

# Mill Hill Preservation Society founded 1949

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*...making change worthwhile*

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20<sup>th</sup> February 2018  
Our Ref JL/jl/MHPS environmentgroup

Dear Jon Sheaff

## **Copthall and Mill Hill Open Spaces Masterplan: Phase 2 Report:**

Thank you for presenting to our committee on 12<sup>th</sup> February 2018 the Copthall and Mill Hill Open Spaces Masterplan that has been commissioned by the Council and for giving MHPS the opportunity to comment. Our response attempts to summarise the comments of our Committee and to add more detail to our views.

The Society welcomes the development of a park and open-space strategy for Barnet and is fully supportive of focused investment in open spaces across Barnet into the future. We are concerned that the quality of open spaces has fallen since they were last assessed in 2009 and that there is just one park in the borough, Golders Hill Park, that is considered to be of excellent quality - whereas six years ago there were five parks recorded as excellent. Likewise the number of parks recorded to be 'good' has fallen from 15 to nine during this period.

The Master Plan, which centres on Copthall playing fields, sets out a vision encompassed by 4 headings – Regional Sports Hub, Wider leisure & Cultural Activities, Support Nature Conservation & Biodiversity, and Better Connected Parks. We list our comments in relation to these points, although we may stray a little.

**1.0 REGIONAL SPORTS HUB:** The site selected for the regional sports hub is Copthall, and whilst we have some reservations, we accept that this is the correct location to choose over the Barnet and Hendon options. We are concerned that the analysis of park spaces shows Copthall Playing Fields as being of low quality and high value, and whilst we accept it is of high value, we dispute that it is of low quality. Copthall is a Green Belt location and apart from sport, provides open space for residents in the area. It is important that the needs of the local residents are not overwhelmed by the desire to generate a regional sport centre.

There are aspects of the proposed traffic circulation for Copthall that we feel we must comment on. Our comments relate to the diagram COPTHALL CIRCULATION VEHICULAR - PARKING (51):

- ❖ The plan shows that the new parking for the new leisure centre will be ticketed. We object to this as the leisure centre is a community asset and having to pay to park to use it will be a disincentive to the use of facilities and not an encouragement. The Society believes that free car parking would be more consistent with the stated aims. There is also a planning issue in that increased car parking in the Green Belt is discouraged. As proposed, site intensification and additional cars will put a strain on the junction of Champions Way and Page Street.
- ❖ We understand that a new traffic lane is suggested on the A41(A1) to facilitate traffic turning into Greenlands Lane and this will cause the loss of the Quickfit Garage – in itself a local asset. Additionally the exit from Greenlands Lane onto the A41(A1) will be closed, even though traffic leaving the site does not queue on the main road, but within the Copthall site. We object to this for two reasons – firstly that this proposal negates the Traffic Plan that Saracens used to obtain planning permission for their stands in the first place and secondly this will put unacceptable pressure in the junction of Champions Way with Page Street on match days. This will be to the detriment of the local residents.

As journey times into the site are generally staggered, our Committee are of the opinion that it would be better to do the opposite – that is to remove the ingress into Greenland Lane and make it exit only, expending any money making a better exit point. This would enable the road layout to cope more efficiently with traffic leaving the site after matches finish and support the Saracens exiting transport plan. This configuration would also avoid increased congestion in residential areas.

- ❖ We understand that in order to have a bus service to the new leisure centre that an enlarged traffic roundabout needs to be included on the site at the junction of Champions Way and Greenland Lane. MHPS support this and feel all efforts should be made to ensure a local bus service to the new centre.

The CONNECTIVITY PROPOSALS - LIGHTING (49) diagram shows a considerable increase in floodlighting to football pitches, rugby pitches and tennis courts. This increase of light pollution will be unacceptable to the UCL Observatory nearby. The additional floodlighting will also be an annoyance to local residents.

**2.0 WIDER LEISURE & CULTURAL ACTIVITIES:** We note that it may be appropriate to include a greater diversity of activities in our parks, including sports zones, skate, events space, water play, natural play, and improved fitness facilities and a café. However, we believe there is an over dominance of football pitches. Additionally, we struggle to see the reason for bringing in restaurants, and a play tower. Copthall is Green Belt space and play activities would be best encouraged in the natural areas, not artificial ones, and the space is already well provided by a restaurant at Metro.

Some of the suggestions made are against the spirit of the Green Belt and current the planning legislation – such as retail proposals. Accepting that changing room facilities are needed and that a café would serve many people using the outdoor space as well as the sporting facilities, retail space is definitely not compatible with its location on open space in the Green Belt. Further buildings and concrete/hard surfaces are also not appropriate. One consideration not included would be some form of ‘earth works or land sculpture’ to attract visitors. Perhaps the Play Tower would be acceptable in Mill Hill Park alongside other children’s play facilities.

**THE SPORTS PROVISION FOR MILL HILL PARK:** the changes proposed for Mill Hill Park seem reasonable although we are concerned that the proposers of the neighbourhood Hub have not been consulted. This may mean that facilities will be duplicated and as such fail. We support the reallocation sports facilities within Copthall, Sunny Hill Park, Mill Hill Park and Bittacy Hill Park although we are concerned as to how the more remote facilities will be managed and protected from vandalism. We assume that these new facilities will be sensitively added to the areas mentioned so as not to disturb the visual nature of these spaces.

**The MASTERPLAN - MAIN ACTIVITY HUB (63):** this plan shows various functions including a new Market Square – which we feel would be in conflict with the market days in The Broadway. This zone includes dubious items mentioned elsewhere – the play tower and the retail outlets. Nevertheless, we do agree the existing sports changing facilities are no longer ‘fit for purpose’ and that new ones are needed. Our major concern is that these proposals for a new activity hub are so extensive that if they succeed it will change the character of Copthall and if they do not the scheme will be a ‘white elephant’. The PLAY TOWER and PROPOSED HUB (70) generally show buildings that are totally out of keeping with the architecture of the area.

**3.0 SUPPORT NATURE CONSERVATION & BIODIVERSITY:** MHPS are totally supportive of improving biodiversity and nature conservation in the location, but we fear that too much intensification in the Green Belt will have an adverse effect on wildlife and discourage it. There are concerns about the loss of ‘natural’ open space for wildlife given the increased number of paths and cycle-ways, turfed pitches, courts and other hardstanding, buildings and the level of light pollution. Almost everything proposed leads to greater disturbance – noise and lighting in particular – and a loss of habitat which is not conducive to wildlife which rather nullifies the claim made that the proposed changes will benefit wildlife.

The Copthall Masterplan shown on diagram 6.2 does two things are far as we are concerned:

- ❖ the plan shows an intensification of uses on the south side of Champions Way that we feel is not conducive to the aim of a Green Belt location: and

- ❖ the plan does not give sufficient importance for the natural areas shown at location 7 (North of the Mill Hill rugby fields) and location 11 (the site of the potential new Hasmorean schools). These natural areas are very important for wildlife, for the enjoyment of more natural open space by local residents and visitors alike. Additionally they form a bulwark against unwanted development encroaching into the Green Belt. MHPS suggest these areas are given some protection.

**4.0 BETTER CONNECTED PARKS:** The subject of connectivity is problematic. There is an agreed desire to create green space corridors to enable wildlife to move from one open space to the other although a strategy for this is lacking in the report. There is also a clear need to link Sunny Hill Park, Middlesex University and Cophall together as so many of the students move between the locations, especially when the new Saracens West Stand is built housing the University Sports Degree course. The link would facilitate access on foot and on bicycles with a new bridge over the A41(A1). MHPS would support this.

Moving on from there, the suggested links from Cophall through Arrandene to Mill Hill Park are not proven, nor is the argument made clear. This is especially important as the routes go through existing residential areas and may involve the loss of grass verges and car parking. Some of these verges are Wastes of the Manor that MHPS has tried to protect for half a century. The proposed new route through Arrandene will have to be designed with a high degree of sensitivity so as not to be visually intrusive and spoil one of the last vestiges of natural countryside within NW7. As suggested the proposed new pathway would not meet this aim.

These notes cover most of the points we wish to raise and we trust they will be taken into account when developing the proposals further. Please be in touch with us if you have any queries.

Yours sincerely

*John Living*

for the MHPS Environmental Group