# Olympic rower opposes gym extension plans in Henley over privacy and tree concerns



In Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, a planning dispute has arisen involving former Olympic rower Miriam Luke MBE and her neighbours, centred on proposals to construct a new gym studio in a residential garden. The planning application, submitted on 3 March, involves replacing an existing garage and shed with a single-storey side extension intended to function as a contemporary garden building with gym and shower facilities.

Ms Luke, 60, who won a silver medal at the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games as part of the British women's quadruple scull rowing team, has raised objections to the proposed development on the grounds of privacy, noise, and its potential impact on neighbouring trees. She expressed particular concern about the proximity of the extension to the boundary fence and questioned what fate would befall two tall trees—a horse chestnut that she describes as diseased and ivy-clad, and an evergreen—that currently provide privacy and shade to her property, including shading her solar panels in the mornings. In her objection, she said: "There are currently two very tall trees, a diseased, ivy clad, horse chestnut and an evergreen. What will happen to the two trees when the studio/gym is built? Currently we enjoy the privacy they create for our gardens and house however they are also very tall and obscure sunshine from our solar panels for a few hours in the morning."

The neighbouring homeowner behind the application, Lucy Marsh, seeks to build the extension featuring an entrance hall, snug/study, open-plan living and kitchen area, utility room, shower room, and a garden room measuring four by seven metres intended for gym use. The architectural firm Simon March Architecture, which prepared the design and access statement, asserted that the plans had taken great care to avoid impacting neighbouring properties, stating that "careful consideration has been given to ensuring that the adjacent bungalows are not affected by the extension and that their right to life is respected." The garden room is designed to be offset from the boundary by at least 1.3 metres, use possible timber cladding and have a flat roof to reduce visual impact.

Other neighbours have also lodged their objections. Samantha Petrie voiced concerns that the garden room, designated as a gym/studio, along with a shower facility, might be used as a rental space such as an Airbnb or for public classes, potentially generating noise disturbances. The Henley Society, a local civic group dedicated to preserving the town’s heritage, has expressed fears that the proposed extension could effectively double the size of the property and result in light pollution, recommending refusal of the application until more details are provided.

At a South Oxfordshire District Council planning meeting on 8 April, the proposal proved divisive. Both the Mayor of Henley, Rory Hunt, and Councillor Michelle Thomas spoke against the development. Councillor Hunt described the project as "overdevelopment" and highlighted concerns about the significant impact on the existing trees and a high potential for light pollution. Councillor Thomas emphasised the studio's proximity to neighbours’ boundaries and the visual intrusion it would create. She noted, "The studio sits very high because of its position so it will be very visible for those people who want to enjoy their garden," and cautioned against its possible conversion into an Airbnb-style accommodation.

Conversely, Deputy Mayor Tom Buckley did not see the plans as likely to cause significant harm to neighbouring properties. Councillor Laurence Plant proposed that planting replacement vegetation could mitigate concerns raised about the loss of existing trees and privacy. Following discussions, the committee ultimately recommended approval of the application on the condition that a replacement planting scheme be implemented.

The local council has not commented on the application publicly, citing its status as an ongoing planning consideration. Both Ms Luke and Ms Marsh were approached for comment prior to publication.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.britishrowing.org/2023/12/henley-rowing-club-president-miriam-luke-awarded-mbe/> - This URL supports the claim that Miriam Luke, a former Olympic rower, was awarded an MBE for her services to women's rowing. It highlights her achievements in the sport and her role in promoting women's rowing.
* <https://www.henleystandard.co.uk/news/henley-on-thames/194162/rowing-pioneer-receives-honour.html> - This article further corroborates Miriam Luke's MBE award for her contributions to women's rowing and mentions her being a pioneer in the field.
* <https://hwr.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/HWR-Miriam-Luke-MBE.pdf> - This PDF document from Henley Women's Regatta congratulates Miriam Luke on her MBE, providing background on her involvement and leadership in women's rowing.
* <https://www.henleystandard.co.uk/news/turning-back-the-pages/194124/news-review-part-one-henley-hit-by-floods-burglars-ransack-church-fight.html> - While this article does not directly address the gym studio proposal, it provides context about local news and developments in Henley-on-Thames, which could be relevant to understanding the environment in which such proposals are considered.
* <https://www.henleyherald.com/2025/01/03/our-2024-review/> - This article offers a review of significant events in Henley-on-Thames for 2024, including Miriam Luke's MBE, but does not directly address the specific planning dispute mentioned in the article.