



LBB HERITAGE ADVISORY PANEL CONSULTATION

Response of the Barnet Society

2 May 2020

INTRODUCTION

The Barnet Society is a non-political organisation with some 600 members that seeks to influence local and central government on aspects of planning and the environment in and around the parliamentary constituency of Chipping Barnet.

Founded 75 years ago, we were involved in the designation of the Wood Street & Monken Hadley Conservation Areas (CAs), and have been actively involved with their Conservation Area Advisory Committee (CAAC) ever since. The Society therefore has long experience of both engaging with major applications affecting Chipping Barnet directly with the Council, and with the minutiae of the two CAs via the CAAC which covers both.

We are grateful to have had sight of the review report prepared by Urban Vision.

SECTION 3 – PROPOSALS FOR EXISTING CAACS

Para 4, 1st bullet

We agree that CAAC representations should be submitted via the planning portal (though that will mean more work for the CAAC Secretary and/or members).

It would on occasion be helpful to be allowed to exceed the 2,000-character limit.

Unless there is a statutory definition which precludes it, CAAC comments could be logged as consultee comments to distinguish them from residents' comments. This would be our preference. We note from the Urban Vision review report (section 5.3) that the CAAC in the City of London is recognised as a consultee.

Para 4, 2nd bullet

Although we would regret the loss of face-to-face feedback, CAACs could manage without Planning Officer attendance. In their place, a single Planning Officer point of contact must be nominated. Since our CAAC also comments on breaches and enforcement matters, we would also need access by email and phone to Conservation and Enforcement Officers.

Timely and complete information from Planning Officers about applications and other cases must be guaranteed. The key is to ensure that applications are registered and logged in a timely way; then the date parameters on the advanced search option on the website can be used to create the agenda for each CAAC meeting.

Recommendation 1

We have some doubts about the efficacy of constitutions for small-scale consultative bodies such as individual CAACs. A simple statement or terms of reference defining the Council's and the CAACs' respective responsibilities ought to suffice. We look forward to the opportunity to comment on a draft.

Recommendation 2

This fails to address a key issue for all voluntary groups, which is how to recruit any new members, let alone increase their diversity, without some funds and/or publicity. We would welcome a borough-wide initiative by the Council to engage with a diverse cross-section of residents on the subject of the local environment, heritage and amenities. It might be helpful to link this to the Borough's Growth Strategy.

Other comments

Our concern about recruitment is all the greater in the case of CAs which currently have no CAACs.

How can they be kick-started? This is a big concern and is not adequately addressed. There should be an action to address this, perhaps as suggested above.

SECTION 4 – PROPOSED HAP

Para 4.1, Purpose and Scope

We generally welcome the idea of a HAP and are content with the proposed scope of the panel's business, but have some concerns:

1. One is that it would be the pretext for reducing the employed Conservation Officer team in time. That would be a disaster.
2. Another is that membership and remit are loosely enough drawn that instead of being a heritage voice it could become a rubber stamp or a means of downplaying heritage concerns. Such a panel should advise on the heritage, not make the balanced judgement required by the NPPF – that's the job of the Planning Committee.
3. A third is that, where an application within a CAAC area is considered by the HAP, would due weight be given to the views of each?

One issue that needs teasing out is the discrepancy between cases involving listed/locally listed buildings within and outside CAs. The latter deserve scrutiny from the community, but there will be no mechanism for this unless they are major applications which warrant referral to the HAP. One option would be to convert CAACs to Area Committees. This begs the question of the relationship between CAACs and the Panel (not to mention how they both relate to the Council).

Para 4.3, Membership

With a membership of nine (not all of whom would necessarily live or work in Barnet), the HAP would be spread thinly geographically. Lack of local knowledge would be a weakness, especially in neighbourhoods that lack a CAAC.

The Chairs of the CAACs could sit on the HAP, though this might be asking too much of them in terms of the time commitment. This could go hand in hand with some mechanisms for establishing commonality of purpose and addressing cases where the CAAC and the Panel take a different view. As long as their remits don't clash, such disagreement may well shed useful light on a given case, provided that both bodies give sound reasons for their views.

We like the proposed make-up of the Panel, but there's not a word about payment or expenses. Without one or both, we can't see volunteers of sufficient calibre putting themselves forward.

The Council's Design Champion should have a defined role vis-à-vis the HAP. We would also welcome a Council Heritage Champion.

Para 4.4, Operations

It's unclear to whom the HAP would be accountable: the lead Councillor for Planning?

The relationship between the HAP and the Conservation Officer(s) needs clarifying. Who trumps who?

Para 4.5, Selection of Planning Applications

It would be helpful to know what proportion of planning applications would be regarded as significant enough for the HAP to be involved. In practice, we suspect that the HAP's limited time availability will dictate the number of cases it can consider, regardless of their significance.

Para 5.1, Resources: the HAP

We note that although the HAP may result in a net reduction of Planning Officer time, the HAP would also require administrative support. Our experience of Residents' Forums, Planning Committees and other Council bodies is that this would not be negligible. Our experience in design and construction-related professional capacities (outside the Barnet Society) with such bodies as CABE, RIBA, Historic England and English Heritage suggests that the costs of recruiting and servicing review panels is not to be under-estimated.

Para 5.2, Resources: Training

We welcome the suggestion of training (especially if it would be with officers and councillors on occasion).

However, our professional experience elsewhere (as mentioned above) is that effective training can involve considerable costs in terms of preparation (whether in-house or out-sourced), venue hire, organisation of seminars or study trips and documentation.

Other comments

We would like to see a Borough-wide Design Review Panel, working in tandem with the HAP on projects of mutual concern.