

Highgate CAAC objection to HGY/2023/1208 Library 1 Shepherds Hill N6 5QJ

The upgrading of a current make shift BMX trail into permanent trail for children of all ages

Background

This objection should be read in conjunction with our previous two objections to application HGY/2023/1208, dated 12.7.23 and 25.7.23, which still apply.

In those objections we asked for a great deal of additional information, for instance about management, maintenance and funding, and how the BMX track could be designed to avoid disturbing library users. The concerns we raised in our previous two objections have not been addressed in the information provided this year. We continue to be very concerned about this application and so still object.

The further comments below focus on:

- properly measuring and rectifying the environmental degradation which has taken place on this site over recent years, in line with biodiversity guidance and the NPPF
- the negative impact on the library next door and other neighbours
- how the facility will be managed and funded to avoid future damage

Environmental degradation

Highgate Conservation Area Advisory Committee considers that this corner of the Conservation Area, which has been considerably degraded over the years, could be enhanced by planting trees and bushes around the BMX track thereby enhancing its biodiversity, ecological value and visual amenity. The detriment to the Conservation Area can clearly be seen from historical images on StreetView.

Although the arboricultural report states that no trees will be removed, which is welcome, it fails to acknowledge the fact that the hedge along the Shepherds Hill boundary was severely cut back in 2018, many trees were felled in 2019, and many more in 2021. As far as we are aware, none of these trees have been replaced.

The Ecological Report takes no account of the large number of trees that were felled by Haringey Council, some because they had sooty bark disease, but which were never replaced, nor of the understorey of plants and shrubs which were removed. See photos below. (There should also be photographs of the site's formerly lush vegetation and verdant nature in Jeff Duckett's tree survey of the area for the HNF tree group in 2017.)

Neither does the report take into account the fact that the small informal bike track originally built was hugely changed by persons unknown. Nobody seems to have protected the area, let alone maintained its ecological characteristics.





Shepherds Hill next to the library Feb 2021



Entrance to Highgate Station from Shepherds Hill. Feb 2021

For this reason, and following the Statutory Biodiversity Metric User Guide 23/07/2024, the current assessment of biodiversity on the site should not be used as a baseline.

As is stated in the Statutory Biodiversity Metric User Guide:

“Accounting for degraded sites If a habitat has been cleared, destroyed or degraded previously, and you should use an earlier baseline, you must:

- use the pre-degradation habitat type as the site’s baseline*
- evidence how this habitat type and condition has been determined in the user comments*
- record the habitat as lost within the biodiversity metric tool*
- account for the time between the habitat loss and compensation using the ‘delay in starting habitat creation or enhancement’ function”*

The National Planning Policy Framework and Practice Guidance, Chapter 15, on conserving and enhancing the natural environment, sets out how the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing existing sites of biodiversity value.

It talks of three types of intervention

- habitat retention
- habitat enhancement
- habitat creation

As the habitat of the area has been greatly reduced, the development of the BMX Track can be seen as an opportunity to enhance and create habitat in the area surrounding the track.

The original proposal for a small BMX facility, apparently designed by Maria Kremer in response to the HNF’s suggested uses for CIL money, included developing nature facilities to the north of the site. These drawings are not included in this application.

Positive intervention to increase biodiversity in this area would be very welcome.

Negative impact on the library

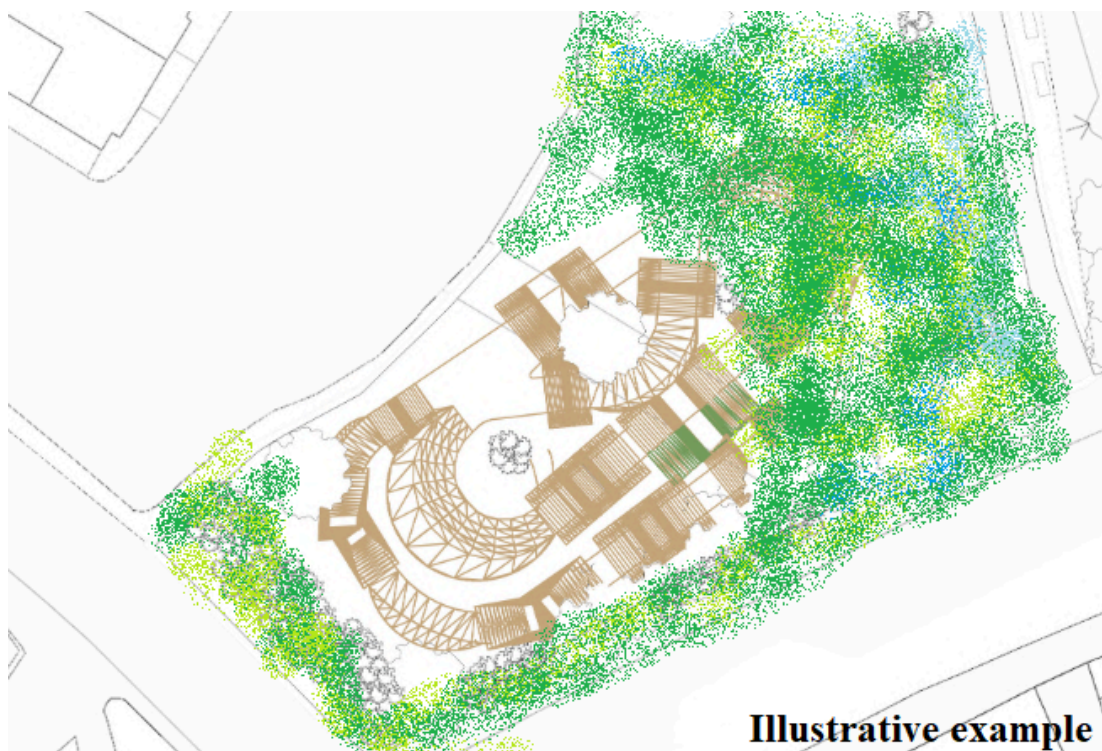
The address of this application is wrong. The site is not “Library, 1 Shepherds Hill, Hornsey, London, N6 5QJ”, it is next door to the library.

Libraries are primarily quiet spaces for reading, research, meetings and so-on and - as we noted in a previous objection - a BMX track right outside the windows may have a very detrimental effect on this core purpose, disturbing users.

While in principle the Highgate Conservation Area Advisory Committee does not object to the original idea of a small BMX track for children, careful thought needs to be given to shielding the library effectively from the resulting noise and activity, as these two activities are inherently contradictory. This contradiction has still not been addressed in these application proposals.

Other neighbours of the site should similarly be shielded from noise and disruption.

The current proposals extend far too near to the library. Both the need to reverse environmental degradation and avoid disturbance to the library could be addressed if the BMX track was reduced in size and far more replacement planting undertaken.



The original proposal was for a facility for children, not “children of all ages” which could easily be read to mean “adults”. This space is not large enough or suitable for a full sized BMX facility intended to attract people from across London and beyond. The proposal should be scaled back so it focuses on the original objective.

Monitoring and maintenance

We do not understand how the natural areas will be protected and maintained if the BMX track is unsupervised. Who will be responsible for the site and its maintenance, especially given funding pressures on Haringey Council? There should be a commitment, including funding, to safeguarding the arboriculture and ecology of the copse.

Conclusion

The degradation of the site over recent years and the need to protect the library and other neighbours from noise and distraction both point to the need for a considerable increase in planting, especially on the northern and eastern sides of the site, and for existing and vegetation to be protected in a way it has not been over recent years.

It does not seem to us that the additional documents provided achieve that objective and hence we continue to object to this application.

Cc Daniel Monk and Annabel Foscett