

Highgate CAAC objections to applications HGY/2024/0707 and HGY/2024/0639 for St Michaels School, North Road, N6 4BG: Proposed change of use of the existing caretakers house from residential (Use C3) to education use (Use Class F.1) in order to provide a new school office and reception area, the reordering of the nursery and reception year classrooms to provide additional nursery spaces, two new door openings in the front elevation of the caretakers house and main hall, the demolition and removal of partition walls in halls 1 and 2, and landscape works including new ramp access and new secure fences and gate.

Highgate CAAC has a number of reservations about these proposals.

1. The heritage statement from Martin O'Rourke provides a lot of interesting background detail but less analysis of the heritage impact of the proposed new openings in the eastern, public facing side of this historically significant Grade 2 listed building. He asserts that the damage caused would be "less than substantial" but that in his view this would be outweighed by the needs of the school, e.g. for more efficient safeguarding and a considerable increase in nursery provision. While a different doorway into the former caretaker's house might be justified by safeguarding needs, it is less obvious why the other new openings are necessary to increase nursery provision. We feel the Conservation Officer should consider carefully whether this heritage judgement is correct, if need be with a site visit and/or following English Heritage's suggestion of employing an independent specialist conservation advisor.
2. Highgate CAAC members had considerable difficulty understanding some of the documents, drawings and illustrations provided. Some aspects of the drawings do not appear to be correct. A site visit by the case officer and conservation officer might be appropriate for this reason as well.
3. Whilst we recognise there is a need for nursery places nationally so that parents can return to work and economic activity, we are also aware that in almost all London boroughs there is a diminishing need for primary school places, as illustrated by recent primary school closures/mergers in Camden, Islington, Hackney and other boroughs. We presume the existing nursery is a private facility. There are several private nurseries/pre-prep/infant schools in the vicinity which are apparently advertising for more pupils. Indeed, on 12/4/24 St Michael's own website <https://stmichaelsn6.com/applications-2024-25/> said: "We currently have some vacancies in our Nursery. For admission in the current academic year please complete the Supplementary Information Form for 2023-24" while there was a more general message about "Chance In-Year vacancies" on the home page. The overall provision in Highgate needs to be evaluated, especially given the daily influx of cars. The size of the nursery will increase by 20, implying more car journeys in a road which is often gridlocked. A travel plan should be provided.
4. Highgate School pupils have used the lane next to St Michael's School playground a number of times a day for many years. It might be desirable to separate them from vehicles by re-routing them through St Michael's, but it seems possible this could be disruptive. The teenagers might pass through the infant and junior school, next to the nursery area, far more than the twice a day suggested.

5. We understand the need for safeguarding, and that the former caretaker's house could usefully be repurposed to provide greater scrutiny of people coming and going down the lane beside the playground. However, the two large hedges and other greenery which would be removed from in front of the caretaker's house are not replaced elsewhere on the North Road side of the site. This area is already mainly tarmac and largely devoid of planting. We would like to see greater planting on the public facing side of the site, in keeping with the leafy character of this area, and to support nature, and greater consideration given to SUDs.

6. Repurposing the caretaker's house from residential (Use C3) to education use (Use Class F.1) to form part of the school office/surveillance system would mean the loss of one key worker residence, which should be taken into account in considering the balance of harm caused by these proposals.

7. Neighbours' amenity should be taken into account. For all of the above reasons, Highgate CAAC believes the proposals should be reviewed very carefully.