

Highgate Conservation Area Advisory Committee

HGY/2023/0338: Mallinson Sports Centre (MSC) Objection re. Design, Highgate Conservation Area, Heritage and MOL



On page 60 of the Design and Access Statement a similar image to the above is reproduced. Haringey's Planning, Design and Conservation officers will know that this is a view of The Bank, Highgate Hill. The text in the DAS states:

"This urban response to sloping topography is seen as an exemplar for the new sports centre extensions, breaking down the overall development into more varied, well-scaled parts that play with and against each other in rhythmic harmony and respond positively to the context. This is a strong contrast to typical sports centre developments, many of which have the industrial appearance of large blank boxes and have very little relationship to any urban context."

These buildings were not built at the same time but form a group of listed domestic buildings with important interiors and predictable plan forms. The Historic England listings are informative:

- Cromwell House, 104 Highgate Hill, Grade 1. 1637 – 38. Forecourt walls listed and carriage entrance separately
- Ireton House, 106 Highgate Hill and Lyndale House, 108 Highgate Hill Grade 2*. Early 18th century pair possibly with 17th century cores. 104 – 108 and walls and gates, 110 and 112 form a group
- 110 Highgate Hill House and forecourt wall: Grade 2
- The Bank retaining wall: Grade 2. Probably 18th century

To start with, an 'urban response' to the Mallinson site is inappropriate. The Bishops area is not urban but suburban. The setting is predominantly extensive Metropolitan Open Land on both sides of Bishopswood Road with views across playing fields up to Highpoint 1 & 2 to the east and on the west side to large houses on the far side of the Senior Playing field. The stated design approach adopted for the Mallinson is not to make the plan form obvious but rather to make the use of the building and the functional forms within it obscure and hidden. It is wrapped in an envelope which has no relationship to its context: large Victorian/Edwardian houses in pale gault brickwork with red brick mouldings and set in large gardens.

It is evident from the Applicant's Design and Access Statement that the School's Architect was advised by Haringey Officers to consider the work of Dudok, Aalto and Colin St. John Wilson.

The applicant's DAS at page 79 states:

“In consultations with Haringey planning officers, the theme of a richly articulated all-brick building, with precedents in architectural history such as by Dudok, St. John Wilson and Aalto, evolved into a very clear coherence.” These architects express the internal volumes in the 3-dimensional forms of their buildings. The opposite design approach, as set out in the DAS and quoted at the top of this document, by Ed Toovey is fundamentally to hide the use of the building. We stated very plainly in our original objection that this building presented an unacceptably long and uncompromisingly bulky elevation to Bishopswood Road. Further, that elevation has no coherence with the north and south elevations. Subsequently the QRP suggested reference to the materiality of surrounding buildings.

Elevational treatments

The elevational treatments of the four facades of this enormous ‘box’ are quite different. The east elevation retains the sense of a back elevation even though very visible from neighbours’ houses and gardens.

We can see that Ed Toovey is ‘expressing’ a different function on the Bishopswood Road frontage, basically the circulation space. The only elevational reference to the main parts of the building – Sports Halls and Swimming Pool - is to the swimming pool. The Architect’s design intent is clearly set out in our first paragraph, namely to hide the Sports facilities. HCAAC considers the proposed building, if allowed, would instead be a megalithic presence in this area of significant open space. The proposed building would be far bigger than any building in the Bishops Area or in the Highgate Conservation Area. Its closest equivalent is the Holloway Bus Garage in Islington. It would be larger than Park Road Pools. The sheer bulk of the proposal remains unacceptable.

The applicant’s DAS states at p 102 that the QRP advised: *“The approach taken to the southern elevation, incorporating the Fives Courts, successfully enhances what is currently a bland façade.”* The layout of the buildings and proposed flood risk solutions have been amended since the QRP’s comments.

The south elevation is a prominent view in connection with the openness of the Metropolitan Open Land.

- The CGI on page 73 of the DAS (August 2025) shows the various elements of the building and those which encroach onto Metropolitan Open Land. There is no architectural continuity of language with the west elevation.

The south elevation consists of a number of different elements but with no architectural coherence:

- A proposed two storey redbrick box with a monopitch roof. The main entrance to the Mallinson Sports Centre is on the ground floor and a café for parents on the first floor.
- The main entrance is approached from the Metropolitan Open Land (MOL). It has a large concrete-frame porte-cochere with glass balcony (but described elsewhere a red brick balcony) to the Parents’ café on top of it all located on MOL.
- A large paved area outside the entrance surrounded by brick walls and seating for students also encroaches on MOL. HCAAC believes the Stage 1 response from the GLA to encroachment onto MOL pre-dated this encroachment.
- The ribbed steel roof to the existing Sports Hall is visible with the redbrick wall facing the MOL entirely hidden by the green roof of the Fives Courts which are at basement level and extend beyond the roof. The Fives Courts are entirely on MOL. There is a visible ‘gash’ in the MOL. The specialist reports on attenuation of rainwater state a full width attenuation tank is required, extending the development even further into the Metropolitan Open Land. These specialist reports dated 2025 have been submitted long after the GLA Stage 1 response to the original iteration of the design.
- Some documents submitted with this application state a bund on MOL is required to safeguard people in the Fives Courts. It is not clear whether this is still part of the measures to protect life in a flooding event as the bund is not shown in the Landscaping proposals as indicated in the DAS.

- It is questionable whether it is prudent to locate the Fives Courts at basement level as the latest specialist report states the Fives Courts would be inundated in any [flooding] event. This health and safety matter must be satisfactorily resolved before any grant of planning permission.

HCAAC urges Haringey to resist encroachment on MOL, such an important aspect of the Bishops area of Highgate Conservation Area. This Application involves unnecessarily extending onto MOL.

The north elevation is a modest elevation with a horizontal arrangement of windows in a 20th century idiom although the piers at roof level are rather randomly placed in relation to the fenestration below. The west and north elevations, seen together, have neither architectural nor visual coherence nor is there any reference to the large forms of the two sports halls or the swimming pool.

Entrances, exits and safety

HCAAC considers the fundamental problem relates to circulation within the buildings. Placing the main entrance at one end of a large building would be unusual. To relocate the entrance from the centre of the Bishopswood Road façade to the far south end of the building results in very extended escape routes internally with the Gym acting as part of the escape route.

Dr. Nick Haycock has made the important observation that, in a flood, the worst thing to do is to open the flood-protection doors to escape. Flood water would simply rush in putting lives at risk. The conclusion must be that the main entrance/exit must be:

- well above flood level and
- with the shortest escape routes possible.
- familiarity for staff and pupils would be essential.

Trees

HCAAC pointed out to the architects and the School that there were views of trees in the adjacent garden in Broadlands Road as seen from Bishopswood Road.

HCAAC commented on the EIA regarding the Mallinson proposals as follows:

"The CA appraisal describes how 'the view over the playing fields or from between the buildings give the road an open and leafy feeling' despite the 'somewhat industrial appearance' of the existing sports centre. The proposed changes despite the claims in the Formal Screening document do nothing to alleviate this harm and in fact have the potential to cause more harm to the CA." The proposed changes in our opinion, despite the claims in the EIA Formal Screening document, do nothing to alleviate this harm and in fact we consider they would cause greater harm to the CA.

We ask Haringey to consider the impact of this proposal very carefully and whether the sought 'open and leafy' views have been achieved. The architect has introduced a sliver of a view of a tree which HCAAC considers is insufficient to retain any sense of the prevailing openness in the Bishops Area of the Highgate Conservation Area.

Other matters

1 Highgate School has removed the teaching space from the proposed new building facing Broadlands Road, replacing it with storage space. The School advises us that it will time-table space for teaching SPEX instead of providing it on this site. It is important that this must be acknowledged by the School in their application documents. This application is part of a 10 year programme of works to meet the School's needs over the period set out in the SPD.

2 The Café does not form part of the NEED set out in the SPD. Providing a café at the Mallinson site to discourage parents from sitting in their cars with the engines idling while waiting for their children shows the School is not serious about their Travel Plan going forward.

HCAAC is pleased to see the relocation of the cycle store on the Broadlands Road.

HCAAC remains implacably opposed to this application on the basis that it would cause harm to the Highgate Conservation Area. Public benefits do not apply.