

8th April 2020

Dear David Fowler,

Re: 2019/6354/P Branch Hill House Branch Hill London NW3 7LS

As Society Tree Officer to the Heath & Hampstead Society and also a member of the Hampstead Neighbourhood Forum committee, I have a few points to make about the trees and landscaping aspects of this planning application, and have been asked to do this on behalf of both these local organisations. We consider it important to improve on the proposed landscaping and retain the importance of some historical features also found elsewhere in Hampstead.

Firstly though, while this application does refer to the Site of Importance for Nature designation, it is curious that it does not refer to Local Green Space number 1 'Branch Hill' in the Hampstead Neighbourhood Plan (HNP), which is of course a statutory designation under the Localism Act 2011.

The Heath & Hampstead Society and Hampstead Neighbourhood Forum are pleased that the arboricultural report is on the whole good and sensitive to the local ecology. There is no mention of veteran tree stumps or veteran standing deadwood, though I see that apart from one, just off site, the rest on site have been removed by Camden in the recent past. This standing oak deadwood is just over the edge of the boundary with Spedan Close.



Veteran oak tree stump
as seen on Street View



It can be seen to be a habitat of immense importance to invertebrates and fungi of veteran trees, including large bored holes made by what is likely to be the stag horn beetle amongst many others. We would like to suggest that a Stumpery in the Branch Hill Garden woodland area made from local veteran tree deadwood would be both a feature and an important habitat contributing to local corridors of such trees and wood piles which we are in the process of both mapping and constructing with the help of local garden owners. We have had confirmation from those who look after the veteran trees on Hampstead Heath that they too would be interested in supporting this and we would be happy to facilitate contact. There is a notable veteran tree wood stumpery in Golders Hill Park (see: <https://www.hamhigh.co.uk/news/environment/broadcaster-henry-kelly-discovers-royal-link-to-hampstead-heath-tree-project-1-2309292> and <http://democracy.cityoflondon.gov.uk/documents/s27381/Stumpery%20-%20Appendix%20-%20Intpretation%20Board.pdf>)

We are though somewhat disappointed with the Landscape DAS and the proposed landscaping, and consider this may be due to lack of local knowledge. Our concerns include:

Paving

Gertrude Jekyll is mentioned for the arrival gardens, however we feel this could be better represented. The Local Green Space numbers 11 and 12 'Burgh House' and 'Gertrude Jekyll's Garden & Wells House Gardens' in the HNP report on the Gertrude Jekyll features still present in Hampstead and a visit to these neighbouring gardens with knowledgeable members of the H&HS Planning Sub-Committee would help the landscape designers discover what could work well here and even do it better. Our feeling is that less of the Lutyens and sculpture but more Gertrude Jekyll features such as in the paths in Burgh House gardens would be more pleasing and fit in better with the house and gardens generally. While there is Gertrude Jekyll shape to the paths, there is a lot of herringbone brick and gravel. If there were more Gertrude Jekyll features in the paving palette such as her millstone shapes and use of contrasting natural materials these would be a more interesting way of treating the ground surface; breaking up all the brick and the gravel that is near to the house and toning it down a bit, plus introducing good links to Hampstead architectural history.

Walling

It seems stone clad walling is the main (only?) wall type. We are rather distraught to discover that all the external walls within the site containing clinker bricks (sometimes called burnt or lava bricks) and the pierced brick walls are for removal. While it is clear that the pierced walls and big retaining wall with clinker brick top along the north side of the public right of way where the new built area is to be cannot be retained, this frees up clinker bricks and second hand bricks to be used elsewhere. The patterns of the various pierced walls along here and by the steps could perhaps be re-used elsewhere too - such as further along the south side of the public right of way. These pierced walls have deteriorated quite considerably over the last few years but the H&HS Planning Sub-Committee have some past photographs which may be of help.

The clinker bricks have a particular historical and local link. The clay from the geological band of Claygate Beds that runs across Hampstead and Highgate contains a lot of silt making it ideal for brick making. (see Brick making: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/earth-sciences/impact/public-engagement/londons-geology/londons-geology-fieldwork/hampstead-heath/geology-hampstead> and <http://londongeopartnership.org.uk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/The-Geology-of-Highgate-Wood-and-Queens-Wood-AGS-final.pdf>) Bricks were made in the many brick kilns that dotted parts of the Heath, old fields / areas near to Finchley Road and the Briardale Road area west of Platts Lane (see the 1866 Ordnance Survey part maps attached).

There is a newly discovered painting of a brick kiln by Constable on the reverse of one of his paintings of Branch Hill pond, now exhibited at the V&A: <https://www.hamhigh.co.uk/etcetera/art/undiscovered-constable-oil-sketch-of-hampstead-heath-to-display-in-new-v-a-exhibition-1-3779948> and <https://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/caring-for-our-collections/unknown-sketch-constable> It is not impossible that the clinker bricks on the Branch Hill House site are from this very kiln. This is too important for these to be lost.

Clinker bricks are used in the terraced slope in the garden behind Branch Hill House in West Heath Lodge for example. A combination of vegetated wall and clinker bricks as part of low retaining walls could be designed to very good effect. Firecrest, just a little further along West Heath Road also has a wonderful and extensive woodland garden designed by the architects of this interesting development, making the most of the topography here, utilising rock outcrops and local materials including clinker bricks. If you would like to see this access could be arranged. West Heath Lodge next door to Branch Hill House also makes use of clinker bricks on the terracing immediately adjacent to Branch Hill House garden. These two sites also have the most magnificent veteran trees, two of a number in the area that have been submitted to the Ancient Tree Inventory. If Branch Hill House's woodland garden could incorporate a stumpery of local veteran tree wood legitimately obtained with the help of the experts from Hampstead Heath, this would be of immense value to these trees' habitat.

Both the Heath & Hampstead Society and Hampstead Neighbourhood Forum consider Branch Hill House gardens and landscaping could have their historical and local interest emphasised to great effect, and would be very willing to help support this. We ask that you request some changes to the landscaping detail to ensure this occurs.

Dr Vicki Harding