

The 21 Broadlands Hearing:
The clash between new and old money
by Richard Webber

In April? a minibus of Society activists leaves Broadlands Road for a hearing in Wood Green. This hearing was organised by Her Majesty's Planning Inspectorate to arbitrate on a planning appeal. The appellant had been refused permission by Haringey to replace the Arts and Crafts house at 21 Broadlands Road with a palace fit for one of the city's most successful developers.

Did it prove the dull day I anticipated? On the contrary, it combined the excitement of court television drama and the cup final victory of Wigan Athletic over Manchester City.

Contesting the appeal was a team recruited by the former head of Minerva who has achieved widespread media coverage from having "given" £1m to Labour's campaign to win the next General Election. His prize would be permission to build a trophy house of some 12,000 square feet, of a quality we're told "is rarely seen in Highgate", for his own occupation.

Andrew Rosenfeld is represented by eleven players in a uniform strip of charcoal suit and tieless blue shirt. This team is here to achieve a result, not to enjoy a workout. Facing them are two officers that Haringey Council has sent to the street's defence, a planning officer and a conservation officer on a short term contract. We amateurs sit on the cross benches. Expecting to be part spectators, part substitutes, we are called into action early in the first half of the day. Clearly in command of the rules of engagement, the inspector/referee was authoritative not bossy, approachable yet clear in setting out how the appeal should be conducted.

The contest hinges on Rosenfeld's ability to defend the objection that the proposed mansion is excessive in size and that its pastiche neo-Jacobean design clashes with the restrained Arts and Crafts style of the surrounding houses. Subsidiary skirmishes address the energy implication of tear down and rebuild, the impact on water courses, and damage to trees and wildlife.

The appellants' defence is that the house's character had been compromised by later additions – but could they not be demolished? – and that the house was built speculatively – but could that not equally be said of Nash's Regents Park?

At four o'clock the inspector announces that she will make a site visit. The final scene takes place in a Broadlands Road as frozen as Haringey officers' salaries to visit No 21 and the neighbouring houses. By now we rate our chance of success at 35%, but in May news arrives: the Inspector has decided in our favour. The celebration justifies a street garden party. Meanwhile the press reports that the appellant, who was living with his family at No 23, has left to live in one of Nash's speculative developments in Regents Park.

