



10a South Grove, Highgate N6 6BS

Attn. Tania Skelli,
Haringey Planning, Regeneration & Economy

13th September, 2023

Dear Ms. Skelli,

HGY/2023/0338 – Mallinson Centre, Highgate School, Bishopswood Road N6 – additional comments from the Highgate Society

We will be grateful if you would attach the following additional comments to those already submitted by the Society on this application.

Hydrological impacts

To fully understand the complexity of the hydrology of the area, reference should also be made to the important evidence from the 1869 Ordnance Survey map for the area which includes Highgate School [see attachment, showing the modern map of the area overlaid on the 1869 Ordnance Survey map]. This shows that, in what is now the area of the Junior School playing fields there is a section of parallel lines denoting what we understand to have been watercress beds, which were traditionally grown in wet environments.

These beds also appear to cover a part of the Mallinson Sport Centre ground, including the "Orchard", in both of which areas substantial excavations are proposed, and the Tatham's Field, which we understand is also being considered for an artificial pitch, though not in the current application. In addition, the map suggests that, at the southern corner of the field now occupied by the "Orchard" (identified by the number 532) there was a substantial natural pond, another possibly another in the middle of the field. Though long since filled in, it is unlikely that the source for the water which once filled it has itself disappeared. Indeed, it is known that there is currently also an active spring in that same field, in the area now covered by recent woodland; and recent development - particularly of basements - throughout the area, and particularly in Broadlands Road, has tended to cause ground water problems for neighbours as the natural flow remains.

All this suggests that any obstruction to natural watercourses and ground water flow caused by the proposed new basement excavations and construction may, unless fully assessed and taken account of in any construction proposals, cause significant groundwater problems for both the school and the neighbourhood. Development in recent decades has shown the hydrology of the whole area to be highly complex. The same 1869 map shows the existence in the immediate area of other numerous ponds and streams - for example, the large pond immediately to the north, the memory of which is preserved in the name Springfield Cottages (now owned by Haringey). Despite development since the 1860s, the basic underlying hydrology will not have changed.

Further, it is essential to remember that the hedgerow between the Mallinson Centre and the Orchard is an important ancient one, identified on the 1869 map as the same southern and western

boundaries of field 532, and hence of great heritage significance. It is, moreover, the last surviving pre-development ancient hedgerow in Highgate, with several important veteran Oaks of considerable ecological importance. The future of this hedgerow must therefore be a primary consideration. Though it is not proposed to physically interfere with it in the course of the works, we have three major concerns, which must be weighed when considering this application:

(1) the excavation of a basement to accommodate the Mallinson Centre five courts will divert the downhill flow of water away from this hedgerow, in all likelihood depriving it, and its veteran trees, of a significant amount of the water necessary for its survival; while, in the event that the proposed "amphitheatre" were to fill up with water, possibly on a long-term basis, it could cause waterlogging which would also threaten the survival of the veteran oaks and the hedgerow. A Basement Impact Assessment should be required and subjected to independent audit.

(2) the proposed excavation of a playing field "amphitheatre" in the Orchard will further substantially, possibly fatally, reduce the flow of ground water to this hedgerow; therefore these two proposals, of a basement and 'amphitheatre, will, in our view, present a major threat to the last historic ancient hedgerow in Highgate and should not be permitted

However, (3), there is a further possibly damaging scenario. The area of the Orchard, as is well known both to the School and to neighbours, includes an active spring which, we are given to understand, makes the ground waterlogged in winter. The excavation of a so-called "amphitheatre" feature, purportedly to act as a sump for excess water in the event of a future major storm event, could, in our view, have exactly the opposite effect, causing the spring (which may well have originally fed the lost pond shown on the 1869 map) to be diverted from its current natural flow off site and to risk the Orchard "amphitheatre" becoming semi-permanently filled with water, rendering it of no value either for a playing field or a "sump" for an unpredictable flood event perhaps long in the future.

Since the "Orchard" is currently an important local ecological area and an integral element of the local and regional "ecological corridor", the present proposals risk not only destroying it, but actually achieving the complete opposite of what is desired by creating an unplayable semi-permanent lake or marsh. We therefore believe that the proposals are ill-conceived and potentially highly damaging. We strongly recommend that a detailed hydrological survey of the entire area should be commissioned by an independent specialist in the field, and consider that it would be extremely unwise to grant permission until this has been carried out.

The aim must not be to use this relatively small area as a catchment area for surplus surface water, but to install an improved drainage system which will carry off any surplus surface water effectively and efficiently. A catchment pit as proposed risks water being retained for prolonged periods and, particularly in the increased periods of hot weather resulting from climate change, becoming stagnant and a health hazard. Sustainable drainage systems should allow for water to disperse naturally, and it is clear that a specialist consultant should be engaged to advise on surface water disposal.

Finally, much of the land proposed for redevelopment is designated as Metropolitan Open Land. How it is intended to replace the loss of any such land through allocations of other open land must be made clear in the application.

We therefore ask that this proposal should on no account be permitted, not only on the above hydrological grounds but because, as the last surviving meadow and ancient hedgerow in Highgate, the Orchard should be retained and developed as an ecological education facility for Highgate School and for neighbouring schools, and what we consider the gravely ill-considered and potentially damaging amphitheatre proposal should be refused for hydrological, ecological, sustainability and heritage reasons.

Redevelopment aspects

The teaching block proposed for the Broadlands Road elevation, now has significantly increased height and bulk when compared to the previous scheme in 2018, and consequently projects beyond the building line established by the neighbouring house, causing significant harm to the Conservation Area by further urbanising its semi-rural character. The basement below this extension may well affect the roots of the mature trees on the boundary which are a vital part of the Conservation Area. In addition, in any revised design for the building, the window proportions should be given a more vertical proportion to reflect the proportions of the windows in the buildings adjacent and opposite. The large slightly horizontal proportions clash with the neighbouring buildings when the opportunity is there to have some sense of belonging to the historic context without being pastiche.

The traffic issues in the neighbouring streets, caused by parents dropping off or picking up their children, are well known and this intensification of use of the Mallinson Centre – possibly including by other Schools, and at extended hours – could make the situation even worse. The School have proposed measures to try and improve the situation in the past, but without any noticeable improvement. A new Green Transport Plan must be developed which will ensure that parents are prevented from blocking nearby streets and driveways to the great inconvenience of the local residents.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Hammerson
Planning Committee, The Highgate Society

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