



Planning Services,
Haringey Council,
River Park House,
225 High Road,
London N22 8HQ

Haringey Planning Services By email.

Date: 26/03/2026

Dear Mr Samuel Uff,

Re: Planning Application **HGY/2023/0315**

Site: Richards Music Centre, Highgate School, Bishopswood Road, London, N6 4PR.

The Highgate Society writes to object to the proposed Richards Music Centre at Highgate School.

The Society recognises the School's long-standing presence within Highgate and supports investment in education in principle. Our concern is not with improvement itself, but with the scale and cumulative impact of the proposed development.

In particular, the proposal raises questions regarding its visual impact within the Highgate Conservation Area, its relationship with Metropolitan Open Land, and whether the scale of the building represents a proportionate response to the stated educational need.

The Highgate Society has previously submitted detailed comments on earlier iterations of the proposals.

Although amendments have been made, these do not materially alter the scale of development or the broader concerns raised by residents and local organisations.

A number of technical matters have already been raised by residents' groups and specialist advisers, including issues relating to traffic congestion, construction disruption, flood risk, hydrology, biodiversity and environmental impact.

The Society does not repeat those detailed submissions but supports their substance and asks that they be carefully considered by the Council.

Planning policy at both national and local level requires that development within conservation areas preserves or enhances their character and appearance, protects heritage assets and respects the openness of Metropolitan Open Land.

The Highgate Neighbourhood Plan, the London Plan and Haringey Local Plan policies all emphasise that development proposals must demonstrate clear public benefit and remain proportionate to their setting.

Our objection therefore focuses on several broader planning issues.

1. Cumulative impact

Although the Richards Music Centre is presented as an individual proposal, the documentation indicates that it forms part of a wider redevelopment programme across the Highgate School estate.

The supporting Estate Wide Programme Review and Construction Traffic Forecast outlines a construction programme involving several redevelopment projects across the School estate over a number of years.

This suggests that the proposed building should not be considered in isolation, but as part of a longer-term programme of redevelopment.

The proposals also appear to have been prepared by different architectural teams for separate buildings across the School estate.

It is therefore unclear how the overall design strategy, circulation planning and architectural coherence of the campus have been considered through a single comprehensive masterplan, particularly given the location within a conservation area.

Taken together, the scale of demolition, excavation and construction activity could represent a prolonged period of disruption within the centre of Highgate Village.

The Society therefore asks:

- How has the Council assessed the cumulative impact of redevelopment projects across the School estate when considered together rather than as individual applications?
- How has the potential effect of prolonged construction activity on residents and the village environment been assessed?

2. Impact on the Highgate Conservation Area

The site lies within the Highgate Conservation Area. The Highgate Conservation Area is unusual in that it covers almost the whole of the historic village, allowing the evolution of Highgate from a medieval hilltop settlement into a semi-rural enclave within London to be clearly understood. This character depends on a delicate balance between institutional buildings, residential streets and open land.

Development within the conservation area must preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the area and should therefore remain proportionate to its historic and village setting.

The submitted context elevation drawing shows the proposed Richards Music Centre together with the Mallinson Sports Centre along Bishopswood Road.

The elevation suggests that the frontage along this part of the road may increasingly be dominated by large institutional buildings.

This raises an important planning question regarding the balance between the School estate and the surrounding village character. The question is not only whether individual buildings are acceptable in isolation, but whether the cumulative effect of development risks altering the character of Highgate from a mixed village environment into one increasingly defined by institutional use.

Highgate's distinctive character derives from the balance between school buildings, open spaces and surrounding residential streets.

Development which allows institutional buildings to dominate this balance risks undermining the historic character and significance of the conservation area.

The contextual drawings submitted with the application appear to provide only a limited representation of the surrounding built environment.

The illustrative 3D CAD white model view presents a simplified representation of the street and surrounding buildings rather than a realistic depiction of the existing urban context.

Similarly, the long context elevation drawing interpolates the horizontal distance between buildings along the curved alignment of Bishopswood Road.

While the Design and Access Statement refers to neighbouring properties and includes visualisations of the proposed building, it provides limited analysis of how the scale, height and massing of the Richards Music Centre relate to the surrounding residential buildings and the established character of the Highgate Conservation Area.

As a result, these drawings may not fully convey how the scale and massing of the proposed building would be experienced within the actual streetscape of the Highgate Conservation Area.

The Planning Statement also notes that the existing building contributes positively to the character of the Highgate Conservation Area. In this context, the demolition of the existing structure and its replacement with a significantly larger building raises questions about whether the proposal would preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the conservation area.

In this context, consideration should be given to retaining and upgrading the existing building, as this could preserve its contribution to the Conservation Area while reducing environmental impact compared with demolition and new build.

3. Scale and overdevelopment

The proposed Richards Music Centre represents a significant increase in built form on the site.

Independent analysis of the application documentation indicates that the proposed development would result in a very substantial increase in floor area compared with the existing structure.

The existing building is a single-storey pavilion, whereas the proposal introduces a substantially larger two-storey building with a basement.

The inclusion of a double-height theatre space requires significant internal volume and roof height, which increases the overall massing of the structure.

The proposal also combines a number of different functions within a single building, including drama teaching facilities, a double-height studio theatre, sports offices and changing rooms serving the adjacent playing fields.

The Planning Statement also indicates that elements originally proposed for the Dyne House development were subsequently relocated to the Richards Music Centre site following revisions elsewhere on the estate.

This raises the question as to whether the proposal represents the minimum necessary intervention?

The Society therefore asks:

- How has the Council assessed whether this scale of development represents the minimum necessary to meet the School's operational requirements?

4. Educational need and proportionality

The applicant states that the redevelopment is intended to optimise existing teaching space rather than increase pupil numbers.

However, the proposal nevertheless involves a substantial increase in building size and the overall scale of development.

Planning policy requires that proposals for educational facilities demonstrate a clear and identifiable need.

It is not evident from the documentation submitted that the scale of the proposed Richards Music Centre arises from a clearly defined educational requirement rather than from broader estate expansion.

The key planning question is therefore not simply whether pupil numbers increase, but whether the scale of the resulting built form represents a proportionate response to educational need within a sensitive conservation area setting.

The Society therefore asks:

- What evidence has been provided to demonstrate that the proposed scale of development represents the minimum necessary to meet educational needs rather than contributing to a broader expansion of the School estate?

5. Teaching space and campus organisation

The proposed Richards Music Centre appears to include a range of functions beyond music teaching, including drama facilities, sports offices and associated accommodation. The applicant has stated that the split nature of the campus creates circulation and timetabling challenges.

However, it is unclear whether a detailed analysis has been undertaken to demonstrate that new buildings represent the most efficient solution, rather than changes to timetable structure, room allocation or internal reorganisation of existing space.

In a school serving pupils across a wide age range, careful master planning and timetable organisation could potentially reduce movement between buildings through more efficient allocation of teaching spaces and sequencing of lessons.

The supporting documentation does not clearly demonstrate that such operational alternatives have been fully explored before significant new construction is proposed.

This raises questions about whether the building represents the minimum scale required to meet educational needs.

If pupils and staff move frequently between buildings during the school day, it is also relevant to consider the effect that this movement may have on surrounding streets and the wider village environment.

Regular movement between multiple school sites has the potential to influence how nearby streets and public spaces are used during the school day, potentially affecting the way residents and local businesses experience and use the village environment.

6. Traffic and transport impacts

Where a school estate operates across multiple sites, the relationship between building location, pedestrian movement between facilities and vehicle activity becomes an important planning consideration.

Highgate Village is a historic village environment with a close relationship between residential properties, local businesses and pedestrian activity.

In a historic village environment where road capacity is limited, the combined effect of these different movements can significantly influence how the area functions throughout the day.

The transport documentation appears to assume that the proposed developments will not materially change travel demand because pupil numbers will remain within the School's existing licensed capacity.

However, the documentation does not appear to include a detailed assessment of existing peak-time congestion in Highgate Village, which residents experience on a daily basis during school drop-off and pick-up periods.

Residents have documented significant congestion on North Road and North Hill during school arrival and departure periods, with traffic queues forming regularly and affecting surrounding streets and local bus services.

It is not evident from the submitted material whether transport considerations have been integrated into the design and organisation of the proposed buildings in a way that meaningfully reduces movement pressures on surrounding streets and It is unclear whether the redevelopment programme has been considered in the context of existing transport pressures.

This existing congestion forms an important part of the context in which the potential transport impacts of the proposed development should be assessed.

7. Construction traffic and disruption

The Estate Wide Programme Review provides only a high-level indication of construction activity and vehicle movements.

The construction programme indicates that construction vehicles, including heavy goods vehicles, will be required over an extended period.

The scale and duration of the wider redevelopment programme means that the effects of construction are not temporary in the usual sense, but may form a prolonged period of disruption within the village environment.

Given the scale and duration of the proposed redevelopment programme, a more detailed assessment of the potential effects on the surrounding community would appear necessary.

Development of this scale, extending over a number of years and involving multiple construction phases, has the potential to affect how residents live and work and how the village functions on a daily basis.

In this context, it is reasonable to question whether sufficient analysis has been undertaken to understand the longer-term effects of prolonged construction activity on the character and functioning of Highgate Village, including its residents, local businesses and public spaces.

What assessment has been undertaken regarding the impact of construction traffic on narrow residential streets surrounding the School and on pedestrian safety within the village?

8. Flood risk and environmental considerations

The proposals involve excavation and construction in an area where concerns regarding groundwater and drainage have been raised.

What evidence demonstrates that the proposed works will not increase flood risk or groundwater impacts affecting neighbouring properties?

9. Biodiversity and environmental mitigation

Given the proximity of Metropolitan Open Land and established green corridors within Highgate, it is important that biodiversity assessments fully reflect the ecological context of the wider area.

Several local submissions have also questioned whether the ecological surveys fully reflect the presence of wildlife and protected species associated with the surrounding playing fields and gardens.

Environmental documentation indicates that biodiversity improvements may form part of the redevelopment proposals.

While such measures are welcome in principle, it remains unclear to what extent they represent genuine environmental improvements rather than mitigation for habitat loss associated with development.

The Biodiversity Enhancement Plan indicates that some habitat creation could potentially be used to offset biodiversity losses arising from future developments elsewhere across the School estate.

This raises questions as to whether the proposed measures are intended primarily to compensate for impacts arising from the Richards Music Centre itself, or whether they may form part of a wider strategy to offset environmental impacts from future development.

The Society therefore asks:

- Are the proposed biodiversity measures intended to compensate for habitat loss resulting from the redevelopment?
- Could these measures also be used to offset environmental impacts from future development elsewhere on the School estate?
- What evidence demonstrates that these measures will provide a genuine and lasting net benefit to the local environment rather than serving primarily as mitigation for development impacts?

10. Carbon impact and sustainability

The application highlights a number of sustainability measures, including all-electric operation and improved energy performance.

While such measures are welcome, they relate primarily to the operational performance of the building once constructed.

Less attention appears to have been given to the embodied carbon associated with demolition, excavation, material production and construction.

This raises the question of whether demolition of the existing building is justified, given its contribution to the Conservation Area and the embodied carbon it contains.

Have the applicant considered retaining and upgrading the existing building as a lower-carbon alternative to demolition and new build?

The Carbon Management Planning Responses submitted with the application indicate that the Council's Carbon Management team raised concerns regarding aspects of the energy strategy, overheating assessment and whole-life carbon analysis.

In particular, the assessment identifies the basement structure and piled foundations as significant contributors to the building's embodied carbon impact.

This raises a wider question as to whether the scale and construction approach of the proposed building, including the introduction of a substantial basement structure, represent the lowest-carbon solution for meeting the School's stated educational requirements.

In a sensitive conservation area setting, it is therefore important to consider whether constructing a new building represents the most environmentally responsible solution, particularly where refurbishment or adaptation of existing buildings may represent a lower-impact alternative.

Has a whole-life carbon assessment been undertaken to demonstrate whether the proposed building would have a lower environmental impact than refurbishing or retaining the existing building?

11. Consultation and planning process

Meaningful consultation should occur when proposals remain capable of fundamental change.

In this case the applications appear to have been brought forward in detailed form before the strategic issues of need, proportionality and cumulative impact had been fully addressed.

Consultation is generally understood as a process through which proposals can be meaningfully influenced by the views of those affected.

Where consultation takes place after key design decisions have already been established, and where no substantive changes result from the process, there is a risk that engagement may be perceived as seeking comment on a course already determined rather than genuinely informing the development of the proposal.

The Statement of Community Involvement Addendum records that, following post-submission consultation with local residents and community organisations, revisions were made to some of the School's development proposals.

However, the document states that no changes were made to the Richards Music Centre scheme.

This raises questions as to the extent to which the consultation process has materially influenced the design and scale of the proposed building.

The Revised Planning Statement also notes that “there have been no changes to the proposed built form since the original submission of the planning application”.

This suggests that the overall scale, height and massing of the proposed building have remained unchanged despite the consultation process, raising questions as to the extent to which community feedback has materially influenced the scheme.

Conclusion

Taken together, these issues raise a broader planning question.

Does the proposed Richards Music Centre represent a proportionate improvement to existing facilities, or does it form part of a longer-term expansion of the Highgate School estate within the Highgate Conservation Area?

In a conservation area of exceptional historic sensitivity, development proposals should demonstrate clear necessity, proportionality and public benefit.

The Society is concerned that, taken together, such developments risk altering the long-standing balance between the School and the surrounding village, potentially allowing institutional development to dominate the character of Highgate rather than remain proportionate to its historic setting.

For these reasons, the Highgate Society objects to the proposed Richards Music Centre in its present form.

The Society would welcome a revised proposal which demonstrates clearer regard for the character of the Conservation Area, the cumulative impact on the village environment and the principle that development should remain proportionate to clearly demonstrated need.

Thank you for considering our comments.

Yours sincerely,

Zahra Uddevik,

On behalf of

The Highgate Society Planning Committee

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