

Committee Report
Planning Committee on 3 February, 2010

Case No. 09/1470

RECEIVED: 12 June, 2009

WARD: Dollis Hill

PLANNING AREA: Willesden Consultative Forum

LOCATION: Dollis Hill House Gladstone Park, Dollis Hill Lane, London, NW2 6HT

PROPOSAL: Listed Building Consent for demolition of Dollis Hill House (as accompanied by Design and Access Statement prepared by DPP Heritage, and Biodiversity Survey Report prepared by Aspect Ecology)

APPLICANT: London Borough of Brent

CONTACT: DPP Heritage

PLAN NO'S: 1035708/01; 573/03; 8772/SK1 and unnumbered "Site Interpretation"

RECOMMENDATION

Grant Listed Building Consent subject to Referral to the Government Office for London.

EXISTING

The application site relates to Dollis Hill House, a Grade II listed building, located within Gladstone Park. The site is accessed off Dollis Hill Lane.

PROPOSAL

Listed Building Consent sought for the demolition of Dollis Hill House.

HISTORY

95/0798: Full Planning Permission sought for internal alterations and external additions, including demolition of two-storey rear extension and change of use of existing building to provide restaurant and bar and first-floor meeting room and staff accommodation, car parking and landscaping - Withdrawn, 02/08/1995.

95/0816: Listed Building Consent sought for internal alterations and external additions, including demolition of two-storey rear extension and change of use of existing building to provide restaurant and bar and first-floor meeting room and staff accommodation - Withdrawn, 02/08/1995.

LM36371377: Full Planning Permission sought for reconstruction of garden wall - Granted, 30/04/1980.

LM36381378: Listed Building Consent sought for demolition and reconstruction of existing wall - Granted, 27/03/1980.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

National Planning Policy Guidance

Planning Policy Guidance 15: Planning and the Historic Environment

In essence PPG15 acknowledges a general presumption in favour of the preservation of Listed

Buildings unless a convincing case can be made for alteration or demolition. Where works are proposed to a listed building that it is necessary for these to be justified, showing that they are desirable or necessary. Any proposals for alteration or demolition will, it states, be subject to "careful scrutiny".

PPG15 sets out four issues that are generally relevant to the consideration of all Listed Building Consent applications:

1. The importance of the building, its intrinsic architectural and historic interest and rarity both in national and local terms. (The historic interest is due to age and rarity.)
2. The particular physical features of the building which justify its listed status.
3. The building's setting and its contribution to the local scene, which may be very important, e.g. where it forms an element in a group, park or townscape or where it shares particular architectural forms or details with other buildings nearby;
4. Whether substantial community benefits will arise for the community, in particular by contributing to the economic regeneration of the area or the enhancement of the environment.

PPG15 consider the approach to the demolition of Listed Buildings. It notes that only "very occasionally" will demolition be unavoidable and the destruction of Listed Buildings is rarely necessary for reasons of good planning but rather the result of neglect or failure to incorporate them into new development.

PPG15 advises that consent is contingent upon a need to provide clear and convincing evidence that all reasonable efforts have been made to find a use for the building, whether existing or new uses. This includes evidence that some form of charitable or community ownership is not possible; or that a substantial community benefit might arise from the replacement of the Listed Building. The case that redevelopment may be economically more attractive than repair and reuse is not necessarily a sufficient reason for consent to be granted for demolition.

The policy guidance note underlines three aspects that must be addressed in applications for total or substantial demolition of a Listed Building, namely:

1. The condition of the existing building and the cost of repair/maintenance in relation to importance and value derived from the use: this must be based upon consistent and long-term assumptions and include the possibility of tax allowances and of grants from public or charitable sources. The Listed Building may also offer proven technical performance, physical attractiveness and functional spaces that, in an age of rapid change, may outlast the short-lived and inflexible technical specifications that have sometimes shaped new developments.
2. The adequacy of efforts made to retain the building in its current use or to find compatible alternative uses: In effect, the Secretaries of State must be satisfied that real efforts have been made, without success, to continue the present use or to find compatible new uses for the building. This should include the offer of the unrestricted freehold of the building on the open market at a realistic price reflecting its condition.
3. The merits of alternative proposals for the sites: the architectural merits of the replacement building may not be sufficient in themselves to justify demolition: The advice states that there may very exceptionally be situations whereby the community benefits that arise from the new development arising from demolition must be weighed against the arguments in favour of preservation. It continues that even in this case, it will often be feasible to incorporate Listed Buildings within new development and this must be carefully considered.

London Borough of Brent Adopted Unitary Development Plan 2004

Policy BE22 - Protection of Statutory Listed Building

SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT

N/A

CONSULTATION

29/06/2009 - 20/07/2009

Site Notices Displayed: 02/07/2009 - 23/07/2009

Public Consultation

87 neighbours consulted - 13 letters of objection received on the following grounds:

- Queried as to whether a Council/private enterprise partnership could be formed to fund the restoration and to continue to finance the building.
- Queried whether there is scope to retain part of the ruin and utilise this area for plays.
- Dollis Hill House should be used as an arts centre/community use.
- Loss of an important symbol of local history.

One letter of support received. Suggested that the historic interest could be marked by a plaque or small statue.

Internal Consultation

Landscape Team - requested a Full Tree Protection Method Statement as there are trees in close proximity to the existing building.

External Consultation

Dollis Hill Art Group

Dollis Hill Art Group currently used the stables gallery and need room to expand. They would like to see Dollis Hill House restored and used as an Arts & Community Centre.

Greater London Authority

No comments to make as the application is not one classed as strategic by the Town and Country Planning (Mayor of London) Order 2008.

Brent Arts Council

Objections raised on the following grounds:

- The demolition of Dollis Hill House as it would result in the loss of an important symbol of local history.
- Prior to the fires, the House was used as an Arts and Community facility and as a retreat for Prime Minister William Gladstone.
- Brent Arts Council is the trustee for the Stables Arts Centre and Gallery (once the stables block for the house). Existing space is limited making it difficult to expand activities in accordance with Brent Council's corporate strategy, in particular with regard to working with youth organisations and older people, due to access constraints.
- The Council has not exhausted all possible avenues for restoration.

Gladstone Park Consultative Committee

Objections raised on the following grounds:

- The demolition of Dollis Hill House would result in the loss of one of the very few historic buildings left in Brent.

- Prior to the fires, the House was used as an arts and community facility by local art groups and other organisations.
- Brent Arts Council is the trustee for the Stables Arts Centre and Gallery (once the stables block for the house). Existing space is limited, making it difficult to expand activities in accordance with Brent Council's corporate strategy, in particular with regard to working with youth organisations and older people, due to access constraints.
- GPCC would like to see the House refurbished and put to both arts and community use with the Council more seriously considering undertaking the funding or part of the costs.

The Georgian Group

Objections raised to the demolition of Dollis Hill House as a "convincing" case for its demolition, as set out in PPG15, has not been met as there is no structural report to demonstrate the structural imperative for demolition.

Suggest that it is feasible, in the short to medium term, for the House to be preserved as a established ruin and serve as an eye-catcher in Gladstone Park. Demolition is premature given the level of active interest in the building's preservation.

Dawn Butler MP (Labour MP for Brent South)

Objections raised to the demolition of Dollis Hill House as it is not considered that there has been careful consideration of all the viable options.

Dollis Hill House Trust

Objections raised on the following grounds:

- The requirements of PPG15 for demolition of a Listed Building have not been made.
- The Council has not made adequate efforts to save the building.
- The historical associations connected to the house remain today.
- Details of the cost of bringing the building back into weatherproof use are not provided. Instead the costs quoted are for complete projects which are higher than the costs to bring the building back into a usable condition.
- The effectiveness of the Council's marketing exercise has not been evaluated.
- The application does not refer to the Heritage Lottery Funding (HLF) stage one grant.
- The Council has not put any of its own funds into Dollis Hill House other than the insurance monies.

English Heritage

English Heritage have provided the following observations:

They acknowledge the poor condition of the house but have advised that they are not convinced that the case for demolition has been fully satisfied and wishes to be satisfied that all possible options for retention or reuse, in whole or in part have been fully tested. Such options include the possibility of the retention of elements of the existing fabric, such as the Portico.

The above comments have been addressed by the Council's consultants and referred to within the Remarks section of this Committee Report.

REMARKS

1.0 Background and History

Dollis Hill House was statutory listed at Grade II on 23 January 1974 because of its role in the life of Gladstone. The description on the statutory list is as follows:

"Built in 1825 by the Finches, a Willesden family, and later became the property of the Earl of Aberdeen and a favourite residence of Mr Gladstone, who stayed as a guest here for long periods between 1882 - 1896 (plaque). A square, 2-storey, 3-window House in yellow stock brick, with hipped slate roof and boxed eaves. Entrance front: wide central doorway and double door with fanlight, in stucco porch arcaded at sides, with pilaster treatment and rosettes in frieze, supporting cast iron balcony with stucco piers. To the right the front is built out to the line of the porch, with cement cornice and blocking course (probably later extension). The east front overlooking the park is plain with grounds floor windows altered to doors, and wood and glass verandah for restaurant. North front has projection to left with cornice, as entrance front. West front towards Dollis Hill has service extensions. Graded for its historic rather than architectural importance".

Dollis Hill House was declared surplus to the needs of Brent Council in 1994. The building has unfortunately struggled to provide viable accommodation for new uses ever since. As a result of extremely destructive fires (suspected arson) in June 1995, April 1996 and a third fire in June 2003, the building is a burnt-out, derelict shell. The plight of Dollis Hill House is not unusual nationally, and is recognised in English Heritage's survey of large Houses in publicly owned parks. **"Park Mansions at Risk in London"** (2004) (The Drury Partnership).

The building is has been included on English Heritage's, Heritage at Risk Register since 1993; the 2008 entry for the building identifies it as a vacant property and its condition is recognised as "Very Bad". The House is currently listed at the "Priority Category A", which is defined by English Heritage as the highest priority for a building which is deteriorating rapidly with no solution to secure its future.

Since 1994, officers have made a number of attempts to secure partners to deliver the rehabilitation of the listed House but none of these options have proven to be successful and/or viable. Unfortunately the application for the demolition of the structurally compromised Dollis Hill House has become the only realistic safe option.

Reasons for Decline

Dollis Hill House has suffered the same way as many Houses in public parks throughout the country. Its vulnerable location has made it the victim of vandalism and arson attacks and its situation within publicly owned Metropolitan Open Land means that its development potential is severely limited. The viability of the House for reuse is also seriously compromised by its relatively remote location in terms of public transport; the lack of parking also restricts the accessibility and versatility of the site. These constraints mean that the Council has found it extremely difficult to secure development partners to find a viable new use. Unfortunately, the House has also suffered from a sustained insidious decline described below:

A summary chronology of the recent history of the building from this time is set out below:

1994 June	Declared surplus to needs by Council.
1994 October	Proposal by Whitbread PLC for reuse as a public House restaurant was resisted by a significant lobby of local residents.
1995 June	First arson attack.
1996 June	Application submitted for Whitbread proposal (withdrawn August 1995).
1996 April	Second arson attack.
1999 June	Torkilsden & Barclay Leisure Management report concludes that reuse is unlikely to succeed without substantial subsidy from Council.
2000 March	Property marketed on open market for nine months.

- 2000** November Council agreed a four-month delay to allow setting up of Dollis Hill House Trust (DHHT).
- 2001** November Council agrees £30,000 from insurance fund for DHHT to develop business plan and funding applications.
- 2002** September Council agrees £28,350 from insurance fund to further develop DHHT business plan.
- 2003** June Third arson attack.
- 2003** December Council Executive considers future of Dollis Hill House. Decision to demolish.
- 2004** Spring Brent Primary Care Trust (PCT) expresses interest in site as a community health centre.
- 2004** June Gladstone Park Heritage Lottery Funded restoration scheme completed.
- 2005** May Brent PCT decides not to progress their proposal.
- 2005** September DHHT agrees to submit revised business case for consideration.
- 2006** October Council agrees to second marketing exercise.
- 2007** June Marketing exercise completed and no viable proposal obtained. One of the bidders, Training for Life (TFL), given three months to submit a feasibility study for the future of the House.
- 2007** September Council officers instructed to prepare application for Listed Building consent to demolish subject to outcome of TFL study
- 2008** February Council Executive gave TFL twelve months to develop full business plan, secure capital funding and obtain planning permission.
- 2008** December TFL not able to progress their proposal due to funding constraints.
- 2009** March Council instruct DPP Heritage to submit application for Listed Building consent for demolition of House.

2.0 Efforts to secure Retention and/or Adaptive Reuse

PPG15 advises that consent for demolition is contingent upon a need to provide clear and convincing evidence that all reasonable efforts have been made to find a use for the building, whether existing or new uses. This includes evidence that some form of charitable or community ownership is not possible; or that a substantial community benefit might arise from the replacement of the Listed Building.

The Council has committed many officer hours and significant financial resources in trying to identify a suitably experienced and resourced partner to help in securing a future for the House. The Council has tried two major marketing exercises advised by experienced estate consultants. The two exercises in 2000 and 2007 were rigorous, comprehensive and open but did not attract a partner with a sustainable, viable proposal for the future of the House that would have complied with the planning requirements of the House's Public Park setting. Unfortunately most of the proposals submitted to the Council were predicated on the transfer of the House ownership for a nominal minimal sum and a large grant to support the restoration. In 2005 the GLA indicated that they would match funding of any monies invested by the Council in the restoration. However, the grant aid was never forthcoming and the offer was withdrawn.

Although the marketing exercise did not secure a new owner and/or appropriate reuse for the building, the Council and technical officers have supported the initiation and development of two serious proposals for the House. Unfortunately, although many hours have been expended to guide these proposals towards a successful scheme; the financial viability and poor structural condition of the building have prevented resolution and delivery. The schemes were:

PCT Health Centre

The Health Centre scheme, based on a Conservation Management plan and initial survey work in collaboration with the Preservation Trust, proposed a full conversion and restoration with some sensitive reticent extension. The scheme was fully developed but after consideration by Quantity Surveyors, the cost of the historic restoration made the project too expensive.

Training For Life

Training for Life (TFL) represented the best opportunity for the future of Dollis Hill House, the organisation is experienced in the sensitive rehabilitation of Listed Buildings and has completed a number of projects elsewhere in London and the Country. The proposal by TFL was for the conversion of the House into a catering training facility. After a year's work, the organisation and Council officers came to the conclusion that the cost of restoration, the difficult location and withdrawal of the GLA funding offer, meant a scheme was not possible at Dollis Hill House.

A number of surveys have been undertaken to assess the condition of the House and the cost of repair and reconstruction. The House was assessed in July 2003 by WPG Surveys where it was reported that "the basic condition of the building is that the brick remains, but the timber elements (floors, roof, staircase, etc.) and finishes are either destroyed or badly damaged (except in the cellar and parts of the north extension)". In 2003 -2004 Integrated Surveying Partnership (Commissioned by the Dollis Hill House Trust) estimated that the costs of repairs to bring the ruined building back into a secure and weatherproof shell where further fit-out would then facilitate a new use, were in the order of £2.8 million. Subsequently in 2007, it was established that these costs had risen to £5.5 million (survey commissioned by Training for Life).

Unfortunately, after so much work, the Council has come to the conclusion that if the PCT and TFL, with all their resources, experience and skill, cannot deliver a future for the House, then it is difficult to see which organisation can. Whilst the Council has been developing its response to the criterion of PPG15's sequential test, the Chinese Welfare Trust approached the Council in October 2009 with some suggestions for a new proposal. Officers invited the organisation to come and explain their scheme but they were unable to develop their ideas and withdrew from the meeting. The Council has not received anything concrete since and cannot delay the planning process based on a verbal intention – the Council is not convinced that the CWT can deliver a sustainable viable solution.

Future Commercial Viability

The Councils property consultants who carried out the 2007 marketing exercise also assessed the future of Dollis Hill House as a commercial proposition unfortunately their conclusions do not suggest a positive future for the remaining derelict structure. They suggested:

"Even if the property was offered at a nil premium, potential leaseholders would not be confident of being able to generate sufficient income or secure appropriate funding to pay for the long-term maintenance of the property. Should the building be refurbished then the cost of undertaking such works (the Training for Life Study budgeted for £5.5 million, though this did include an extension) would represent a significant 'conservation deficit'."

3.0 Testing the Policy Case for Demolition

The case for demolition can only be made if the demands of the sequential test are strictly met - National Policy Guidance PPG15 sets out the fundamental issues that need to be considered for all applications calling for the demolition of a Listed Building. The criteria are set out below,

together with a summary of the Council's consultants' assessment of the application for demolition of Dollis Hill House in relation to these issues. The cases are made in more detail in the Design and Access statement and letter to English Heritage by the Council's consultants DPP Heritage. The sequential test requires assessment of:

PPG 15 (Para. 3.5) Criteria (i) “The importance of the building, its intrinsic architectural and historic interest and rarity, in both national and local terms.”

Dollis Hill House was listed for its special historical interest and association with William Ewart Gladstone. The listing was not initiated by the architectural character of the House, indeed Dollis Hill House is considered to be an unexceptional piece of architecture. The Council and its consultants argue that the listing was made because of an association with an historic person, so although the demolition of the building is regrettable, it does not remove the historic association or the celebration of Gladstone, as the park is named after him. The Council is proposing that some interpretative material will be available either on an independent display or attached to the surviving stables complex.

PPG 15 (Para 3.5) Criteria (ii) “The particular physical features of the building which justify its inclusion in the list.”

As the statutory listing description establishes, even in good condition, the House was not included on the list for its architecture. Therefore, now that the building has been significantly altered and ravaged by three fires there is nothing physical left to justify retention of the seriously compromised derelict structure.

PPG 15 Criteria (iii) The building's setting and its contribution to the local scene

Dollis Hill House does not form part of or contribute to the character and quality of an associated group of other Listed Buildings. The House stands within what would originally have been its own landscaped grounds, independent of the Park. The House was not laid out to respond to any part of Gladstone Park or any axis or landscape and natural features. The House is at the top of the Hill but was not composed to be the focus of views from around the park location.

PPG 15 Criteria (iii) The extent to which the proposed works would bring substantial benefits to the community. In particular by contributing to economic regeneration.

The demolition of the remains of Dollis Hill House will not in itself bring a regeneration benefit to the community of Brent. However, the building is in a very poor structural condition and is difficult to keep secure, therefore posing a threat to anyone who might get inside. At present the security and structural stability of the House is a financial burden to the Council and the demolition of the remains would enable an area of the Park to be brought back into public access and provide amenity for park users that is not now available behind the security fence.

Should the consent be permitted for demolition it is proposed to landscape the remaining space expressing the footprint of the building in a combination of hard and soft landscape surfaces. This will indicate that the building once stood on the site and will be explained in any interpretive materials either directly on site or more appropriately within the stables. Your officers have prepared a preliminary draft proposal. The resultant landscape space will provide a much more positive and usable amenity for the users of the park.

It has been suggested by English Heritage that an element of the remaining structure, in particular the entrance Portico, should be retained as a memory of the House. The Council has appointed structural engineers to assess the surviving elements of the House and they are of the opinion that the most suitable elements for retention are structurally compromised and their condition has deteriorated too much for viable restoration. In any event, the basement beneath the remaining structure makes the retention of walls and/or the Portico a very complex and difficult construction problem.

4.0 Conclusions

The recommendation to seek consent for the demolition of Dollis Hill House has not been reached easily and is the regrettable but inevitable result of a series of conspiring factors, they are:

1. The architecture of the House is not exceptional and, as the 1974 statutory listing describes, the significance of the House is through an historic association, not its built fabric and architecture.
2. The House's role in the Park has always been secondary and, because of vandalism and fire, it is now a significant blight on the local landscape.
3. The original, undistinguished House is now a burnt-out, derelict shell which seriously reduces its architectural relevance and structural integrity.
4. The building cannot provide the accommodation, location and development potential for a viable reuse.
5. Despite repeated efforts by experienced and well-resourced professionals, it has been impossible to develop a viable, sustainable, long-term commercial proposition for the remaining structure.

RECOMMENDATION: Refer to Secretary of State

- (1) The proposed development is in general accordance with policies contained in the:-

Brent Unitary Development Plan 2004
Central Government Guidance

Relevant policies in the Adopted Unitary Development Plan are those in the following chapters:-

Built Environment: in terms of the protection and enhancement of the environment
Open Space and Recreation: to protect and enhance the provision of sports, leisure and nature conservation

CONDITIONS/REASONS:

- (1) The development to which this permission relates must be begun not later than the expiration of three years beginning on the date of this permission.

Reason: To conform with the requirements of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

- (2) Prior to works commencing on the demolition of Dollis Hill House, details of the hard and soft landscaping works which form part of the site interpretation shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The approved landscape scheme shall be implemented within six months of the demolition of Dollis Hill House. Such details shall include:

(a) the identification and protection of existing trees and shrubs not directly affected

by the building works and which are to be retained;

(b) soft landscaping planting schedule and layout plan (including details of species, size, location, density and number);

(c) areas of hard landscape works and proposed materials;

(d) details of the proposed arrangements for the maintenance of the landscape works.

Any planting that is part of the approved scheme that within a period of five years after planting is removed, dies or becomes seriously damaged or diseased, shall be replaced in the next planting season, and all planting shall be replaced with others of a similar size and species and in the same positions, unless the Local Planning Authority first gives written consent to any variation.

Reason: To ensure a satisfactory appearance and setting for the proposed development and ensure that it enhances the visual amenity of the area.

INFORMATIVES:

None Specified

REFERENCE DOCUMENTS:

Brent's UDP 2004

Planning Policy Guidance 15: Planning and the Historic Environment

Letters of objection

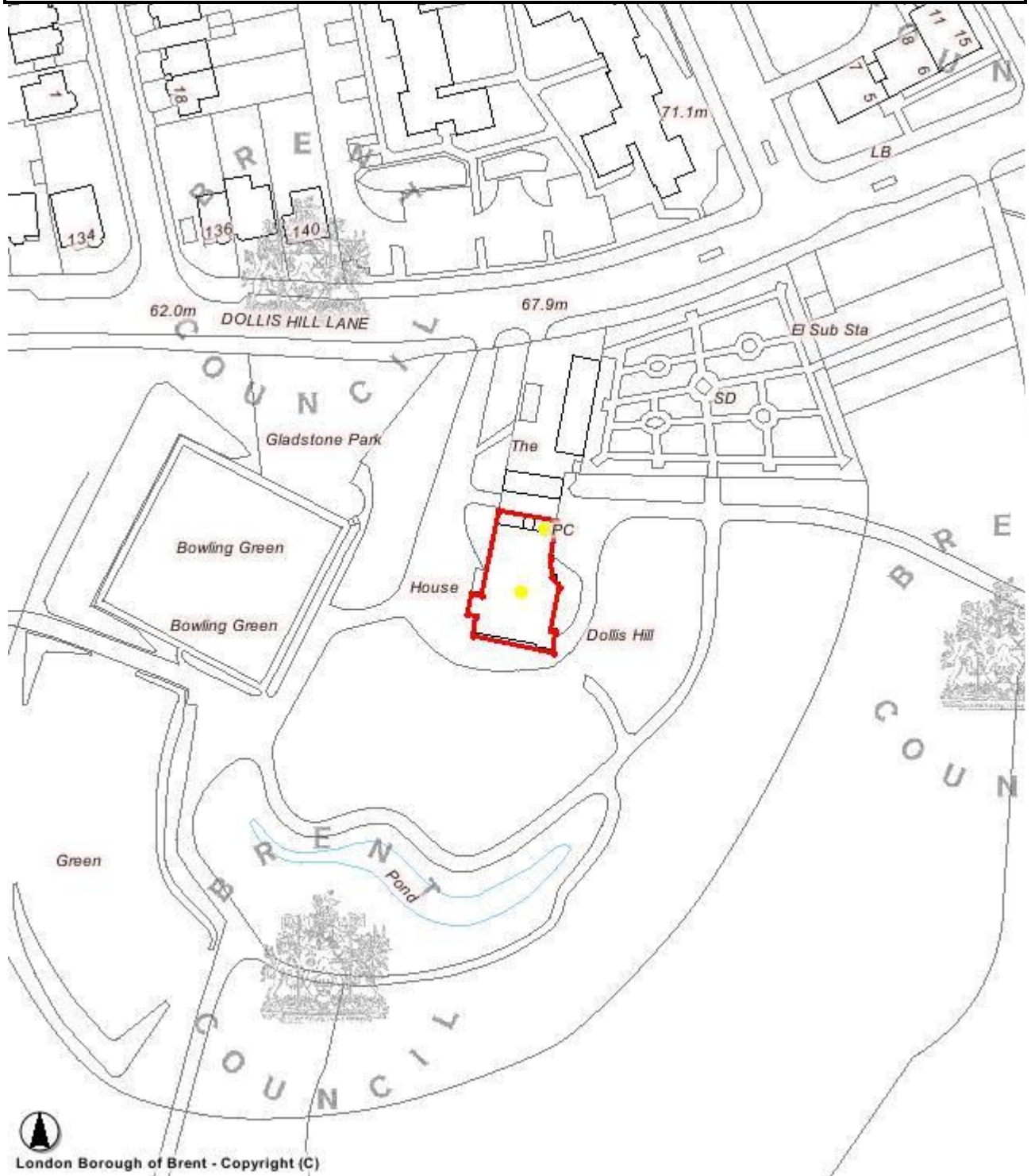
Any person wishing to inspect the above papers should contact Victoria McDonagh, The Planning Service, Brent House, 349 High Road, Wembley, Middlesex, HA9 6BZ, Tel. No. 020 8937 5337



Planning Committee Map

Site address: Dollis Hill House Gladstone Park, Dollis Hill Lane, London, NW2 6HT

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