

Highgate Conservation Area Advisory Committee

2 MAY 2023 HGY/2023/0390: Science Block LISTED BUILDING APPLICATION

1. Introduction

These are the objections of Highgate Conservation Area Advisory Committee to the above Listed Building application for proposed works to the Science Block, Highgate School, Southwood Lane, Highgate HGY/2023/0390, namely:

APPLICATION FOR LISTED BUILDING CONSENT HGY/2023/0390

Science Block, Highgate School, North Road, London N6 4AY

Refurbishment and extension of existing Science Block, to include: 1) Four storey plus basement extension to east wing to provide new entrance and improved circulation, lift and ancillary accommodation; 2) Three storey extension including ground level colonnade to central building; 3) Creation of additional plant space at roof level of the Link Block, with extension of dormer and installation of louvres; 4) Complete replacement of building systems/plant; 5) Rooftop observatory extension; 6) Replacement windows and restoration of existing facades; and 7) Associated landscaping.

Highgate CAAC objects to this application on the following principal grounds. Detailed comments are given below on each of these points.

- 1. The adverse impact of the proposed extension on the existing Science Quad elevations, and of the glazed stair enclosure on the existing imposing end façade**
- 2. The plant on the Observatory roof would be clearly visible from Southwood Lane both the south and the north**
- 3. Design elements, elevations and entrances are unresolved**
- 4. The relationship between the existing recessed entrance and staircase block and the adjacent facades would be irretrievably altered**
- 5. Unspecified alterations to the windows are planned. Details of the work to existing windows/new windows at 1:5 or larger are required**

The Science Block was built in 1928 to the design of AE Mumby. It is designed the neo-Baroque style widely employed for public and institutional buildings in the Edwardian and inter-war periods, built in red brick with Portland stone dressings and stone pilasters. It forms a four-storey L-shaped block enclosing the north and east sides of the quadrangle. The flank wall of the east wing of the Science Block, topped by a segmental stone pediment, features prominently in views from the south. At the re-entrant angle of the north and south wings the façade is recessed and has an entrance with a stone surround reached by a shallow flight of stone steps which leads to an open-well stair providing access to both wings.

Conceived as the hub of the expanded school campus, the Science Quad elevations were given equal architectural elaboration to the façade in Southwood Lane and should not, therefore, be regarded as secondary elements of the design. We consider that any

substantial alterations or extensions to these elevations would be very difficult to achieve without damaging the architectural integrity of the whole.

Detailed comments

1. The adverse impact of the proposed extension on the existing Science Quad elevations, and of the glazed stair enclosure on the existing imposing end façade seen from the south

The extension would entirely obscure the quadrangle elevation of the Science Block's eastern wing, which would spoil the architectural integrity of Science Block itself, detracting from the Quad seen as a whole and from the setting of the listed school buildings. The revised elevations to the Science Quad and south elevation have not been reviewed by the Quality Review Panel. While accepting that the original 1928 façade would remain in situ (although the application documents is not entirely clear how this would be treated) and should not be regarded as mitigating the impact of the extension. We note that the revised elevations to the Science Quad and south elevation have not been reviewed by the Quality Review Panel.

The proposed elevation is superficial in design terms. It may look sensible on a drawing to replicate the arrangement of windows on the existing elevation when compared superficially with the 'as existing' elevation. However this is no more than a device to reproduce the existing façade to the Quad but is meaningless in terms of the function of the extension which encloses only a staircase with little of the area at existing floor levels. There are possibly drawbacks in any case with regard to functionality: the 'windows' would probably result in sunlight falling on solid areas of the existing west façade thus unacceptably reducing the light levels in the existing rooms. People on those rooms may have unacceptable views of people on the staircases. Scaffolding would be required to clean the windows internally.

The end wall of the proposed stair enclosure would detract from the imposing neo-Baroque south end façade, severely narrowing views from the south. We agree with the QRP's comment that the relationship between any new extension (whether in the Science Quad or at roof level) must be assessed in relation to views from Southwood Lane. Not only would the end wall to the proposed extension unbalance the formal symmetry of the façade, the design treatment on elevation and on plan fails to achieve a subservience to that façade (it also blocks views into the Science Quad as the QRP observed). An understanding of the spatial relationships should be maintained. To be clear however we consider neither option as drawn would be acceptable.

HCAAC considers that the proposed extension would destroy the integrity of the original design and that reconsideration of circulation within the Science Block could achieve a significant improvement and a more sympathetic design. We consider that any design needs unreservedly to respect the set-piece of the existing three facades including the expressed function of the existing recessed entrance and staircase block and the adjacent facades at the angle of the two wings. A 'fake' elevation to the Science Quad with its end elevation in yet a different idiom is a poor solution given the significance of the listed buildings surrounding it and therefore the setting of those buildings would be compromised.

We note that the reason for this extension being extended to the southern corner of the existing building is only because of the need for a refuge from the mezzanine floor in the Staff Common Room. No floor plan of the mezzanine level has been provided and we have asked that this should be submitted. Further, if that is the only reason for the extension then the mezzanine should be removed rather than cause harm to the significance and setting of the multitude of listed buildings surrounding this site. We presume there is no alternative

means of escape from the mezzanine in the Staff Common Room at the moment and therefore it cannot be used in any case.

We strongly suggest that the new staircase/lift enclosure should be removed from the proposals entirely and a more sympathetic design should be developed which fully respects the strong architectural attributes of the existing building.

We consider these parameters should apply in any revised proposals:

- a) the formal elevations of the existing buildings should be maintained:
- b) a clear expression of the existing recessed entrance and staircase block and the adjacent facades between the north and east wings as a separate entity must be maintained.
- c) designs should ensure a subsidiary relationship between any new extension and the prominent neo-Baroque south elevation end wall
- d) no extension should extend southwards such that it would be visible in views from the Camden side of Highgate High Street, also part of Highgate Conservation Area.

We note that the alignment of the south elevation to the proposed extension is not shown consistently across the submitted drawings. On some drawings that end wall is shown on the same alignment of the neo-Baroque façade and on others at right angles to the proposed new elevation to the Science Quad. The proposed relationship is a crucial aspect of the design. Clarity on what is proposed is required.

2. The plant on the roof and the Observatory would be clearly visible from Southwood Lane both from the south and the north

The existing roof-level extensions are regrettable, especially those on the Southwood Lane block which have the appearance of Nissen huts. What is proposed is an inchoate jumble of forms which would cause further harm to the roof profile. Plant at roof level requires railings, which are not shown. The Observatory would be clearly visible from the north; and the Mezzanine (top floor) lift lobby and the plant would be seen from the south. The lift lobby and possibly the Observatory would involve artificial lighting at night causing unacceptable light pollution. CGIs would help the Planning Sub Committee appreciate the impact of the plant and observatory in terms of bulk and height on the views we provide above. Drawings showing as existing and proposed elevations from Southwood Lane are required.

3. Design elements, elevations and entrances are unresolved

The relationship between the quite different proposed treatments of the main new façade and the return at the south end appears to us to be an awkward and unresolved relationship internally and externally. There is visual architectural confusion and potentially actual confusion about the entrance to the Science block, again a point noted by the QRP but not addressed by the architect.

4. The relationship of the junction of the two wings with the adjacent facades would be irretrievably altered

The loss of the original entrance and steps with original iron balustrades would be highly regrettable. We note that the plant and observatory are placed on the roof at the junction of the two wings of the existing Science building which is recessed at 'front' and 'rear' on plan and has a lower roof, expressing its location as the existing connecting recessed entrance and staircase block and the adjacent facades between the main facades of the two primary facades on either side. Each façade is symmetrically arranged in strong neo-Baroque elevations independent of each other, separated by the Link Block. The proposed plant and

observatory, contrary to the carefully articulated existing design, would increase the height of what is currently a subsidiary element, making it higher than the two main elements of the building. Internally, the loss of the original open-well stair which is understood to have original geometric-pattern ironwork, would also be highly regrettable.

5. Unspecified alterations to the windows are planned.

Details of the work to existing windows/new windows at 1:5 or larger must be provided to ensure no visual change to the windows on any elevation would be made. The elevations as seen from Southwood Lane, as existing and proposed, are required.

Conclusion

The Highgate Conservation Area Advisory Committee considers that the proposal would detract significantly from the architectural interest and integrity of the Science Block as a curtilage building to the statutorily listed Highgate School buildings. Listed building consent should therefore be refused.

Please note that detailed comments regarding the adverse impact on the Highgate Conservation Area, on views from Southwood Lane, on the setting of nearby listed buildings, and on local residents, are given in the HCAAC's objection to the associated planning application for the Science Block (HGY/2023/0317)