

Downshire Hill Residents' Association

Abacas School on site of the old Police Station

Planning reference 2016/1590/P

You may or may not be aware that a planning application has now been made to house the Belsize Park Abacus free school in the old police station building at the top of Downshire Hill. The building has been bought by the EFA (the Education Funding Agency) and once developed, will be handed over to Abacus. The EFA are proposing that the building be developed to accommodate a school with an annual two form intake of a maximum capacity of 420 pupils with c 40-60 staff. The school has been established as a non-faith school that will serve the Belsize Park area. Downshire Hill will sit at the most Northerly point of it's catchment area (with only half the road included within catchment). It's most southerly point sits beyond Swiss Cottage. It is currently planned that the school will open in September 2017. More information about the school can be found on it's website: <http://www.abacus-cfbt.org/>

It was agreed by a vote at the DHRA street meeting in March that we would object at the planning stage to the establishment of such a large school (of 420 pupils) on this site, especially as it does not serve the community in which it is located (minutes on www.downshirehillra.com), but that a well-designed school of 210 pupils *might* be considered. We are now asking all residents that are opposed to the development of such a large school in Downshire Hill to object to this application. We are also seeking additional funding to support our objection and are looking to raise money for this purpose.

To object to this development, please email the Council at planning@camden.gov.uk quoting the planning application number 2016//1590/P or comment on the Camden website: www.camden.gov.uk/planning comments

You can also comment by post:

Case officer Zenab Haji-Ismail

Planning Solutions Team (Planning reference 2016/1590/P)

London Borough of Camden

Town Hall

Judd Street

London WC1H9JE

Comments on the planning application must be submitted to Camden **by 29th April 2016** so if you are going to object please do it now.

The following are some of the grounds you could use to object:

Principles of Development

- Hampstead is already home to 37 schools, which equates to 10,250 pupils. 13 of these schools are Local Authority, Voluntary Aided or Community schools. Abacus is a Belsize Park school being located in Hampstead. Hampstead doesn't need a school that doesn't serve the local community.
- The original school was planned to have a maximum intake of 210. The need for a school accommodating 420 pupils has not been shown. The school describes itself as small and local yet at 420 it will be amongst the biggest primary level schools in the area.
- We understand that as no other suitable site could be found, the school is sited at the extreme Northern corner of the catchment area. As it is a Belsize Park catchment, very local children will be unable to attend and others will have to travel a distance with all the implications for school run congestion and local conflict.
- The planned school sets a bad precedent for existing and new schools
 - what would stop others expanding from a 1 to 2 form entry?
 - if sold in the future, with an established educational Planning use, what would stop a private school buying it with loss of control of intake and further school run problems?

Design & Architecture

- The new design plans to double in size the original building. The extension of the building overwhelms what would remain of the original structure and does not sit well within Downshire Hill with its unique set of listed residences. We consider this 'facadism' – leaving some of the old building while unacceptably developing the rest and going against all principles of conservation.
- The panelled Magistrates Courtroom and Custody Suite are of historic interest but are planned as standard classroom areas in the new school.
- The size, bulk and scale of the planned development are out of scale in context with its neighbours.
- The rooftop play area is an eyesore and intrusive in terms of noise and privacy.
- The selection of materials (two-tone grey and yellow bricks) is disrespectful to the existing warm red brick of this historic building.
- The architecture is not of a high standard, being overscaled, overbearing and intimidating 'like a 1990s office building'; it is not child- friendly, homely, welcoming or in keeping with Downshire Hill.
- The architects make the point that little of the new building will be visible from public roads; this may be true for Rosslyn Hill but the gradient on Downshire Hill means that most will be visible from that side.

- The design of the building uses only one of the current entrances, so all 420 children will arrive and leave by the Downshire Hill entrance. Children and their carers will all leave via the narrowest part of pavement around the site thereby compromising safety. Developing the building so both entrances can be used would make far more sense.

Transport.

Residents consider this the most important issue; the applicants' approach to this issue is considered completely inadequate.

- Converting 2 pay and display parking spaces at the top of Downshire Hill into a parking bay for school vehicles buses means the encouragement of more (potentially large) vehicles in to an already restricted road area. Downshire Hill is used increasingly as a cut through and experiences high volumes of traffic which struggle to get to the bottom of the road or turn around.
- Road safety: siting such a big school at an already overused and dangerously busy intersection with no provision for increased road safety is completely irresponsible given that the number of additional children that will be in the area every day.
- Despite the applications assumptions (based on little evidence) that pupils will not come to school by car, the expanded school will inevitably result in significantly more cars on our roads in an already congested area at extremely busy times. It is likely that the Rosslyn Hill and Downshire Hill junction will become comparable to the Fitzjohns Avenue/Arkwright Road hot-spots at school run times.
- There have been serious and unresolved school run problems in Hampstead for many years, with resulting congestion, parking chaos, safety hazards and high levels of air pollution.

In addition to asking you to object to the development, DHRA is looking to raise funds:

Because of the inadequacy of the applicant's data, the DHRA is raising funds to employ experts in traffic , noise pollution, educational need and heritage. Substantial contributions have already, and very kindly, been pledged (especially from those most affected by the scheme in Hampstead Hill Gardens, Keats Grove and Rosslyn Hill, as well as Downshire Hill), and this has allowed us to kick off the technical work that is needed. Any unspent money will be returned pro rata to anyone who is contributing more than £1000. Total cost is expected to be of the order of £15-20k.

We would ask all residents who object to this scheme to consider making a contribution, however small, towards these costs.

Mark and Christabel Dennis (no 26 DH) will be calling over the next week to provide more information about what is being carried out, and the costs to undertake the work but if you feel able to drop a cheque payable to Downshire Hill Residents Association to Mark at number 26 beforehand then that would be great.

Kind regards

Stephen Ainger

Chair of DHRA

8 Downshire Hill