

Holland Park school plan slated by council review

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A PLAN for the most expensive state school in Britain was thrown into disarray today by a damning report from experts at the council that wants to build it.

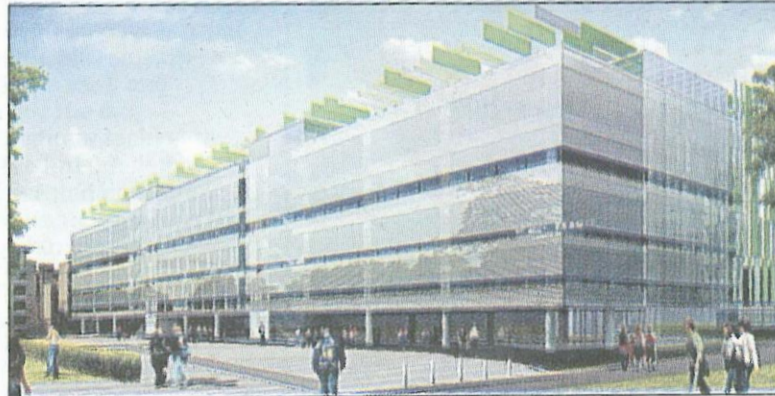
Kensington and Chelsea wants to spend £72.6 million to demolish and rebuild Holland Park School, selling part of the site for flats to help finance the scheme.

But its own review panel of architects has branded the design "monolithic and relentless", criticised plans to use stone cladding, and warned existing architecture in the area had not been taken into account.

Residents have been fighting a long-running campaign against the demolition and rebuild.

They want the original buildings at the Sixties school — dubbed the "Eton of comprehensives" — to be refurbished and its existing playgrounds and sport areas to be retained.

The architect's panel said they believed the design "would date very quickly", adding: "Though competent, the architecture failed to excite



"Monolithic": Kensington and Chelsea's vision for a rebuilt Holland Park School

the panel." It found the use of reconstituted stone cladding throughout was "regrettable" and the overall height of the school building was "a cause for concern".

It also criticised the "monolithic, relentless application of a staggered façade throughout the development".

Housing provision in the scheme, meanwhile, "does not adequately respond to the predominant characteristics of the conservation area".

David White, of the Campden Hill Residents' Association, said: "This is a damning report from the coun-

cil's own experts and reinforces everything that has been said by objectors."

Under the council's plan, the reborn school would open in 2013 with eco-friendly buildings including a sports hall, swimming pool, badminton and basketball courts, a gym and dance studios.

The number of classrooms would fall from 94 to 75, but they would cater for the same number of pupils because they would be larger and use space more efficiently.

A central feature of the design is an

atrium intended to provide better visibility so teachers can monitor pupils as they move around.

But the project has been dogged by arguments for years because land would be sold off for development.

A provision to include some "affordable" housing for council tenants and key workers — including teachers — in the same block as the expensive flats has been scrapped.

The Conservative council says this is the only way it can make enough money from the sell-off to pay for the school, as the estimated price tag has spiralled from £60 million to £72.6 million in recent months.

Residents are hoping Mayor Boris Johnson will step in to block the scheme, as he has pledged to stop playing fields being lost to development.

A council spokesman said: "The architects' appraisal panel advises on design issues. Its views will be taken into account in the planning officer's report to the planning committee on 26 June."