



Mr G Dolphin  
Planning Decisions Unit  
Greater London Authority  
City Hall  
The Queen's Walk  
London  
SE1 2AA

**By email and post**  
**[giles.dolphin@london.gov.uk](mailto:giles.dolphin@london.gov.uk)**  
Our ref. SN/CW/676001

14 July 2008

Dear Mr Dolphin

**HOLLAND PARK SCHOOL, AIRLIE GARDENS, CAMPDEN HILL ROAD, W8  
7AF**  
**GLA REF: PDU/1500b & 1500c/01**  
**LPA REF: PP/08/00591 & PP/08/00594**

We are writing on behalf of the Campden Hill Residents' Association (CHRA) in connection with the revised applications to redevelop Holland Park School, which the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBK&C) has now resolved to approve. We understand the applications have been referred to the GLA.

For the reasons provided in our earlier correspondence dated 9 May 2008 (copy enclosed), we consider the proposals are contrary to a number of policies in the Development Plan. The existence of various policy conflicts has also been identified by RBK&C officers in their report to committee.

We do not propose to rehearse all of these policy conflicts in this letter. However, since the proposals give rise to issues which are of London-wide importance and which have potentially far reaching consequences (as well as being the subject of significant public opposition), we consider it appropriate to write to you seeking that the Mayor either directs refusal of the applications or else supports the separate request we will be making that they be called in by the Secretary of State for her determination.

### **The London Plan (February 2008)**

Of particular relevance to the Mayor is the fact that the proposals are contrary to the following policies in the London Plan (February 2008):

*Policy 3A.10 Negotiating affordable housing in individual private residential and mixed use schemes* - The proposed affordable housing would be located off site (in Freston Road and Ifield Road) and therefore not integrated into the rest of the development (contrary to the supporting text in para 3.55). The Freston Road site is within a ward that already has high levels of social housing (contrary to para 3.57). Planning permission already exists for the Ifield Road

### **Indigo Planning Limited**

Swan Court  
Worple Road  
London  
SW19 4JS

T 020 8605 9400  
F 020 8605 9401  
[info@indigoplanning.com](mailto:info@indigoplanning.com)  
[indigoplanning.com](http://indigoplanning.com)

Registered office  
Swan Court  
Worple Road  
London SW19 4JS  
Registered number 2078863

#### Directors

Simon Neate  
BA (Hons) MRTPI  
Philip Villars  
BA (Hons) MRTPI  
Ian Laverick  
BSc (Arch) BArch (Hons 1)  
RIBA FRAIA  
Bill Davidson  
BA (Hons) DipTP DipUD MRTPI  
Mathew Mainwaring  
BA (Hons) MRTPI  
Sean McGrath  
BA (Hons) MSc MRTPI  
Tim Waring  
BA (Hons) MRTPI  
Stewart Miller  
BA(Hons)  
Helen Greenhalgh  
BA (Hons) DipTP MRTPI  
Doug Hann  
BA (Hons) MTPL MSc MRTPI  
Consultant  
John Spain  
BBS MRUP MRICS MRTPI MIPI  
Associate Director  
Rob Crolla  
BA(Hons) DipTP MTP MRTPI

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site and therefore it would not result in a net increase in the number of affordable units in the borough.

*Policy 3A.24 Education facilities* - The proposal would result in the loss of a significant proportion of land that is currently in educational use (equating to approximately a 25% reduction of the existing site), contrary to the supporting text in para 3.114. It is also important to note that the proposal would result in an expansion of only approximately 30 school places.

*Policy 3D.8 Realising the value of open space and green infrastructure* - The proposal would result in the loss of open space. The supporting text in para 3.298 specifically refers to hard surfaced playgrounds.

*Policy 3D.10 Metropolitan Open Land* - The height, scale and massing of the proposal would have an adverse impact on the adjacent MOL (refer to the supporting text in para 3.303).

*3D.13 Children and young people's play and informal recreation strategies* - The proposed market housing would provide inadequate on-site children's playspace for future occupiers.

*Policy 3D.14 Biodiversity and nature conservation* - The proposal would result in the loss of over 40 trees (approximately one third of the trees on the site).

*Policies 4B.8 Respect local context and communities, 4B.10 Large-scale buildings – design and impact, 4B.11 London's built heritage and 4B.12 Heritage conservation* - the proposed scale, height, bulk, massing and architectural design of the buildings would fail to respect the local context, the amenity of existing neighbours, views into the site, the character and appearance of the conservation areas and the setting of the grade II listed Thorpe Lodge.

*Policies 4A.2 Mitigating climate change, 4A.3 Sustainable design and construction, 4A.4 Energy assessment, 4A.5 Provision of heating and cooling networks, 4A.6 Decentralised Energy: Heating, Cooling and Power, 4A.7 Renewable Energy, 4A.9 Adaption to Climate Change, 4A.10 Overheating, 4A.11 Living Roofs* - Insufficient information has been provided with the planning applications to allow a full assessment of the suitability of the proposals in terms of climate change.

### **Planning for a Better London (July 2008)**

The proposal is also contrary to the guidance set out in the Mayor's new planning report, 'Planning for a Better London' (July 2008). Of particular relevance is the fact that the document makes several references to resisting the loss of playing fields.

For example, page 25 states:

*Making sure that neighbourhoods have good facilities for*

*play, sport and recreation; **protecting and enhancing our playing fields** (our emphasis)*

Page 26 goes on to state that:

*The planning system is a potent mechanism to help achieve the Mayor's ambition to make London a world leader in addressing environmental challenges. It can enable a real contribution to be made towards the global efforts to deal with issues like climate change while also finding ways – like **protecting** back gardens and **playing fields**, or ensuring the highest and most modern standards of design and construction – to improve the quality of the environment and of Londoners' lives closer to home. (our emphasis)*

Page 28 states:

*The Mayor will use his planning powers to prevent inappropriate development of open spaces, Green Belt, domestic gardens **and playing fields**. (our emphasis)*

We trust that the Mayor will seriously consider the proposal in light of his recent statements on the loss of playing fields.

### **Call in by the Secretary of State (July 2007)**

As well as conflicting with the development plan and the statements in the Mayor's new planning report, the proposals have not addressed the Secretary of State's reasons for calling-in the original applications in July 2007. No inquiry took place because the applicant elected to withdraw and resubmit its proposals, but the grounds set out by the Secretary of State for her decision to call the application in, and the matters which she asked to be informed of, remain at least as relevant to the new application as they did to the last.

### **Loss of Playing Fields**

An example of the above is that the letter from the Government Office for London (dated 13 July 2007) stated that the Secretary of State particularly wished to be informed for the purposes of her consideration of the applications:

*The extent to which the proposed development accords with national policy guidance in PPG17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation, specifically in terms of:*

- whether the site is surplus to requirements for all the functions that open space can perform (PPG17, paragraph 10); and*
- whether the proposed development is consistent with advice set out in PPG17 paragraph 15.*

The RBK&C has still not undertaken an open space assessment and it is debatable whether the criteria set out in PPG17 have been met.

It is equally relevant to note that we have serious concerns about whether the proper procedures have been followed by the RBK&C in seeking an authorisation for the anticipated disposal of playing fields at the school from the Department for Children Schools and Families. We have provided Counsel's opinion to the Department showing that authorisation should not have been forthcoming as it was based on serious errors of calculation in the Council's application. This reinforces the concerns of local people that the application has been forced through by a partial local authority without adequate probity. At the time of writing there has still been no adequate explanation from the Department or from the Council to the concerns we have expressed.

### **Inappropriate design in a sensitive area**

Secondly, the Secretary of State also wished to be informed about:

*the extent to which the proposed development accords with national policy guidance in PPS1: Delivering Sustainable Development and PPG15: Planning and the Historic Environment, in particular with regard to securing high quality and inclusive design, specifically in terms of the likely impact of the proposal on the character or appearance of the Kensington and Holland Park Conservation Areas and on the setting of Thorpe Lodge.*

Holland Park School is located in a very sensitive area. The site lies within the Kensington Conservation Area and abuts the Holland Park Conservation Area. Thorpe Lodge, which is within the school grounds, is grade II listed. The site is adjacent to Holland Park, which is listed as a Park of Special Historic Interest and is also designated as Metropolitan Open Land (MOL).

The applicants admit that the design of the new school building itself is unchanged from their original application. The CHRA considers that the proposed scale, height, bulk and massing of the school building would be over-dominant and unsympathetic to its surroundings, one of the most environmentally and architecturally sensitive areas of Kensington. CHRA is also concerned about the architectural design, which it considers to be entirely inappropriate in this sensitive setting.

Turning to the proposed residential development on the southern site, the design has been altered from the original scheme but CHRA considers that this element of the scheme is still completely out of character with its surroundings and is concerned about the disappointing architectural design of the residential units. Furthermore its height, bulk and massing is unacceptable in an area that immediately borders Holland Park and has already seen other significant residential developments erected in the past few years, including one on the adjacent site.

It is also important to note that English Heritage strongly objected to the scheme in their letter dated 11 June 2008 (copy enclosed). In respect of the proposed school building, English Heritage referred to ‘the harm to the character of the Holland Park Conservation Area that will ensue from the intrusion of the roofline of the very large slab block ..’. The letter went on to say that English Heritage urges RBK&C to seek a reduction in overall height.

In respect of the proposed residential development, English Heritage has ‘serious concerns regarding the harm to the character and appearance of both the Kensington and Holland Park Conservation Areas resulting from the contextual inappropriateness of the materials and elevational treatment of the residential block’. Again, English Heritage urges RBK&C to seek fundamental revisions to the elevational treatment.

The council’s own Architectural Appraisal Panel criticised the design, commenting as follows: the ‘residential development does not adequately respond to the predominant characteristics of the conservation area’, the ‘monolithic, relentless application of a staggered façade .. is not supported’, ‘the ‘overall height causes concern’, the detailed design .. would date quickly’, ‘the architecture failed to excite the panel’.

The RBK&C’s officers’ report to committee also has a negative conclusion on the design of the scheme, where it states that the proposal ‘pushes at acceptable limits of bulk’ and takes ‘little inspiration from its surrounding’.

Therefore, CHRA does not consider that the revised proposal has addressed the issues raised by the Secretary of State in terms of PPS1 and PPG15.

### **Housing Policy**

Thirdly, the Secretary of State also wished to be informed about:

*The extent to which the proposed development accords with national planning policy guidance in PPS3: Housing, in particular with regard to the mix of housing, both market and affordable.*

The lack of on-site affordable housing on this council owned site is contrary to PPS3 and would provide an unfortunate precedent for future residential planning applications in the Borough.

Despite the London Plan policies and the RBK&C’s own emerging policy requirements, the off-site affordable housing proposed at Freston Road is within a ward that already has high levels of social housing. That site is also surrounded by industrial and commercial uses which would be ‘bad neighbours’ for the prospective residents. In terms of the off-site provision at Ifield Road, planning permission already exists for that site and therefore the proposal would not result in a net increase in the number of affordable units in the borough.

CHRA's affordable housing specialists, AtisReal, conclude that the submitted appraisals do not justify a departure from the policy requirement to provide 50% affordable housing on site.

Therefore, CHRA consider that the revised proposals have not addressed the Secretary of State's reasons for calling-in the original applications.

### **Conclusion**

To be clear, CHRA is perfectly willing to support a proposal for the site which is acceptable in planning terms. This is not a case of a residents' group turning its face against the inevitable and resolving to object come what may. As you are aware, there has been significant public opposition to the proposals from more than just the CHRA. In circumstances where the applicant is land owner, Local Education Authority as well as the relevant Local Planning Authority, public confidence demands an increased level of scrutiny of the development proposals. Given the level of disagreement and the importance of the issues, it is clearly appropriate that the Mayor either directs refusal or supports our request that the application is called-in for the Secretary of State's determination.

If you require any further information, please contact Caroline Wilberforce or me.

Yours sincerely



Simon Neate

Enc: Indigo letter to RBK&C, dated 9 May 2008  
English Heritage letter to RBK&C, dated 11 June 2008  
cc: Mr D White, CHRA (by email only)  
Mr T Smith, Berwin Leighton Paisner (by email only)  
Mr B Johnson, Mayor of London (by email only)  
Mr I Clement, Deputy Mayor (Government Relations) (by email only)  
Mr D Blankson-Hemans, GLA (by email only)  
Mr D Prout, RBK&C (by email only)  
Mr D Taylor, RBKC (by email only)  
Mr A Ross, GOL (by email only)  
Mr B Collins, DP9 (by email only)