

Design & Access Statement

Wildwood Nature School

September 2022

Revision B - Issued for Planning

INTRODUCTION

This Design & Access Statement has been produced to accompany a full planning application in regard to St.Mary Brookfield Church Hall, 34A York Rise, London NW5 1SB. The application is made on behalf of Wildwood Nature School who intend to provide a primary school for the community within the church hall. In brief, the scope of the application includes the following items:

1. Change of use to provide a primary school under use class F1(a) Provision of Education.
2. Alterations to the frontage to provide a usable enclosed external area to the front and an updated entrance to the space.
3. Provision of outdoor bin storage and bike parking spaces for the primary school.
4. Provision of an updated gate and entrance area for the separately demised residential units within the building.

The works to the exterior of the property are minor in nature, but will enhance the character and appearance of the parent building, the street scene and by association, the wider Conservation Area. The works will not result in detriment to the amenity of neighbouring properties.

2.0 APPLICATION SITE

The application site contains a church hall owned by St.Mary Brookfield Church. Built in the 1950s, it replaced an original Victorian church hall, which was destroyed by bombing in World War II. A simple pitched roof brick building, it is typical of the period and has little architectural merit, being described as 'plain' in the Dartmouth Park Conservation Area Appraisal & Management Statement (DPCAA). To the front it is set back from the York Rise pavement line by circa 5m with a tarmac hardstanding, whilst to the sides there are minor external spaces.

The Applicant is the leaseholder of the main hall, the external frontage to York Rise and the external side area to the south east. The side area to the north-west is demised to provide a separate entrance and access to three flats which are also set within the building. Two of the flats are set within the upper levels of the hall at the front and rear respectively, whilst one is set in the rear lower ground floor area of the building.

The property is located close to Hampstead Heath and sits within Sub Area 2 (Dartmouth West) of the Dartmouth Park Estate Conservation Area, designated in February 1992. The building is not listed, nor are any neighbouring properties. It is not identified as either positively or negatively contributing to the Conservation Area. No part of the Conservation Area lies within an Archaeological Priority Zone.

There is an electrical substation immediately to the north-west of the plot and further beyond, post-war housing at no.26-34a York Rise. There are residential properties neighbouring to the south west on Laurier Road. Formerly built in the 1930s, no.32 Laurier Road has been recently re-developed. Nos.32a & 32b form a pair of older houses dating from circa 1915, with slightly different detailing to the earlier Victorian housing of Laurier Road and the Conservation Area in general.

To the rear, the land formerly used by Mansfield Bowling Club has a relatively recent planning approval for residential development. It is understood the current owners are seeking to apply for a revised planning permission to develop this area as a care home with communal gardens.

Opposite the front of the building, there is a long brick wall and the brick side elevation to no.30 Laurier Road, which form an elevation typical of York Rise, in that the street pattern results in the gable ends of terraces and garden walls being predominant along the road. The DPCAA notes that the garden walls of the end of houses of the lateral roads, and their height are a significant feature of York Rise.

Further north-west along York Rise, after the post war building at no.26-34 and its open metal railings, the original pattern of Victorian terraced housing is re-established with 3 storey late Victorian housing, with low garden walls and hedging. The building therefore sits in a rather idiosyncratic plot, in that its immediately adjacent context is not typical of the character of the Conservation Area.

The Conservation Area is mainly residential in nature. It has a variety of domestic architecture ranging from the late 18th century up to the present day, generally arranged in groups of similar housing which reflect the historic speculative development of the area. Street trees, low garden walls with hedging and private trees contribute to the semi-rural character of the area.

The DPCAA notes that railings and other boundary treatments are quite extensive in their variety, but a common feature is that these elements complement the architecture. It also notes that the predominance of boundary hedges, trees and shrubs enhances a rural feel.

Integral to the character of the Conservation Area are the scattered uses interspersed throughout it including schools, nurseries, workshops, offices, pubs, etc. Part of the sense of character is noted in the DPCAA as being derived from the social cohesion of these different uses.

Locally, the view north along York Rise leads the eye up to the wooded heights of the Holly Lodge Estate and is considered of importance to the Conservation Area. The view down from the top of Laurier Road is also specifically noted as of particular visual importance.

The DPCAA mentions the loss of boundary walls, fences and hedges as potentially causing unsightly gaps in the street scene, especially where used for off street parking. It calls for new development to be of high quality design, appropriate scale, form and materials, including smaller alterations. It also encourages high quality modern design that can enhance the Conservation Area by carefully assessing and responding to the form and qualities of surrounding buildings and spaces.

3.0 PROPOSED WORKS

This application seeks consent for a change of use to provide a primary school. This is dealt with in a separate planning note accompanying this document. The DAS is primarily concerned with describing the external changes proposed and their appropriateness within the Conservation Area.

The proposed external works are for the frontage of the building to be provided as a new entrance space and additional external play area, with better (new) provision for bin and bike storage and new boundary fencing with planted areas to both sides.

There are also minor modifications proposed to improve the entrance to the separately demised residential units with a new gate and to add a door to the south-east side elevation of the main hall to facilitate easier access to the existing external play space to the side.

The proposals do not involve any external demolition to the existing Church hall building, other than to form a new door in the the south-east side elevation. In terms of the external frontage, it is proposed to remove some minor areas of tarmac and to allow the insertion of new fencing/planting and then to re-surface locally with a softer covering material appropriate to external playspace.

It is proposed to have signage with the school name only, positioned at low level within the front planter facing the street and set against the backdrop of new planting. This will be informal in nature and at a height where pedestrians and more specifically children can directly visually engage with it. The intention would be to keep all signage low key, so as to signify the school to the community, but not overstate it in the context of what is a predominantly residential Conservation Area.

The fencing to the front elevation is proposed as an open timber slatted construction in a hit and miss pattern, which affords security for the primary school, but also provides an open boundary that can be partly seen through. The planter allows for both a greening of the boundary as is so prevalent in the Conservation Area, as well as an opportunity to provide a larger specimen tree to engage with and enhance the street.

The rationale for the shaping of the fencing in plan is twofold. Firstly, to provide an entrance gate which is pragmatically set back from the pavement line and directed towards the front of the church hall. This arrangement then allows an area for bins and some bicycle storage to be accommodated out of the way of general circulation, but still close to the street for practicality and set away from the main building.

Secondly, the indentations of the fencing line provide a definition of seating space for parents and children within the proposed external front area, providing both waiting space and an external learning environment. In addition, on the street side of the fence the same indentations offer a planted space back to the community and streetscape, together with an opportunity for signage.

4.0 ASSESSMENT OF THE PROPOSALS

The Camden Local Plan, along with the London Plan and all adopted Supplementary Planning Documents, comprise the development plan for the borough. In addition, the Dartmouth Park Neighbourhood Plan has been referred to in developing this application.

Due regard has also been paid to avoiding harm and the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the Conservation Area under s.72 of The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended by the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act (ERR) 2013.

The following policies within the above documents have been specifically considered:

Dartmouth Park Neighbourhood Plan (2020)

- DC1 – Enhancing the Sense of Place
- DC2 – Heritage Assets
- DC3 – Requirement for Good Design
- CM1 – Community Facilities

Camden Local Plan (2017)

- A1 – Managing the Impact of Development
- C2 – Community Facilities
- D1 – Design

D2 – Heritage

T1 – Prioritising Walking, Cycling & Public Transport

Dartmouth Park Neighbourhood Plan

The proposal site lies within the Dartmouth Park Neighbourhood Plan, in which the key issues of relevance to this application include: preserving the sense of place; supporting the vibrancy and attractiveness of the neighbourhood with lively well-placed local services and centres; improving the quality of local roads and streets as walking, cycling & public transport routes.

The Plan's vision seeks a balanced diverse community in a vibrant neighbourhood, where the area's rich architectural heritage and green attractive streets are maintained and enhanced. Policies DC1 Enhancing the Sense of Place, DC2 Heritage Assets, DC3 Requirement for Good Design, CM1 Community Facilities are therefore considered relevant to this application.

Policy DC1(a) requires development not to harm specific views and where possible to enhance them. Whilst the site sits within the compass of views 4a & 4b in the Plan (down Laurier Road towards Hampstead Heath), the proposals will not affect either view as the proposals are of a very minor nature and will not be visible from this location.

Policy DC1(b) aims to maintain and enhance the attractive suburban nature that characterises the Neighbourhood Area. Whilst the proposals are minor and do not create public realm space per se, the aim of the design is to offer some additional greenery to both the private external space and the public realm, through the addition of planters and a specimen tree.

Policy DC2(a) seeks to ensure developments preserve or enhance the character of the Conservation Area. The proposals support this aim through an appropriately scaled and materially considered addition, which adheres to the idea of providing greenery to the street frontage.

The proposed boundary treatment is set at a similar scale to the surrounding brick walling which typifies the garden walls of York Rise and the new planting proposed adds to the sense of greenery in a space where there is currently a gap in the provision of street trees.

Whilst the application site does not contain a listed or positively contributing building, the proposals are nevertheless designed to a high standard with a specifically detailed boundary treatment that provides at once a secure external setting for the primary school and greenery to the street scene.

The proposals aim to improve the coherence of this local part of York Rise with the overall feel of the Conservation Area. The existing frontage and gap between the electrical substation and adjoining housing fail to achieve this currently, leaving a gap with tarmac finishes at pavement level which does not enhance the Conservation Area and on balance probably causes it harm, appearing as a poorly finished hard standing or a potential off street parking area.

Policy DC3 requires development to demonstrate good quality design that responds to and integrates with local surroundings and landscape context.

Policy DC3(a) requires design to respect the scale, mass, density and character of existing and surrounding buildings and preserve the open and green character of the area. Policy DC3(b) requires development to relate to the street setting and grain of development, including established building lines, etc.

The proposals whilst minor in nature, do this through respecting and matching the scale of the surrounding brick walling to gardens on York Rise and by adding greenery to the streetscape. The building and space beyond are somewhat idiosyncratic in the urban fabric of the area. However, the position of the proposed boundary line matches that of the established garden wall to 32 Laurier Road and 24-34a York Rise adjacent and thus aims to unify and cohere the site into the street scene.

Policy DC3(f) requires good quality materials which the proposals adhere to, and Policy DC3(g) requires well integrated amenity space, refuse and recycling storage, and bicycle storage.

The proposals provide improved and well integrated refuse & recycling storage, whilst also providing a significantly improved level of amenity space for the primary school to use. Cycle parking is proposed within the entrance area directly outside the building for two bicycles and a further four cycle parking spaces are proposed at the end of the external area to the right of the entrance. The overall number of 6 cycle spaces provided on site was agreed as appropriate at pre-app stage.

Policy CM1 aims to retain and develop Dartmouth Park's community facilities in order to support a strong vibrant community with accessible services. Policy CM1(a) requires that any development of existing community facilities in Appendix 3 either maintains the existing or provides an equivalent or better facility, unless demonstrated via 12 months of marketing that the facilities are no longer required or economically viable and that there is no suitable alternative use for the facility.

Appendix 3 Community Facilities specifically notes St Mary Brookfield Church Hall and the nursery it previously provided (York Rise Nursery, now closed) as community facilities to be retained and/or developed. It also notes that the following facilities were previously or are currently provided at the church hall, *'...jumble sales, meetings, social gatherings, sports & leisure classes and activities for all ages, homeless shelter, etc. Capacity up to 200.'*

The church has moved the homeless shelter to the main church, so this facility is no longer provided within the building. In regard to all the other activities noted on the list, the church has confirmed that aside from a nursery, it has in fact rarely been used for any community purposes other than badminton and sometimes for birthday parties in recent years.

This application seeks to provide a community facility in the form of a primary school, with children from reception age upwards. The applicant is also proposing that after school activities for children could be hosted in the building for members of the local community as well as students of Wildwood Nature School. This would specifically address a need identified in the Plan at para 5.8:

'...a consistent theme in our consultations was the need for additional after school activities.'

This theme is also re-iterated at para 5.13:

'The further community facilities that are particularly needed in Dartmouth Park include provision for young people (especially for after-school activities)'

The proposals therefore re-provide a community facility in the area with uses that accord with the needs of the local community. This together with the proposed new external front area, will provide an improved facility for all in the area and the proposals therefore accord with the aims of policy CM1(a). The previous community facilities with dates of when they occurred and the proposed community facilities have been compiled into a schedule as agreed at pre-app stage. Please refer to a copy of this at appendix A.

The above confirms that the development would respect and enhance the character of the area and would be in accordance with the applicable aims and objectives of Policies DC1, DC2, DC3 and CM1.

In addition to the specific policies noted above, there are several areas in which the proposals adhere to the aspirations noted in Appendix 5 of the Plan. These are not policies per se, but they nevertheless reflect the ideas and proposals from the local neighbourhood.

The creation of a small scale green space to the frontage is in line with biodiversity policy, as is the intention to add a specimen tree to the streetscape (Projects 11&12).

The proposal to introduce cycle parking on street in an approved enclosure also accords with desired improvements to the public realm (Project 7) whilst maximizing the green space associated with the community facility by not siting it within the front external area.

Providing public realm cycle parking in this location also accords with the draft cycling plan in which York Rise is a new proposed route through an existing area (Project 2).

Camden Local Plan (2017)

Policy A1 seeks to ensure the amenity of communities, occupiers and neighbours is protected. The detailed description of the proposals above has already outlined that there will be no impact on neighbouring amenity in terms of design.

A separate transport statement accompanying this application describes how the amenity of neighbours will not be impacted by the proposed travel plan and there will be no tangible transport impacts from the proposals.

Policy C2 seeks to ensure community facilities are developed and modernised to meet the changing needs of the community and reflect new approaches to the delivery of services. Policy C2(g) specifically relates to existing community facilities and their retention or replacement with a facility of a similar nature that meets the needs of the local population or its current or intended users.

The proposals seek a change of use to a primary school. The current nursery school provided within the building for many years (York Rise Nursery) has recently closed. We note that at the same time as this closure, Brookfield Primary School opened their nursery to 2 year olds and upwards, which to some degree may mitigate the loss of the spaces at York Rise Nursery.

In policy C2, providers of new community provision are encouraged to engage early in the development process with ward members and local communities, including Neighbourhood Forums where they exist. In this spirit, the applicant has initially engaged with the Dartmouth Park Neighbourhood Forum and listened to early comments.

The early feedback received (without sight of the proposals) was to consider a green boundary, possibly hedging, and to consider that community uses are appropriately allowed for. These comments have been taken on board and incorporated wherever possible. A flyer has been posted to all nearby neighbouring properties outlining the proposed proposals and the aims of the school, together with a link to their website and a request for any suggestions for community engagement.

The provision of a primary school within the area is covered in the planning note accompanying this document, which contains details of the proposed school arrangements, times, etc. We note here

however, that the building will remain in use as a community asset and therefore the provision of a primary school in lieu of a nursery within the hall is in line with Policy C2(g).

In addition, the proposals seek to improve the asset frontage in order to provide better facilities for the community, thus meeting the implied aims of Policy C2(a). The provision of an educational facility that can offer after school care to the community also meets the aims of Policy C2(d) in appropriately extending the building's use/reach to the community. Please also refer to the schedule of existing and proposed community uses found at appendix A.

Policy D1 Design and Policy D2 Heritage both cover a lot of similar ground to the Neighbourhood Plan sections described above. It is however worth specifically noting some areas in particular where design and heritage policy under the Local Plan is more than met by the proposals, to the benefit of the Conservation Area generally.

In terms of Policy D1 Design, the scheme respects the local context, is designed to use sustainable materials of high quality and detailing and incorporates high quality landscape design, offering a tree and other soft landscaping to the street as well as a scheme for the site itself. Overall it seeks to improve the character and quality of this local part of the Conservation Area, which is an idiosyncratic site and context.

With regard to Policy D2 Heritage, the scheme proposes a green and sympathetic addition to the streetscape, which will preserve the character of the Conservation Area and enhance it through the sensitive addition of a contemporary but appropriately scaled green boundary. The material palette is simple but sits well with the existing context where there is a lot of timber fencing and the overall effect is one of improvement from the current condition, with high quality detailing proposed.

Policy T1 Prioritising Walking, Cycling & Public Transport is also relevant to this application. A separate transport study has been carried out to confirm that the effect on the local area will in fact be positive. This combined with the greening of the boundary will provide a significantly improved public realm in this location.

Pre-Application Advice

Pre-application advice was sought on the proposals and the advice highlighted various matters all as set out in the covering letter to this application.

The addition of Appendix A to demonstrate the existing and proposed community uses responds to the request to specify the exact community uses and quantify them, together with identifying any community uses that have relocated elsewhere.

The design of the fence as a hit & miss arrangement was requested and this is confirmed in the proposals. In addition, the Operational Management Plan now submitted alongside the proposals confirms that the front landscaped area & fence will be kept free of rubbish as also requested.

Noise from the outdoor classroom area was raised, together with a request to highlight how this might be mitigated. The Operational Management Plan has a section on noise and notes how the front landscaping and fencing will help to reduce this at drop off and pick up, together with how the outdoor classroom along the side of the building will be used with restricted timings and an outdoor classroom arrangement, which will reduce the noise from that experienced by the previous all day use as York Rise Nursery.

External flues, ductwork, etc were raised and it was noted that these should be carefully considered in terms of noise and visual impact. We confirm no external ductwork or flues, etc and no external plant are proposed within this application, so there will be no resulting noise or visual impact.

The pre-app advice also referred to transport issues, which are now all addressed in the Transport Statement submitted alongside the proposals.

Consequently, we confirm that all pre-application advice has been carefully considered and we believe successfully addressed within this application.

5.0 CONCLUSION

As outlined in the document above, there are multiple positive benefits to the building, the street scene, community facilities and the Conservation Area resulting from the proposals. The scheme is additionally shown to comply with the relevant policies in both the Camden Local Plan and the Dartmouth Park Neighbourhood Plan and has been updated to comply with the advice given at pre-application stage.

APPENDIX A

SCHEDULE OF COMMUNITY USES AND ACTIVITY, EXISTING AND PROPOSED

Prior community usage and activity at St Mary Brookfield Hall

Activity	No. participants	Frequency	Day	Start date	End date
York Rise Nursery*	24 children & 4 members of staff	Daily on weekdays	Monday-Thursday (until 2019) and then Monday - Friday	1991	July 2022
Agincourt Badminton Club**	5-10	Weekly	Thursday evenings until 2019 and then Friday evenings	2002	July 2022
Private party hire***	Up to 50 children and adults	Sporadic (15-20 weekends per year)	Saturday or Sunday		July 2022
Night Shelter****	16 adults	Weekly (January to March)		2010	2020
Perform Drama School	30	Weekly	Saturday mornings	2018	March 2020
Duncombe Badminton Club	5-10	Weekly	Wednesday evenings	2002	July 2019
Harmsworth School of Dance	?	Weekly	Thursday afternoons	2002	July 2019
Tai chi club	15	Weekly	Monday evenings	2016	August 2019
Greenlight Taekwondo				2013	Unsure - before 2019
Pentecostal Church	30	Weekly	Sunday mornings	2017	2017

(Lighthouse Christi)					
Joms Vikings	15			2013	2016
Yoga class	14	Weekly	Tuesday evenings	2013	2016
Meditation	20	Annual	Weekend	2015	2016
Zumba Fitness	12	Weekly		2011	2012

* York Rise Nursery announced its closure in March 2022 due inability to meet running costs.

** Badminton space can be hired at [The Dome sports facility](#) on Weedington Road NW5. And there are plans for a badminton court at the [Highgate Newtown Community Centre](#) (less than a 10 minute walk from St Mary Brookfield Hall), due to open September 2023.

*** There are numerous options locally for private party hire including the [Peggy Jay Centre](#) on Parliament Hill Fields NW5, [Hargrave Hall Community Centre](#) on Hargrave Road N19 and [Queen's Crescent Community Centre](#) on Ashdown Crescent NW5.

**** The night shelter moved to a hotel during the pandemic and now takes place in St Mary Brookfield Church.

Many of the other regular activities dwindled in number and then stopped.

Proposed community usage and activity at St Mary Brookfield Hall from September 2023

Activity	No. participants	Frequency	Day
Wildwood Nature School	20 children + 4 members of staff (growing to 40 children + 6 members of staff in 2027)	Daily on weekdays during term time	Monday - Friday
Spanish after school club	15 children	Weekly during term time	TBC
Yoga after school club	15 children	Weekly during term time	TBC
Dance after school club	15 children	Weekly during term time	TBC
Drama after school club	15 children	Weekly during term time	TBC
Yoga and meditation (evening)	15 adults	Weekly	TBC
Tai chi (evening)	15 adults	Weekly	TBC
Parent education talks	30 adults	Quarterly	TBC

We have posted flyers through local residents' doors to let them know about our plans and have asked for their input and recommendations for after school clubs and evening classes that they would like to have at St Mary Brookfield Hall.