

Highgate Conservation Area Advisory Committee objection to Murphy's Yard proposals, application [2021/3225/P](#)

Highgate CAAC recognises that there is a great need for housing in London and that the housing targets set for L.B. Camden under current arrangements are extremely challenging. That said, additional housing should not be achieved to the detriment of existing and future residents, the local area or the environment.

L.B. Camden has a long history of innovative public housing. Developments such as the Camden Borough Architect's Whittington Estate, on the boundary of Highgate Conservation Area, showed that it was possible to build high quality, dense housing which responded sympathetically to the site without resorting to tower blocks.

As numerous people have commented in response to this application, it ought to be possible to develop the Murphy's Yard site in a way which responds far better to the needs of the local community, the location and the special characteristics of the site and its surroundings with lower rise, community focused, human scale developments which make full allowance for nature, sustainability and climate change.

Our concerns include:

1. We support the objections from Heritage England, the Heath and Hampstead Society, the CPRE and many others that the proposed tower blocks and massive industrial/office buildings will damage the legally protected views from Parliament Hill and the openness of the setting of Hampstead Heath. They will also damage views from parts of the Highgate Conservation Area, Highgate Neighbourhood Forum area, Parliament Hill Fields, Kentish Town and elsewhere. (Heritage England and others have already provided very thorough lists of the relevant legislation and policy.)
2. 825 new homes with little provision of garden or natural space will place significant additional pressure on Hampstead Heath. The Covid pandemic has demonstrated the damage caused by increased use and the cost of mitigating such damage. The 825 new households are bound to increase this pressure if

they have nowhere else to go. The proposals may meet minimum standards for amenity space required at present but the quality of public space should be improved. Tree planting and green areas at ground level should be increased. There is far too much densely packed built and paved area. If the developers do not significantly increase the area of recreational and natural space on site perhaps they should contribute on an ongoing basis to the cost to the City of London of maintaining the Heath, as they are essentially relying on the City to provide green amenity space for residents without cost to themselves.

3. The proposals do not meet the highest sustainability standards. This development should be an opportunity to exceed current standards and build forward looking zero carbon, sustainable buildings with genuinely green energy generation built in - e.g. solar panels. The 2021 London Plan sets zero carbon targets and requires major developments to meet an embodied energy policy. These requirements should be met or exceeded in this outline plan and all detailed plans arising from it.
4. The green corridor from Hampstead Heath to Primrose Hill will be damaged by the current plan. This decrease in communication between green areas will reduce biodiversity as isolation will negatively affect the DNA of remaining animals.
5. The application does not appear to include the direct access via the SE corner of the site to and from Kentish Town Road shown by the green link in “Fig. 29 — Kentish Town Planning Framework spatial strategy” on page 25 of the Design and Access statement. The developer apparently owns this land (“the car wash site”). An entrance opposite Kentish Town tube and railway stations would obviously be very useful. Without it, there are few access points, limited to the north and east of the site. The residential area to the north of the industrial/office complex may be rather isolated from existing facilities in Kentish Town. The lack of access from the SE corner of the site should be reviewed.
6. The cycle/walkway through the site should be reassessed as it may add relatively little benefit compared to current routes from Kentish Town to

Hampstead Heath. The proposal is apparently for a rather circuitous route via the backstreets not directly from Kentish Town tube/railway stations, and may be problematic for vulnerable groups, people with mobility problems and numerous others. The developer should provide a far clearer map of the route relative to the entire site and all surrounding roads, and more complete, clear illustrations of the appearance, access points, height and position of the cycle/walkways relative to ground level, homes and businesses. The aerial cycle/walkways illustrated running through the inside of buildings seem questionable. As others have noted, being a private road, public access along the entire length of the route is not assured at all times which may end up causing problems for cyclists and walkers, for instance late at night or early in the morning. Also, as many objectors have noted, it is not the green corridor promised.

7. It seems unlikely that none of the 825 households and numerous workers will use private vehicles. Some of the businesses will use vans etc, numerous maintenance and delivery vehicles will visit both houses and businesses, carers and nurses will visit and so-on, and via very few access points. Since there is very little provision in the plans, vehicles will stop or park in surrounding streets or in places not designed for that purpose, causing obstructions. This may have implications for surrounding roads and facilities such as The Greenwood Centre. Ambulances already have trouble getting around the Heath to the Royal Free and Whittington Hospitals quickly, exacerbated twice a day by the numerous schools in the area. Bartholomew Estate and Kentish Town CAAC have calculated approximately how many journeys these proposals might generate but the number could be even higher. A thorough, independent assessment should be made of probable journeys to and from the site, and the impact on surrounding streets, businesses and facilities.
8. The proposed residential area is close to Gospel Oak station but bus services east-west around the south of the Heath are notoriously poor. Will thought be given to improving bus services?
9. Post-covid and Brexit it is not yet clear what the future requirements for office, industrial and research workspace will be in Inner London. The massive blocks

proposed may already be or rapidly become obsolete. It would be better to consider this now rather than in piecemeal needs assessments carried out at later dates. The plans should be based on the 2021 London Plan. Kentish Town is classed as a “district town centre” with low commercial growth potential and in office category B. Murphy’s Yard is not in the Central Activity Zone (CAZ) nor in a Strategic Industrial Location. It seems likely that high tech research facilities would be better placed somewhere like the Kings Cross development, close to national and international transport links, the Francis Crick Institute, UCLH and universities etc rather than the more distant area of Kentish Town.

10. By contrast, the listed workshops are to be partly destroyed. There are many examples around the country where our industrial heritage has been repurposed in a far more sympathetic way.
11. No affordable housing provision has been agreed. In many such commercial developments the initial offer of affordable housing is in any case subsequently reduced, sometimes to zero. The proportion should be fixed now. The London Plan has such policies already. They are likely to change over the long period of delivery of the scheme. It is of course regrettable that there is no provision for social housing or consideration of more vulnerable members of society.
12. The proposals appear to be slanted far too much in favour of 1 and 2 bed flats, to the detriment of family homes. L.B. Camden has already achieved a large number of such units in developments such as that at Kings Cross, ideally placed within walking distance of national and international rail services, numerous buses, a major hospital, the West End etc. The Murphy’s Yard site is not as centrally placed and suffers from legal constraints relating to nearby Hampstead Heath. The site might be far better used to house families and other long term local residents.
13. The design of the buildings is unimaginative and extremely similar to many other current/recent massive developments all over London: Woodberry Down, Lewisham, Nine Elms, Tottenham Hale etc.

14. It is not inevitable that massive housing and industrial/office developments always proceed without question. Recent examples where proposals have been refused or significantly improved would include:

- Homebase site, North Finchley
- Westferry Printworks
- Brighton Marina
- Cannon's Park

15. The buildings proposed are too tall, massive and dense even in outline, but the "parameter plans" and the large number of aspects to be clarified by "Reserved Matters Applications" mean the development may turn out to be even taller, more massive and damaging than described in this application.

In summary, Highgate CAAC would like to support the objections made by Heritage England, Dartmouth Park CAAC, Dartmouth Park NF, Kentish Town Road Action, Bartholomew Estate and Kentish Town CAAC and many others. The current plans are fundamentally ill conceived and need a complete rethink to provide a far more appropriate proposal for this location, particularly with regard to:

- The height, mass, density, placement and design of buildings
- The provision of natural, green and amenity space
- Sustainability and ecology within and beyond the site
- Appropriate business use in a non-central location
- The balance between business and residential uses
- Traffic within and near the site
- Access points and routes across the site
- Safety and amenity of women, elderly and disabled people and other vulnerable groups
- The type of residential provision
- Affordable and social housing

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