

Another Reprieve for the Highgate Bowl

The Planning Inspector who presided over the recent Planning Appeal Inquiry announced on 16 March 2012, that the appeals made on behalf of the landowner, Capital Gardens Ltd, were dismissed. They had appealed against the refusal by Haringey of their proposal to build three luxury houses on what is at present the Highgate Garden Centre, otherwise known as Southwood Nurseries.

The land within the Highgate Conservation Area has therefore just received another reprieve from the bulldozer. Yet the current position following these dismissals should be seen as probably no more than a temporary respite in the struggle to make something better of the Highgate Bowl than just an opportunity to turn a nice profit for the owners of the various parts of it. The Southwood Nurseries site has already been turned into what looks like a builder's yard.

The Highgate Society is very aware of the difficulties in seeking to make good use of this land, a key part of the Highgate Bowl, but we firmly believe that there must be a better way than this in which to manage the heritage of future generations of Highgate people, and of Highgate Village itself. We have fought against building on this swathe of open land behind Highgate High Street on every occasion, - and there have been many, - since the 1960's, because we think that what happens to this piece of open land affects Highgate Village and its people enormously.

While we fully recognise the rights of the owners of the land, we think that there must be a way to use so much time, energy, talent and goodwill to better purpose than upon such misconceived and unpopular schemes, so clearly against the public will.

The task before us is to bring everyone together to try to find that better purpose, and to make it happen.

For the moment, we are cautiously pleased, but in welcoming this very sensible decision we remain aware that it provides only a starting-off point. The process of defining and achieving that appropriate community purpose, and marshalling the will of the community of Highgate Village behind it, is the only way that a better solution than just more luxury housing can be realised.