

November 2023

Vacant Station Building,
Priory Gardens,
Highgate, London
Heritage Impact Assessment

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1 Introduction

Purpose

- 1.1 This report has been prepared to support the submission for planning permission for the demolition of the vacant station building at Priory Gardens, Highgate, London, following a recent arson attack.
- 1.2 The purpose of the report is to set out the heritage significance of the site and its context and to consider the impact of the proposals on that significance.
- 1.3 The report should be read in conjunction with the plans and other documentation submitted as part of this application.

Author

- 1.4 The author of this report is Nick Collins BSc (Hons) MSc MRICS IHBC. Nick set up Portico Heritage in 2014. Previously he was a Director of Conservation at Alan Baxter & Associates. Nick spent nine years at Historic England where he was a Principal Inspector of Historic Buildings & Areas leading a specialist team of historic building inspectors, architects, and archaeologists on a wide range of heritage projects in East & South London. Previously a Conservation Officer at the London Borough of Bromley, Nick began his career at real estate consultancy Jones Lang LaSalle as a Chartered Surveyor.

2 The site and its context

- 2.1 The vacant station building is located just off Priory Gardens, on the northern side of the railway cutting immediately above Highgate (Northern Line) station concourse. It formed part of the Highgate disused surface railway station, itself part of a now closed branch of the Great Northern Railway.
- 2.2 The building is not listed but lies within the London Borough of Haringey's Highgate Conservation Area. The 'Disused 1940 Highgate Interchange Station'¹, close by, is identified on the Council's Local List.

Highgate Disused Surface Railway Station²

- 2.3 The Highgate disused surface railway station was opened on 22nd August 1867 by the Great Northern Railway on a new line that ran from Finsbury Park up to Edgware, High Barnet and Alexandra Palace.
- 2.4 When the station was built, much of the area further out from central London was still countryside. There is a report of the opening of the station in the *Illustrated Times* on 26th October 1867. This described the area and the benefits the line would bring:

The beautiful country around Finchley, Hendon, Mill Hill, Edgware and Stanmore, has hitherto been practically a remote and inaccessible region. One or two vehicular enormities in the shape of 'busses' and the 'carriers cart'. With its incurable jog-trot have literally been the only means of transit for passengers, goods and parcels between London and a large, healthy, and populous district within five to twelve miles of the Bank! Now, however, smart, roomy carriages, lighted with gas, and 'tooled' into the City in less than half the time formerly occupied, will no doubt, draw out the travelling capacities of our secluded friends; while the household requisites and numerous articles of merchandise necessary to the existence of a modern civilised community will be scattered by a beneficent goods-train in rich profusion over a district contented till lately, with the mere beauties of nature.'

- 2.5 Highgate Station was sited in a deep cutting immediately west of the Highgate East tunnels and when opened in 1867 it had two side platforms with the main station building on the 'down' (south) side at the end of an approach road and waiting shelter on the 'upside'.
- 2.6 A passing loop was provided between the running tracks to accommodate trains that terminated at Highgate. A covered footbridge ran from the upper floor of the entrance

¹ London Borough of Haringey's Register of Local Listed Buildings of Merit

² Much of the history of the site is drawn from www.disused-stations.org.uk prepared by Nick Catford & 'A London Inheritance: A Private history of a Public City' (alondoninheritance.com) September 2017

building to a brick 'tower' on the up platform adjacent to the shelter. This shelter formed part of what was subsequently converted to accommodation and the subject of this application.

- 2.7 Immediately west of the station the line entered the Highgate West tunnels. In c.1868 an additional entrance was provided high above the station on Archway Road.



Figure 1: Postcard dating to 1868 showing the original station, looking west (the shelter, which was to become station accommodation on the right).

- 2.8 The station was rebuilt during the 1880s with a new island platform on the site of the former passing loop with a new booking office in the middle of the footbridge. The two side platforms and the original buildings were disused at this time but both platforms and parts of the 'up' platform shelter are still extant today.



Figure 2: The 'rebuilt' station in the early 20th century looking west (John Alsop Collection)

- 2.9 As part of the 1935 'New Works' plan to incorporate the Edgware, High Barnet and Alexandra Palace lines into the London Transport network the station was once again rebuilt with a new platform building with reinforced concrete canopies and a stairway leading down to the new Highgate Northern Line ticket hall constructed between 1939-41.
- 2.10 The original design intended to link Archway Road to the Alexandra Palace branch line railway station and Underground Station, below, with a landmark entrance at road level – as illustrated in the following image.

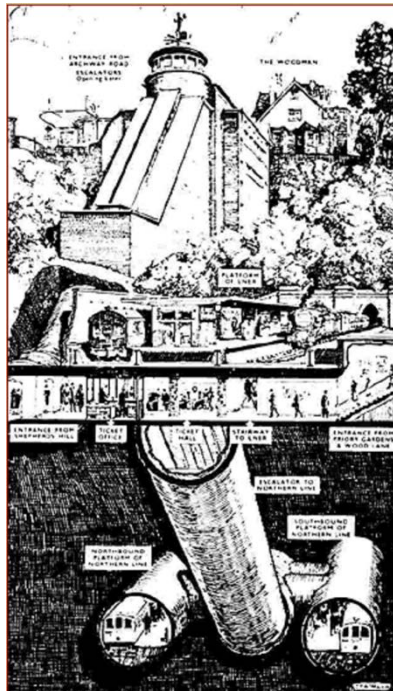


Figure 3: Artist's impression of how the stations would be interconnected with Archway Road

- 2.11 The older station was demolished except for a short section of the 1880s building including toilets and the canopy was retained at the east end (although this was also later demolished, see figure 5).



Figure 4: The 1939-41 rebuilt station structure at the far end, with the retained canopy and toilets in the foreground, photographed just after the Second World War © Photomatic Ltd

- 2.12 New entrances were provided on Archway Road and Priory Gardens on the north side of the line to the Northern Line concourse below.
- 2.13 After the war, the lack of finance, along with a reduction in passenger numbers conspired against any further electrification or expansion of the northern rail lines and whilst the Northern Line was not at risk, traffic through the high-Level Station was such that routes through the station gradually closed.
- 2.14 No further work on the station took place after the war with the steam-hauled passenger service to Alexandra Palace retained until closure of the branch line in 1954 by British Railways (Eastern Region). Highgate goods depot which was sited beyond the west tunnel remained open until 1st October 1962 but was renamed Highgate Wellington Sidings after closure of the line to passengers.
- 2.15 The remnants of the station have remained ever since, with the tracks and embankments being gradually re-claimed by nature.
- 2.16 The following photographs were taken in 1968 and 2007 and shows the 1939-41 rebuilt station in the centre with the vacant station building to the left in figure 6.





Figures 5&6: Highgate High-Level Station 1968 and 2007 (Nick Catford) Figure 7: 2017 (Hidden London Tours)

Vacant Station Building

- 2.17 As described above, parts of the now vacant station building were originally built as the 'upside' waiting shelter.
- 2.18 Visible in figures 1 & 2, the original structure sat alongside the stair tower for the passenger bridge across the lines and originally also had a canopy over the platform.
- 2.19 Following the re-building of the station in the 1880s the shelter's original purpose, along with the platform it served, became redundant. The canopy was subsequently removed, the structure considerably altered and converted to a dwelling (exact date unknown).
- 2.20 After the closure of the high-level station and the removal of the footbridge the building has become increasingly isolated. Unused for some time this no doubt contributed to its susceptibility to the subsequent arson attack that has now occurred in May 2023.

2.21 The following images show the structure today.

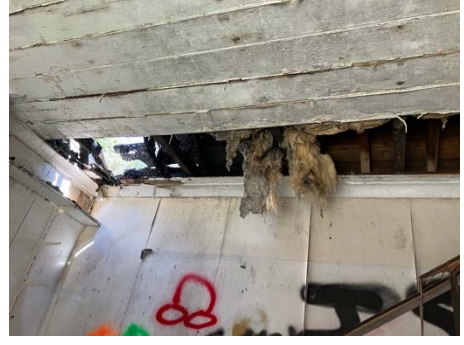




Figures 5-7: Station Cottage today

The Building Today

- 2.22 An assessment of the structure that exists today clearly demonstrates the extent of alteration that has taken place since originally constructed – not just form but also materials.
- 2.23 The western ‘left hand’ part of the building is in a cheap ‘engineering’ red brick with a red-brick chimney stack. A door that would once have opened onto the platform has been partially bricked up. From the historic images, it is likely that this part is that which originally formed the upside passenger shelter.
- 2.24 The eastern end is a later addition which does not appear on either of the historic images (figures 1&2) and presents a gabled front bay to the track. This addition appears to be of stock brick and whilst architecturally ‘polite’ appears to ‘crash’ into the side of the original shelter – breaking the symmetry of the original openings.
- 2.25 To the rear a utilitarian brick lean-to has been added, connecting the two parts of the structure.
- 2.26 A structure to the north has been completely destroyed by the fire, and it was this that allowed the fire to cause damage to the roof and northern end of the station building.
- 2.27 Notwithstanding the physical changes that have taken place, the structure is now entirely derelict and the victim of arson. Elements of the building are in a state of structural collapse following the damage and dangerous. This is not helped by the site’s remote and inaccessible location.



Figures 8-10: State of the building today

3 The heritage significance of the site and its context

The heritage context of the site

- 3.1 The vacant station building is not listed or locally listed however it sits adjacent to the locally listed 1940s disused Highgate Interchange Station (disused surface line) and associated disused tunnels and portals, and lies within the LB Haringey Highgate Conservation Area.

Heritage Significance

Assessing heritage and townscape significance: definitions

- 3.2 Listed buildings and conservation areas are 'designated heritage assets', as defined by the National Planning Policy Framework (the NPPF). Other buildings and structures identified as having heritage significance can be considered as 'non-designated heritage assets'.
- 3.3 Heritage 'significance' is defined in the NPPF as 'the value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic'. The Historic England 'Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 2' puts it slightly differently – as 'the sum of its architectural, historic, artistic or archaeological interest'.
- 3.4 'Conservation Principles, Policies and Guidance for the sustainable management of the historic environment' (English Heritage, 2008) describes a number of 'heritage values' that may be present in a 'significant place'. These are evidential, historical, aesthetic and communal value.
- 3.5 In terms of the assessment of the proposals for the site as they affect the heritage significance, the heritage assets relevant are the character and appearance of the Highgate Conservation Area and the setting of the nearby locally listed structures nearby.
- 3.6 The Council's Conservation Area Appraisal & Management Plan was adopted in December 2013. This summarises what is special about the area and thus its significance. Its overall character is identified as being '*formed by the relationship of its historic pattern of development, its high percentage of buildings of architectural merit, its topography, its green opens spaces and distant views*'.
- 3.7 More specifically to the area around the disused station the appraisal notes: '*Archway Road, the nineteenth century route to the north, fronted by late Victorian and Edwardian retail parades of diverse independent shops, with flats over appears more urban than the*

village core. The adjacent high quality residential areas of Victorian, Edwardian and early twentieth century terrace housing off Archway Road such as the Cholmeleys, the Miltons, and Shepherd's Hill are fine examples of planned development of their period'.

- 3.8 Whilst physically lying within Sub Area 3: Archway, topographically the site lies between two 'Sub-Areas'. Sub Area 3: Archway to the west and Sub Area 5: Shepherd's Hill to the east.
- 3.9 Archway Road, which runs along the top of the embankment to the west of the railway cutting is the main arterial route out of the City towards the north of England and noted to be heavily trafficked and frequently heavily congested, thus forming a barrier to the more suburban residential areas to the west. The street is predominantly red brick Victorian shops with flats above. The heavily wooded embankment on its east side (leading down to the site of the former station) is noted for ameliorating the impact of the traffic in the adjoining area, creating a positive contribution to the neighbourhood.



Figure 11: Parade of shops on Archway Road with the railway cutting to the right c. 1910 (Highgate Conservation Area Appraisal, photograph courtesy: Michael Hammerson)

- 3.10 The disused surface Highgate Station is also noted as making a positive contribution (although it is perhaps the perception of its presence that contributes to the actual character and appearance rather than its physical presence which is barely visible) and the area is identified as an 'enhancement opportunity'.
- 3.11 The character of the Sub-Area 5: Shepherd's Hill is identified as follows:
'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 spaces mature trees on both sides of the road. No.1 Shepherds Hill is Highgate Library, a striking 1902 two storey red brick building with turrets and half-timber walls; it is a locally listed building. Some of the original houses have been replaced with blocks of flats, mostly built in the 1950s'.

The contribution that the vacant station building and the disused surface station make to the Conservation Area

- 3.12 It is clear that the disused surface Station and its connecting tunnels made a historically important contribution to the character of the area: the construction of the railway station in this location will have had a considerable impact on the development of the 'new' suburbs to the east and west after its opening in 1867.
- 3.13 However, in terms of the character and appearance of the conservation area, in reality it is the wooded, sylvan context that the railway cutting now provides to Archway Road and Priory Gardens as well as the entrances to the underground station that most meaningfully impacts the character of the conservation area in a positive way.
- 3.14 To the west it provides a buffer to the busy main road and to the east a wooded focal point and barrier between the quiet suburban streets and Archway Road along Parkland Walk.

Locally Listed Buildings

- 3.15 The now disused surface station was comprehensively re-built on two occasions – firstly in the 1880s and secondly in the 1940s. Whilst the first re-build fundamentally changed the operational configuration of the station – bringing passenger access to the centre of the lines rather from the edges – it was the 1940s rebuild that had the greatest stylistic impact.
- 3.16 Only part of a grander plan to link Archway Road, the now disused surface station and the underground station were implemented (see figure 3), but that which was carried out delivered an architecturally coherent 'moderne' station with its reinforced concrete canopies that is still apparent today – be it derelict and overgrown.
- 3.17 The nearby vacant station building, by the 1930s, had been much altered, extended and re-configured in a functional rather than coherent way. It had not had a direct relationship with the operation of the railway for nearly 70 years at this point and the modern architecture of the 'new' station made it even more of an anachronism.
- 3.18 The subsequent vandalism and damage by arson have rendered the structure visually, physically and structurally unsound and dangerous, creating an eyesore that detracts from the area where glimpsed from the eastern side of the railway cutting.

Summary of Significance

- 3.19 The vacant station building has the remnants of some minor local historical interest in being made up, in part, of an original element of the first iteration of the Highgate Station. The arrival of the station will have had a considerable impact on the evolution and development of the surrounding area.
- 3.20 However, its original purpose (as a passenger shelter) was soon redundant and its functional connection with the operation of the railway severed. Its subsequent

conversion and alteration for residential purpose was undertaken in a functional manner with little thought given to, for example, choice of materials.

- 3.21 Any remaining architectural contextuality was further diminished when the operational railway station was comprehensively redeveloped in the 'moderne' style in the late 1930s.
- 3.22 Subsequent arson attack in May 2023 has rendered the building unsafe and structurally damaged its integrity yet further.
- 3.23 Other than providing an eastern access point to Highgate Underground Station, the site has little connection with this part of the conservation area – either through character or visual connectivity. The only glimpse being from the steep footpath which runs along the northern edge of the site.
- 3.24 In reality it is the wooded, sylvan, context that the railway cutting now provides that most meaningfully impacts the character of the conservation area in a positive way - rather than any of the remnant structures at its base – which are almost entirely unseen from the road.
- 3.25 The contribution that the locally listed structures make to the character of the area is now largely historical – the presence of the railway station and tunnels in this location will clearly have had an impact on the development of the 'new' suburbs to the east and west after its opening in 1867 but the contribution made by the vacant station building is negative.

4 The Policy Context

The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

- 4.1 The legislation governing conservation areas is the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 ('the Act'). Section 72(1) of the Act requires decision makers with respect to any buildings or other land in a conservation area to pay 'special attention... to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area'.

National Planning Policy Framework

- 4.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) has recently been revised and re-issued in September 2023.
- 4.3 Section 16 deals with 'Conserving and enhancing the historic environment'. The NPPF says at Paragraph 189 that:
- 4.4 In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance.
- 4.5 A description and analysis of the heritage and townscape significance of the site and its context is provided in this report.
- 4.6 At paragraph 197, the NPPF says that:
- 4.7 In determining planning applications, local planning authorities should take account of:
- The desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
 - The positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic viability; and
 - The desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.
- 4.8 Paragraph 201 says:
- 4.9 Where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm to or total loss of significance of a designated heritage asset, local planning authorities should refuse consent, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss, or all of the following apply:

- The nature of the heritage asset prevents all reasonable use of the site; and
 - No viable use of the heritage asset itself can be found in the medium term through appropriate marketing that will enable its conservation; and
 - Conservation by grant-funding or some form of charitable or public ownership is demonstrably not possible; and
 - The harm or loss is outweighed by the benefit of bringing the site back into use.
- 4.10 Paragraph 202 says that 'Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use'.
- 4.11 Paragraph 203 goes on to say 'the effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that affect directly or indirectly non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset'.
- 4.12 Paragraph 207 says that:
- 4.13 Not all elements of a World Heritage Site or Conservation Area will necessarily contribute to its significance. Loss of a building (or other element) which makes a positive contribution to the significance of the Conservation Area or World Heritage Site should be treated either as substantial harm under paragraph 201 or less than substantial harm under paragraph 202, as appropriate, taking into account the relative significance of the element affected and its contribution to the significance of the Conservation Area or World Heritage Site as a whole.

Haringey's Local Plan

- 4.14 Haringey's Development Management Development Plan Document (DPD) was adopted by the council in July 2017.
- 4.15 Policy DM9 relates to the Management of the Historic Environment.
- 4.16 This states (in part):
- 4.17 (A) Development that conserves and enhances the significance of a heritage assets and its setting will be supported.
- 4.18 (B) Proposals affecting a designated or non- designated heritage asset and its setting will be assessed against the significance of the asset and its setting, and the impact of the proposals on that significance. Applicants are required to submit with their planning application a statement describing the significance of the heritage asset(s) concerned, including any contribution made by its setting, along with an assessment and justification of the impact of the new development on the asset and its setting.
- 4.19 (C) When considering the impact of proposals on the historic environment, the Council will have regard to:

- The priority given to sustaining and enhancing the significance of a heritage asset and its setting;
- Character appraisals and management plans or other guidance, where they are available;
- The preservation or reinstatement of original or historic form, fabric, function or character of the asset and its setting;
- The relationship with adjoining and neighbouring uses, particularly where these are heritage assets of significance in their own right;
- The desirability of securing a viable use for a heritage asset consistent with its conservation.
- An understanding of and respect for significance of heritage assets as parts of measures to mitigate and adapt to climate change; and
- The contribution that the sensitive utilisation of heritage assets can make to sustainable regeneration.

4.20 Conservation Areas

- 4.21 (D) Subject to A-C above the Council will give consideration to, and support where appropriate, proposals for the sensitive redevelopment of sites and buildings where these detract from the character and appearance of a Conservation Area and its setting, provided that they are compatible with and /or complement the special characteristics and significance of the area.
- 4.22 (E) Proposals for alterations and extensions to existing buildings in Conservation Areas should complement the architectural style, scale, proportions, materials and details of the host building and should not appear overbearing or intrusive

5 The proposed scheme and its effect

- 5.1 The proposal is for the demolition of the vacant station building.
- 5.2 This report has considered in detail the heritage significance of the structure – which whilst containing a modicum of remnant local *historical* interest is actually so altered that it is of little coherent architectural merit and now has a negative physical impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area.
- 5.3 This is exacerbated by the structural state of the building, which has been identified as a ‘dangerous structure’ with health and safety implications.
- 5.4 Not being part of the identified locally listed 1940s station, the loss of the building will not impact the locally listed buildings and the change to their setting will not affect an ability to appreciate their local interest as part of London Transport’s inter-war aspirations for a newly connected overground and underground in Highgate.
- 5.5 The loss of the building will also not have a detrimental impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area – which primarily relates to the residential and urban/suburban character of the two sub-areas of Archway Road and Shepherd’s Hill with the railway cutting sitting between and filled with dense ‘woodland’ tree and shrub cover.
- 5.6 For these reasons we believe that the proposals are consistent with legislation, national and local planning policy:
- 5.7 This report provides a detailed assessment of the significance of the building and wider heritage context as required by paragraph 189 of the NPPF.
- 5.8 The loss of the building will not alter the ability to appreciate the identified character and appearance of the conservation area and the characteristics that make it special and thus its character will be preserved as required by legislation.
- 5.9 We do not believe that the proposals will lead to either substantial or less than substantial harm to any designated heritage asset (NPPF paras. 201 & 202): the Highgate Conservation Area, rather it will remove a building that is damaged, dangerous and an eyesore.
- 5.10 Similarly, we do not believe that the proposal will lead to any harm or loss of significance to the locally listed 1940s station complex.
- 5.11 Even if it was believed by others that a small element of less-than-substantial harm will be caused by the loss of the building this needs to be considered within the context of the assessment that it is a dangerous structure that is a visual eyesore and its removal has the

potential to enhance the conservation area and approach to Highgate Underground Station from the east.

- 5.12 It is for these reasons that the proposals are in line with Haringey's Local Plan policies in relation to the historic built environment – aside from the fact that the building has been assessed as fundamentally structurally unsafe and unsound.

