exist, as the pavements alongside both gates are far too narrow, as many of the parents have attested.

This is all in contradiction to the CAMDEN LOCAL POLICY, LOCAL PLAN (2017), which is actually quoted in the Transport Assessment Para 5.21 as below.

III. Impact of noise and air pollution and quality of life of neighbours

CAMDEN LOCAL POLICY, LOCAL PLAN (2017) Paragraph 4.33 which states that:

*'The scale and intensity of use of some community facilities, such as schools, colleges and higher education facilities can lead to adverse impacts on residential amenity. **This is principally related to the movement of large numbers of people at certain times of day, impacts such as noise and air pollution and the pressure on the transport system.** The Council will ensure schemes satisfactorily address the impacts of changes to the balance and mix of uses in the area, including the cumulative impact of schemes with planning permission or awaiting determination. **Hampstead and Belsize Park** have a very high concentration of schools where significant issues exist concerning the "school run". **We will refuse applications for new schools or the expansion of existing schools in these areas, unless it can be demonstrated the number of traffic movements will not increase.** Policy A1 Managing the impact of development refers to how the Council will manage the impact of traffic movements'. [Emphasis added].*

Clearly this application has several adverse impacts on residential amenity in terms of increased traffic movements; parking problems; residents' bays being unavailable to residents, some of whom are elderly and disabled; the crowding outside our pavements at school run times; and the new proposed northern playground with its associated noise levels. We are also affected with light pollution at night. All of these conflict with Camden's Local Policy as detailed above and below.

5.22 of the Transport Assessment further quotes the Camden Local Plan:

'Policy A1 'Managing the impact of development' is as follows:

The Council will seek to protect the quality of life of occupiers and neighbours. We will grant permission for development unless this causes unacceptable harm to amenity.

We will:

a. seek to ensure that the amenity of communities, occupiers and neighbours is protected;

...

c. resist development that fails to adequately assess and address transport impacts affecting communities, occupiers, neighbours and the existing transport network;

d. require mitigation measures where necessary.

The factors we will consider include:

...

g. artificial lighting levels;

h. transport impacts, including the use of Transport Assessments, Travel Plans and Delivery and Servicing Management Plans;

j. noise and vibration levels;

Conflicts with Camden policy 'g' above

The school currently leaves lights on inside, and many floodlights outside on all the existing buildings every night of the year, including several on the single storey classrooms in this application. These lights have a severe impact on us and are a huge source of light pollution for us at night, shining as they do directly at our house opposite. Should these classrooms' depth be further extended, the light pollution at night we be almost directly opposite our main bedroom. This is far too much light even for security reasons, and highly wasteful of energy.

Conflicts with Camden policy 'j' above

The DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT states under Amenity: There will be no increase in noise levels to neighbouring properties as a result of the proposals.

This is clearly not the case. The new proposed north playground, specifically for the youngest children, is to be directly opposite our main bed and living rooms at 17 Belsize Lane. Neighbours in Zone 1 are already able to hear the high pitched screams from the pupils and yells from sport instructors from the existing south playgrounds before and after school hours, during break times, and during sports lessons. With the youngest children now playing directly opposite our houses at the northern end, the impact of noise at most times of the school day will severely exacerbate most of the neighbours who are home all day, including those in Belsize Court.

Yours sincerely

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