

06/12/2016

Request to speak at the committee

Dear Sir or Madam,

Re: Objection to planning application Ref: 16/6662/FUL Hasmonean High School 2-4 Page Street London NW7 2EU

Introduction

I am objecting to this application in my capacity as London Assembly Member for Barnet and Camden and request to speak at the committee.

My objection is to Green Belt development in principle.

Green Belt issues

Whilst I accept the applicants have done as much as they can to limit the impact of the application and it is probably as good an application as is possible for the site, my objection to this application is that it is nevertheless sited on what should be sacrosanct Green Belt land, not available for development.

I fully welcome and acknowledge the significant efforts the applicants have made in consulting with local groups and residents, but consultation with local groups does not make an otherwise impermissible scheme one that should be approved under planning law.

The application comprises a 55% increase in the built footprint of the site, which is clearly against Green Belt policy which states that any new development should be within the existing envelope. The impact of such a large land take on the openness of the Green Belt is devastating. The Green Belt should remain open to the general public for informal recreation, as now.

Fencing off parts of the site

Despite the amendments to the original plan now to incorporate a walking track around the site, I am concerned about the extent to which access to such a large part of what is currently an informal green recreational area is fenced off, a sadly necessary security measure needed to keep Jewish institutions safe.

I therefore understand the need for fencing, but would propose a condition in the application, that if the scheme is approved contrary to Green Belt policy, there should be an inner cordon fence around the school buildings, in order to preserve their security outside school hours, whilst enabling and requiring open public access to the rest of the site and sports facilities out of school hours.

Public Access

It is to be expected that the applicants should open their grounds facilities for community use when not required for their own purposes. I believe the inner fence I suggest would maximise the times of public access to the facilities without compromising the security of the school buildings, but this would still not address the key objection, that a very large swathe of the Green Belt would be removed from open public access.

I have not seen the terms of any proposed Community Access Agreement but I have seen other such school planning applications (including nearby) where public access has been promised so as to obtain planning permission, but frustrated in the detail with those promises of community access unfulfilled.

Whilst I do not question the bona fides of the applicants, I believe that public access needs to be properly pinned down through a detailed and rigorously enforced Community Access Agreement. I therefore suggest a planning condition that the fine details of any public access plan should set out, in terms, in a Community Access Agreement the hours of public access; and for the sports facilities, the bookable hours available to the public for each facility; an affordable, not for profit fee charging structure; straightforward booking administration arrangements; and the physical security access arrangements that will be in place, before permission is granted. Even then, though, my concern is that past history tells us that Barnet Council are woefully bad in enforcing such planning conditions, so such an Agreement may not be worth much, especially when compared with what the community would lose in Green Belt open access.

Conclusion

It is regrettable to have to object formally to an application where the applicants have made a great deal of effort to engage with local people and mitigate against the impact of their development, and have a design that would be completely acceptable in any other location.

However, the principle of defending the Green Belt is a strong one, and if an exemption is created for this site, a precedent is created for more intrusive applications. If however the committee is minded to grant the application despite it being in clear breach of Green Belt policy, then detailed clear and improved public access conditions should be the subject of enforced planning conditions.

Yours sincerely,

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