

Objection

I object in principle to change in use of this land, Highgate Library woodland glade. This land has been an open public green space for over 120 years. Historic maps show this land as the Bishop of London's hunting grounds. Some ancient oaks remain in the adjacent Highgate Station cutting. It is unacceptable to alter the use of this land, when it is the only open green space accessible to disabled people in the neighbourhood, and also the only space for many families such as mine who live in flats on Shepherds Hill. It is part of Capital Ring, London's green route.

I object that the BMX bike track would be out of character with both the Highgate Conservation Area and the historical setting of the locally listed Highgate Library. Both Highgate conservation documents and the listing of Highgate Library have been legally agreed by Haringey Council. Photographs from the time Highgate Library was built show the woodland glade between the library (above) and entrance to the old overground station (below).

Value of the site

I have lived on Shepherds Hill, a few doors from Highgate Library, for 30 years. When I moved here in 1993 my daughter was 7 years old and on her 8th birthday she was given a skateboard. She used the smooth footpath next to this site to ride her skateboard on her own and with her friends, which she did for a number of years. The site was at the time idyllic beautiful woodland that I and my family enjoyed regularly. I particularly remember the beautiful flowers - snowdrops, daffodils, bluebells and foxgloves - that I could see when walking past.

One of the important features of the Highgate Library woodland glade is that it is level near the Shepherds Hill pavement and has two benches. This meant that my elderly disabled mother was able to enjoy the woodland space too, seeing my daughter playing. The glade was also enjoyed by the elderly and disabled residents in the housing for older people at Goldsmith's Court across the street and by elderly residents who live in flats in Shepherds Hill.

The junction of Shepherds Hill and Archway Road is Haringey's only pollution hotspot with the most dangerous and highest levels of pollution. My own daughter developed asthma that I believe was as a result of walking to school through this pollution hotspot. As yet neither Haringey Council nor the Mayor of London have any plans to deal with the dangerous levels of pollution in the hotspot. The pollution is expected to get worse as tyres from electric vehicles generate ten times more particulate matter because electric cars are so heavy. The community believes that Highgate Library woodland glade provides some protection from the pollution from particulate matter. Transport for London has said that it wishes to safeguard the site to provide a lift (for Disabled Access) at Highgate Station.

Heritage

The Heritage Statement document produced by Room 102, belonging to Maria Kramer, is inaccurate and misleading. I find the description of the uses of the site unrecognisable and there is no mention of the local listing of Highgate Library. I note that the Room 102 website

states that the plan for a BMX bike track is supported by Haringey Council, and that is worrying given that consultation has only just begun. Maria Kramer is a former committee member of Highgate Neighbourhood Forum.

When I moved to the area my neighbours explained that the Highgate Library woodland glade was a remnant of the medieval Bishop of London's hunting grounds just like Queen's Wood Nature Reserve. This is acknowledged in the Highgate Neighbourhood Plan at 1.3. It is worth pointing out that the Highgate Neighbourhood Plan also states at 4.4.2 that "Highgate Library is housed in a villa built in 1901", which is incorrect. Highgate Library is a purpose-built Arts and Crafts style library opened in 1902. It was funded by a Carnegie grant and it the only half-timbered Carnegie library apart from the Grade I listed library in Stratford-Upon-Avon.

The Heritage Statement fails to mention that Highgate Library woodland glade was compulsorily purchased for the Archway Motorway slip road, which led to many years of neglect while STAMP (Stop The Archway Motorway Plan) and other local residents opposed the plan across three public enquiries from 1976 onwards and finally brought it to an end. The neglect through planning blight has included fly-tipping, petty vandalism and failure to deal with self-seeded trees.

The Heritage Statement omits critical information from the Highgate Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan which has been adopted by Haringey Council. The document states that: 'Shepherds Hill has a cohesive character by virtue of the predominant 19th/early 20th Century 3-storey detached houses, the station-side copse to the north, the allotments to the south, the leafy gardens, and the regularly spaced mature trees on both sides of the road.' The Appraisal concludes that: 'Further loss of features and architectural details would detract from the overall character and appearance of the conservation area and should be resisted.'

The Heritage Statement states "This area of Highgate, Haringey, has a lack of formal play areas," which is clearly rubbish. The Highgate Wood children's playground and sports grounds are a few minutes' walk away. Any council tax payers' money spent on producing this nonsense Heritage Statement should be refunded to the council for use elsewhere.

The site has been adopted as part of Capital Ring and it brings walkers from far afield to enjoy the woodland glade as part of London's green route. The Heritage Statement fails to mention this. The site was also to be part of the Parkland Walk nature reserve and was called the Parkland Walk Extension for some time, however those plans did not come to fruition.

I cannot say that I have witnessed BMX biking other than at the consultation events organised by Highgate Neighbourhood Forum. As someone who passes the Highgate Library woodland glade at least twice a day it is only on rare occasions that I have seen any cycling other than what I've described above. It is simply incorrect to suggest that the site has been a BMX bike track at all, let alone since 1985 as claimed. I would like the Planning Officer to note that my comments and those given by my friends at the 2019 consultation event organised by Maria Kramer of Room 102 are completely missing from the consultation document. In addition to saying that the Highgate Library woodland glade is not suitable and would be too small we said that Pond Square, which has a large unused area of asphalt, or

Highgate Wood park, adjacent to the recreation ground or children's playground would be much more suitable.

Highgate Library woodland glade

Over 30 years I have seen adults and children of all ages enjoy the Highgate Library woodland glade in spite of the neglect. Under fives have delighted in leaving the pavement and walking through the glade parallel to the pavement as my daughter often did. Older children have observed the flowers, trees and other plants. Users of Highgate Library, particularly students preparing for exams, came into the glade to enjoy the space and then return to work in the library. Parents took their children through the glade to the many children's classes in the library before the pandemic. Under 5s rode their tricycles and tiny play scooters excitedly up and down in glee. The glade has also been a place where parents taught their children to ride a bike.

I remember that on one occasion a large number of old car tyres were dumped there in the glade, which the council later removed. In about 1996 my daughter told me that she saw three older teenage boys digging in the Highgate Library woodland glade. The following day we went together to see what was going on. Two mounds of about 2ft high had been created and a plank about 6ft long had been placed to join the two mounds and a tyre was placed in front of one mound. Later we saw these older boys riding their skateboards across the plank. I had a neighbour who worked for the police and she explained that she regularly reported the vandalism and the anti-social behaviour that she saw and pressed the council to take action, which they did. She pointed out that this behaviour and other anti-social behaviour and petty vandalism put others at risk of injury.

In about 1998 the council consulted on proposals to close the branch libraries, including Highgate Library. Around this time the Highgate Library woodland glade was severely vandalised and important trees were felled. Residents approached then councillor Nicky Gavron for help. She arranged for half of the Highgate Library garden to be sold to the owner of 3 Shepherds Hill with the sum received to be used to restore the Highgate Library woodland glade. Unfortunately the sum that was received was small and the trees that were planted were small. I remember that a number of Field Maple trees, an important English native, were planted for the commemoration of the centenary of Highgate Library. The fencing to the old station was renewed around the same time. We lost Nicky Gavron as our local councillor after she was elected to the Greater London Assembly, and the replacement Lib Dem councillors showed no interest in the vandalism to the Highgate Library woodland glade.

Around 2016 JLAC (Jackson's Lane Arts Centre) published a proposal to close Highgate Library and to create a library in the JLAC café. This proposal was defeated by Friends of Highgate Library Shepherds Hill (FOHLSH) and their supporters with the help of the Ham and High news reporters. Once again the trees in Highgate Library woodland glade were vandalised. It was very distressing to see the four surviving Field Maples that had become attractive trees felled across their trunks at 4ft high.

There was widespread outrage at what had been done both among residents and also the many families who attended classes for children at Highgate Library. On making enquiries I was told that the felling had taken place after a complaint had been made by Highgate Society

to Highgate Police Community Support Officers following a robbery at the Highgate Library woodland glade.

Residents could not understand why the Field Maples were targeted when they were in the middle of the glade and quite tall with bare tree trunks. The trees were not wide enough to hide a would-be robber. It was also strange that a dead tree that was left in a precarious position and the tree that had been supporting it was felled but the dead tree itself was not felled. This dead tree was over 12ft tall and 10 inches wide at the trunk and close to the pavement. It could have caused a serious injury so I reported this to the council. When I spoke to the council officer who attended he was aghast and said the contractors were not supposed to do what had been done. I was not clear whether the officer was referring to Highgate Society contractors or council contractors. The officer agreed that there was no reason for the Field Maples to be felled, that the dead tree was dangerous, and that it and needed to come down. He explained that all the other trees needed to be checked. The dead tree was felled and removed after a few days and a notice was put up explaining that some further trees needed to be felled because they were diseased.

The pandemic brought the closure of Highgate Library and the many classes taking place. This led on one hand to fewer people using the glade as they had done and on the other hand a phenomenal increase in the fly tipping and vandalism. The council did not clear the fly tipping during the pandemic so this accumulated and large ugly mounds were formed. The fly tipping is continuing. Ahead of the May 2022 election photos of the builders' rubble bags were taken and reported to the council. The bags were not removed but emptied and added to the mounds. There is fresh builders' rubble on the site (see photo). Dealing with vandalism and past neglect no longer appears to be a priority for the council following the pandemic.

Most recently after the severe vandalism and dumping the atmosphere in the woodland glade has changed, partly because there are now dense bushes overhanging the pavement and it is no longer possible to see into the glade from the pavement. Residents can no longer use the glade as before because it has been fly-tipped with a very large amount of builders' rubble (sub-soil and concrete from excavations for foundations and basements). We cannot walk in the glade without treading in the muddy sub-soil, and much of the flora has died. As a result of the bushes overhanging onto the pavement, it is hard for disabled people and parents with pushchairs to even walk past the glade along the pavement (see photo).

Ideal BMX bike track locations in Highgate

There are several far more suitable locations for a BMX Bike Track within the Highgate Neighbourhood Forum Area. Within Waterlow Park there is a wholly unused space between to the tennis courts and petanque court. This could be especially valuable as there are indeed no formal play areas in this part of Highgate. Within Highgate Wood (managed by the City of London) there are a number of options that could be suitable, e.g. adjacent to the children's playground, adjacent to the sports grounds or in the little used scrub land. If HNF wanted a site that is adjacent to the highway then what location could be better than Pond Square which is owned and managed by Camden Council. A large part of Pond Square consists of a extensive sheet of asphalt which is unused apart from the once a year Highgate Festival. Alternatively, on a smaller scale the disused 271 bus terminus could be used. All of these options are within the existing use of that land and do not involve the change of use of a public open green space.

Conclusion

My neighbours and I believe that in accordance with the Highgate Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Plan the council should refuse the application for change of use to a BMX bike track. The previous application cited in the so called Heritage Statement was refused as this one also should be. We want action taken to stop the fly tippers by using the new civil injunction legal powers against persons unknown.

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