

LEE MANOR SOCIETY



105 Burnt Ash Road
Lee, London SE12 8RA
April 12 2008

Emma Talbot
Planning Service
Laurence House,
1 Catford Road,
London SE6 4SW

Dear Ms Talbot,

Applications DC/07/67730 and DC/08/67976 for Northbrook School

I am writing on behalf of the Lee Manor Society to object to important aspects of the proposed demolition and rebuilding of Northbrook C of E Secondary School in Taunton Road. We believe that this is such an important issue in terms of impact on the Lee Manor Conservation Area that council planning officers should arrange a public meeting – held in Lee if possible – for society members and local residents to express their views. It is normal practice for such a meeting to be held if an amenity society such as ours does object.

Our concerns are:

- The dominating presence of the school building on Taunton Road at the corner with Wantage Road. According to the planning documents every effort has been made to reduce the impact of the building on Manor House Gardens. But this has been achieved at the expense of the street frontage. The proposed building will project in front of the existing building line in Taunton Road and come right up to the pavement. This is in contrast with the existing building which is set back, respects the building line and is also masked by trees. The bulk of the new building will completely dominate views from three compass points, east and west along Taunton Road and north along Wantage Road. It is difficult to overstate its impact on the conservation area.
- We believe this approach is fundamentally misconceived. Planting in the park and on the school site will soften the school's impact on the park. The school is anyway tucked away from any direct views of the main park recreation area and any views of the Manor House itself. We feel this allows a design that transfers more of the bulk of the building towards the park, instead of, as at present, towards sensitive street frontages. One negative outcome of this design will be for pupils to cluster on the pavement at the front of the building to the inconvenience and possible danger to themselves, pedestrians and motorists.
- use of exterior render as a cheaper substitute for brick. We are concerned that this will not be as durable a material as brick and that it will weather less satisfactorily. Where brick is used, it is essential that the type used is sympathetic to the local context, which is largely London

stock. Materials will need to be vetted but we are concerned at initial remarks by the architect that he was keen for a bright yellow brick. This would not be at all suitable.

- The use of Brightfield Road as a pupil entrance. This would have a considerable negative impact on what is a very quiet street and would detract from its character. Brightfield is not a cul-de-sac because it forms a U-shape with Lampmead Road but nor is it a through route so has remained very peaceful. Since the recent conservation area review carried out by Lewisham council, Brightfield (and Lampmead) are now within the Lee Manor conservation area.
- The proposed extensive use of Manor House Gardens as an overflow playground for pupils. We are aware that the Manor House Gardens User Group has held detailed discussions with the applicants and school headteacher over this issue. We back them in their campaign for any park use to be appropriate and supervised, respecting the needs of non-school users.
- The lack of adequate advance consultation by the applicants. They claim to have fully consulted the local community but this is most definitely not the case. Two events displaying early plans did take place last summer. But this was no more than the showing of early drawings and plans with no adequate facilities for the views of the local community to be taken into account. Our early informal comments on the bulk of the building appear to have been ignored. We would contrast this with the extensive consultation carried out over the current refurbishment of the Manor House. This involved regular project meetings with local community organisations, the council and the developers. None of this has happened with the school project. The result is that we have an advanced scheme that will have a seriously damaging impact on the conservation area. It is for this reason that we are calling for the planning department to arrange a public meeting for view to be aired as a first stage to modifying the design.

We do not believe that this is a design that will achieve the close links between the school and its local community that is one of its stated aims. In fact, it threatens to damage better relations that have been created in recent years by the former head teacher, Mr John Ratcliffe.

This will be the largest construction project in or near the conservation area since it was created over 30 years ago. The plans clearly represent an attempt to squeeze and quart into a pint pot both in terms of the bulk of the building and the recreational needs of the pupils in the park. This is illustrated by the following:

- The plans state “The site area is well below that recommended by DCSF for a school of 600 students and is a compact urban site.”
- New construction involves an increase of 2.4 metres in the height of the building to 16.4m.
- New construction involves a 77 per cent increase in building area and a 50 per cent building footprint increase.

The above represent an astonishing admission about the inadequacy of the site and staggering increases in the size of the building.

Unless sensitively handled, this project has enormous potential to do damage to the character of the neighbourhood. At present, it most decidedly does not “maintain or enhance” the character of the CA, as any building is required to do. It is for these reasons that we object to these plans.

Yours sincerely,

Charles Batchelor
Chairman, Lee Manor Society
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