

LETTERS

Widcombe Way, N2 OHL

Sir,
Having earlier read “‘Inappropriate’ extension sends negative waves around the Suburb” H&H, Sept 8, I decided to have a look at the new Henrietta Barnett School extension. With respect, it is no monstrosity but a commendably thoughtful construction.

Built in soft looking terracotta coloured brick, it conveys part of the spirit of Edwardian architecture; that straightforward, domesticated understatement emblematic of English Edwardian culture that fits in well with Hampstead Garden Suburb around. The great wooden covered balcony at the rear, suggested to me a hint of Lutyen’s government buildings in Delhi. The materials – old fashioned well laid bricks, oak veranda rails and supports and terracotta tiles on a sloping (not a modern flat) roof overwhelmingly gesture towards the arts and craft domestic architecture surrounding it. It may not be the twin of the older school opposite to the rear, but it is obviously its cousin. The façade facing the side street suggests a human domestic scale, invoked by traditional handsome brick window lintels, shallow pilasters in the well laid brickwork – contrived to look like the chimney stacks of a domestic house – and in a particularly imaginative deceptive touch, what look like bricked up one time former windows. An inventive way of breaking up what would otherwise be a long unbroken, boring brick wall. If it looks new its not the design but the obvious newness of the brickwork which will gradually mellow with time to the advantage of these features.

This building is the converse of a thoughtless modern, soullessly ultra economic, impertinently out of place construction. It does not attempt to be (who could afford it now) a pale, inadequate pastiche of the highly elaborate building next to it. The indented right angle of the front Central Square side – suggestive of a large carpentry joint – pleasingly allows a feature to be made of the pre-existing fine old tall tree, as well as cleverly giving elbow room to the un-repeatable, contrived, self indulgent handsome Edwardian extravaganza next door. To emphasise the point, once the new brick of this building has mellowed and the wooden supports and rails seasoned, it will look very much in keeping with the rest of the suburb. If you were disappointed at first glance, look again and admire the detail and intentions? I think that if the great Sir Edwin Lutyens were around, he would recognise and appreciate the thoughtfulness and cousinship of the modern, cash restrained architects of this building.

Yours
Robert Sutherland Smith

Temple Fortune Lane, NW11

Sir,
I read with interest Shana Nieburg-Suschtsky’s thoughts on the Henrietta Barnett School extension. Along with other girls in my family I also attended HBS – my slot being 1939-1945, quite an eventful schooling. Even then more space was needed, the space being shared with Institute classes.

Although I am in no way architecturally qualified, these are my thoughts on the new buildings, shared with many residents as SUBURB NEWS IS PRODUCED AND DELIVERED TO YOU BY RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION VOLUNTEERS

well as visitors to our Suburb:

- 1) The extra rooms and spaces for additional school activities and classes are indeed exceptional. It must be a pleasure to both teach and learn in these well equipped and inspiring rooms and areas.
- 2) The outward design, whilst contemporary is not really sympathetic to its surroundings as an addition but would surely have been more acceptable in brickwork of the same colour as the main building.
- 3) Why was this violent red brick chosen instead of the soft colouration of the main building and the surrounding squares? Whose choice was that vivid and violent brick colour. Our Central Square deserved better from the ‘planners’.

However we are stuck with it! After so many years of hopes, planning discussions ad nauseam and fund raising, it is indeed sad to see this fiery blot on the landscape which will stand out like a sore thumb forever.

Yours
Jacqeline Morris

North Square, NW11

Sir,
The magnificent oak tree saved by the Planning inspectorate sets positive lawful precedence for future ruthless cases initiated by insurance companies using loss adjusters and their clique of paid experts. This is a normal and regular tactic they use and the teams work closely together to bulldoze the councils and hence create unnecessary damage to our cities for financial gain with no thought for our disappearing green environment or the value of mature trees. They stated that the effects of under pinning create more of a carbon footprint and advised to fell instead. They are sadly misinformed as it is a known fact that trees support the atmosphere in many, many ways. This is substantiated by research in Scandinavia where it states clearly that people are healthier in greener surroundings. It may only be a matter of time until the insurance companies take on board that perhaps illness and medicine may be more costly than chopping down trees for deceitful property developers and insurance claims.

In a case where the odds were so heavily stacked against the survival of the tree, Barnet council tried to get rid of the financial risk and back down because of their lack of funds in favour of the appellant Marishal Thompson Group, a heavyweight arboriculture company specialising in insurance claims. Their client was Infront Innovation. And the chain goes on... A heavy blow was struck with this successful case to the greed and ‘financial bullying’ tactics of these types of companies.

Barnet Council committees, including John Marshall, rejected officers’ recommendation for removal. In the end it was council tree officer Ann Currell, with of course the entire backing of Hampstead Garden Suburb Trust, the RA, many residents and representation from the Friends Meeting House (Quakers), who successfully defended the tree.

Hampstead Garden Suburb has managed to save one of its heritage 140-year-old oaks. Thanks must also go to the caring and common sense of the planning inspector John Felgate who made it quite clear that when under pinning was an option the felling

of magnificent trees should not be considered. Hampstead Garden Suburb is a stunning conservation area and the tree in questions was part of Bigwood Nature Reserve according to the councils plans, it was also known as the tongue of the ancient woodlands and covered by a tree preservation order, the sheer callousness of the appellants who were totally unable to prove their case shows that fighting for magnificent irreplaceable trees can be successful.

This is not the first time or last time this will happen, Hampstead Garden Suburb is built on clay, currently there are cases going on all over the Suburb where magnificent trees are at risk because of the general lowering of the water table in London, the fact the Suburb is built on clay has made it an easy target for the unscrupulous!

Other oaks in the Suburb under threat are Willifield Way/ Lucas Crescent oaks and the 9 Asmunds Hill.

Yours
Kim Einhorn

Name and address supplied

Sir,
In his letter in the last edition of the Suburb News David Iwi supports the demolition of a “fine Soutar House” on the grounds that the President of the Lands Tribunal was “startled” by this description

and that the Trust’s expert witness “did not make any great claims for its architectural merit”.

I did not and do not understand why the Tribunal judge should have been startled at what seems to me to be a quite reasonable and moderately expressed opinion. There are plenty of less distinguished residential buildings on the Suburb. In fact, that is the point I would be grateful if you, Sir, would allow me to make it and to draw attention to its implications.

The Suburb is, in many ways, an (extraordinary) celebration of the ordinary – most of what goes on, if we are lucky, is ordinary, and most of us regard ourselves as ordinary people. It has been said that the value of 24 Ingram Avenue is that it represents a type, reflects a specific point in the history of taste, is of reasonably good quality and fits seamlessly with its wider environment. I do not think that more was claimed for it in the Tribunal.

Most residents probably feel that they have tried to do their best, have looked after their families as well as they could, paid their taxes, are sorry for any shortcomings they may have or errors that they have committed and are content to go unnoticed by history.

If the criteria for the condemnation of human beings are, by analogy, to be the same as David Iwi’s criteria for demolition, then many of us are doomed.

Yours
“Disgusted of Golders Green”



24 Ingram Avenue

Oak before ash

My last rainfall column appeared in April with a little verse of folklore about the relationship between the leaves appearing first on oak or ash and subsequent rainfall being above or below normal. Oak leaves appeared before ash leaves so we should have been in for a dry period. In fact, March, April and May were very dry with a total of 1.5 inches, compared with an average of 6.5 inches for the same three months. So perhaps the old saying was right! But the rain started in the first week of June and by the end of the month there had been 4 inches, well above the usual 2.5. July had above average but then August dampened many hopes of summer days in the garden. Another 4 inches fell, compared with the average 2.4 inches. So, thank goodness September turned out fairly dry, sunny and, by the end of the month, wonderfully warm – summer at last.

In spite of drought and near floods, rainfall during the year to September has proved to be very average, 20.1 inches against 20.9 inches. The distribution has apparently been perfect for garden produce. Roses may have been rather early but were absolutely splendid and the growth of new shoots has covered the windows or elbowed out the competition in the flowerbeds. As for apples and pears, they have never been so large or so prolific so the rain must have fallen, or held off, at exactly the right time.

Perhaps it is as well that we cannot artificially reproduce the timings next year or the trees might collapse with the strain. As it is, we will probably be disappointed with next year’s crops, but will be able to indulge in the perennial subject of conversation in Britain – the weather.

DIANA IWI

‘How lucky we are to live here’*

It’s up to us to preserve the Suburb. Please don’t just leave it to others.

Join the Residents Association and let your voice be heard. Pick up a leaflet or join on line.

www.hgs.org.uk

*Philip Davies who has been an English Heritage Director and is a lifelong Suburb resident