

Friends of Highgate Library (FOHL-SH) objection to HGY/2023/1208 Library 1 Shepherds, Highgate, N6 5QL

FOHL-SH are the Friends of Highgate Library in Shepherds Hill. We came together in 2016 to fight Haringey Council's plans to sell Highgate Library and move its books into the Jackson Lane Arts Centre café. We have been working to safeguard the future of our locally listed Library since 1987. Although the Highgate Library copse has suffered from vandalism from time to time, until 2018 it was a well-used community space, both by library users taking a break from their time in the Library and by pedestrians walking to and from Priory Gardens and Archway Road across the copse as part of the Parkland Walk.

FOHL-SH had letters about the proposed BMX track published in the *Hampstead and Highgate Express* and the *Camden New Journal*, and we held a meeting at Highgate Library on 3 May to discuss the planning application. _Tulip Siddiq MP, ward councillors and assembly members were also invited.

This is our response to planning application HGY/2023/1208 for a BMX track at the Highgate Library copse which supplements our response of 2023. British Cycling, the official BMX sports governing body, recommend that basic BMX tracks are built in existing parks and facilities and they oppose the use of small open green spaces. British Cycling recommends a minimum size of 20 metres by 40 metres. Highgate Neighbourhood Forum (HNF) do not state whether existing parks or sports facilities in the Highgate Neighbourhood Plan area were considered as possible locations, or whether they approached the managers of those parks and sports facilities with their proposal for a £2 million BMX track.

Background to the application

The applicant claims that the plan for the BMX track is in the statutory Highgate Neighbourhood Plan (HNP) which was approved in 2017. This is not correct and a search of the whole document for BMX finds no results. The site put forward for a BMX track is discussed at 4.4.2 of the HNP which states that Highgate Library is housed in a villa built in 1901. This is incorrect. It is a purpose-built library. The HNP fails to acknowledge that Highgate Library is locally listed. It has been locally listed since the conservation area was adopted on 21 December 1967. The HNP also fails to acknowledge that all four of the disused tunnels are locally listed and have been since 2004. The HNP incorrectly claims that the underground station is locally listed. The HNP, the Register of Local Listed Buildings of Merit, and the Highgate Conservation Area Character Appraisal are published on the Haringey Council website. At 8.2.1 of the Character Appraisal states:

"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 spaced mature trees on both sides of the road. No 1 Shepherds Hill is **Highgate Library**, a striking 1902 two storey red brick building with turret and half-timber walls; it is a locally **listed building**.”

The HNP obviously has major flaws. There can be no doubt that the station side copse is a positive feature of the conservation area, and it is an important attribute of Highgate Library which is a heritage asset. When it was pointed out by residents that Highgate Library, designed by W H Hyde, is locally listed the response of the Highgate Neighbourhood Forum was to ask Haringey Council to remove Highgate Library from the List. That request was rejected by the Council. The copse is also the setting for tunnels which are important heritage assets in the conservation area.

As part of the 2019 Highgate Festival there was a consultation event staged by Room 102. Room 102 is a business owned by Maria Kramer, elected committee member of the Highgate Neighbourhood Forum. Before this event there was considerable destruction of the copse including the felling of the remaining four Field Maples planted for the Library’s centenary and the creation of a hard bare ground surface which involved removing an extensive area of vegetation.

This was followed by significant fly-tipping on the site in 2022 - see photo 1. In addition to the fly-tipping, the entrance to the copse which is close to the station was blocked – see photo 2 -, which resulted in far fewer people using the copse. Until this entrance was blocked many people were in the habit of walking across the copse to and from Priory Gardens and Archway Road which made it a well-used space.

Planning application for a BMX track

In 2023 the planning application for the BMX track was submitted to Haringey Council. The application misleads by using a 1985 newspaper cutting of BMX cycling in Highgate Wood to suggest that the Highgate Library copse was used as an informal BMX track in 1985 and has been used as that since then. The applicant fails to request a change of use from green open space to fenced BMX track. Numerous residents, including those with teenage children living close to the copse, have said that it has never been used as a BMX track. Local residents are concerned about the complete absence of any plans to manage the BMX track and a lack of any proposals to ensure safeguarding of children and young people. Highgate Library has the largest number of library users aged under 5 of any Haringey library, including the Hornsey and Wood Green libraries. The parents of those young children are especially concerned. Until the copse was vandalised it was a place where families took toddlers and young children to play and ride their bikes and tricycles in a beautiful woodland glade but that is no longer possible. Comments published on Haringey Council’s website in support of the scheme make it clear that the copse is not used now. The vandalism, fly-tipping and obstructed access make it impossible for the community to use the copse as it once did. Despite the vandalism the native bluebells are fighting to stay alive in the copse – see photo 6. This shows the potential for the copse to become a pleasant woodland space again.

Arboricultural impact assessment 2025

The arboricultural impact assessment claims the copse was not part of ancient woodland. This is wrong - see *From Forest to Suburb* by Ken Gay published by Hornsey Historical Society providing evidence that this area was woodland and part of the Bishop of London's hunting ground. The woodland copse is also clearly seen in the photograph marked a 'century of service' which must have been taken not long after the Library was built given that horse-drawn transport is shown - [see photo 3](#).

The spindle tree species is an indicator of ancient woodland. At least three separate spindle trees have been identified in the southern part of the copse but the assessment only identifies one. It is worth noting that the arboricultural assessment disingenuously cites 12.2.1 of the Highgate Conservation Area Character Appraisal to claim that the copse is not mentioned in the Appraisal when that is not true (see above). 12.1.1 states that the chapter on management should be read in conjunction with the earlier chapters to explain 12.2.1. The point made in the Appraisal about the copse as a positive feature of the Conservation Area was mentioned in one of the 2023 objections so should have been picked up in the assessment.

Ecological assessment 2025

The ecological impact assessment rightly acknowledges the place of the copse as part of the Parkland Walk - [see 1985 photo 4](#) from Hornsey Historical Society. The assessment however is flawed in that it suggests that the copse is a more recent development than the Parkland Walk. The copse is visible in the pre-WW2 photographs of the now disused Highgate overground station - [see photo 5](#). The Parkland Walk was in service as a railway line until 1 October 1962. The false assumption that the Parkland Walk predates the copse is used in the assessment to discount the ecological contribution of the copse, which is wrong.

Both assessments

Both assessments fail to consider the impact of the BMX track on the heritage asset of the locally listed Highgate Library. The BMX track would damage the heritage asset of Highgate Library and destroy its setting. Furthermore the ecological report takes the copse in its vandalised state as the baseline for the report, which is quite wrong. There is no evidence in either assessment to suggest that the BMX track would enhance the conservation area.

Conclusion

Highgate Neighbourhood Forum's (HNF) planning application to convert the Highgate Library copse, which is part of the Capital Ring and Parkland Walk, into a fenced BMX track must be rejected by the Council. The BMX track would damage Highgate Library, an important heritage

asset in the conservation area. The BMX track would adversely affect the locally listed disused tunnels, another important heritage asset in the conservation area. The BMX track would not compensate for the loss of open space or enhance the conservation area.

Friends of Highgate Library consider that the historic copse is quite unsuitable for a BMX track and will leave children and young people unsafe, particularly vulnerable young people who may be attracted to a BMX track as part of a popular sub-culture. We believe that facilities for teenagers that meet the minimum standards for a basic BMX track laid down by British Cycling could be built in one of the existing parks with open spaces like Waterlow Park, Highgate Wood, and Priory Park. British Cycling oppose the use of pockets of green space such as the Highgate Library copse. There should be a full repair of the damage caused by chain-sawing the Field Maple trees planted by Haringey Council for the commemoration of Highgate Library's 2002 centenary with the help of the late Nicky Gavron who was then councillor for Archway ward, and the Field Maples should be replanted.

We believe that the Highgate copse should be restored to its original state as an area of green woodland space for the enjoyment of all members of the community.

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FOHLSH@yahoo.com

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