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THE TWENTIETH CENTURY SOCIETY

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Founded in 1979
as the Thirties Society
to protect British
Architecture and Design
after 1914

19 January 2011

Dear Susie Saraiva

Hammersmith Town Hall, King Street, London W6 9JU
Your ref 2010/03465/FUL and 2010/03466/LBC
Our ref 02 04 17

Many thanks for consulting the Society on the above applications.

The Society **objects** to these applications. We believe that the proposed redevelopment scheme will have a detrimental impact on the setting of the Grade II Listed Hammersmith Town Hall and that this cannot be outweighed by the wider public benefits of the proposed development (*Planning Policy Statement 5 (PPS5), Policy HE10.1*).

The reasons for our position are presented below.

Understanding the significance of the Listed building with regard to any impact on its setting

The *Historic Environment Planning Practice Guide* (Department for Communities and Local Government, English Heritage, and the Department for Sports Media and Culture, March 2010) particularly stresses that '*understanding the significance of a heritage asset will enable the contribution made by its setting to be understood*' and that this should be '*the starting point for any proper evaluation of the implications of development affecting setting*' (§119).

In this connection, it is particularly important to note that Hammersmith Town Hall is listed as a fine example of an interwar town hall by one of the specialists in the genre, E. Berry Webber, a specialist in municipal buildings best known for his work at Southampton and Dagenham. As its list description points out, '*Webber adopted a fashionable, but distinctive, Neo-classical style showing a fusion of modern Scandinavian and Dutch motifs combined with English Regency ones*'. In addition to its sequence of fine interiors, the Town Hall is notable for its bold presence. Following Webber's stylistic and material choices, this is a building distinctive for

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its overall massing and elegant articulation of its elevations. It is precisely in this context that the impact of the proposed development has been assessed here, in accordance with the *Practice Guide* to the PPS5 (§119).

The scale of the new development and its proximity to the Listed building

The Society is deeply concerned about the heights of the proposed new buildings and their proximity to the Listed building. Not only are the tallest buildings of the proposed development truly ‘gigantic’, but they are also located very close to the Town Hall. As a consequence, the proposed new development would completely overshadow the Listed building and, in fact, be out of scale in comparison to all existing buildings around the application site.

The *Practice Guide* to the PPS5 points out:

‘The design of a development affecting the setting of a heritage asset may play an important part in determining its impact. The contribution of setting to the historic significance of an asset can be sustained or enhanced if new buildings are carefully designed to respect their setting by virtue of their scale, proportion, height, massing, alignment and use of materials. This does not mean that new buildings have to copy their older neighbours in detail, but rather that they should together form a harmonious group.’ (§121)

Regrettably, the scale, height, and massing of the proposed new buildings offer no opportunity for the creation of a harmonious group together with the Listed building.

The proposed link to Furnivall Gardens

The Society strongly objects to the proposed link to Furnivall Gardens. Although in principle this could offer certain public benefits, the actual scheme falls short of the high design and place-making standards expected by any new development in such close proximity to a significant Listed building. In fact, should this link be constructed, parts of the basis of the Listed building’s west and north elevations would be visually obstructed. Given the extent of this detrimental intervention and the fact that this concerns the way in which the building meets the ground, this would be a very serious compromise as regards the appreciation of the Listed building. Equally detrimental would be the impact of the proposed bridge and also the proposed landscaping of the northwest end of Furnivall Gardens. Details of these points are presented below:

- *West elevation*
As illustrated in the application drawings, in order to reach the necessary height for the proposed bridge over Great West Road, the link to Furnivall Gardens would need to start rising virtually from King Street. As a result, the base of the Listed building would be visually partially obstructed throughout the full length of its west elevation. The rising height of the proposed pathway and its close proximity to the Listed building particularly aggravate its negative impact on the Listed building.
- *North elevation*
The demolition of the Town Hall Extension could be welcomed, as it would create the opportunity for better appreciation of the north elevation of the

Listed building, facing King Street, and therefore could re-establish a better relation between the Listed building and a principal thoroughfare of the city, Sadly, this potential positive outcome is severely compromised by the actual design of the new proposals.

Although the obstruction of parts of the building's plinths could be in principle accepted, the extension of the new steps both to the east and to the west is contrary to what one would expect for an access element to a classic building of the type of Hammersmith Town Hall. This 'spreading out' means that the proposed new front steps would take on a primary role, rather than being subsidiary to the Listed building's elevation, and the basis of the Listed building would be 'buried' behind the proposed landscaping of the new square between the Listed building and King Street. The negative impact of this is further aggravated by the similar impact throughout the west elevation of the building as discussed above.

- *New bridge over Great West Road*
The proposed bridge could be a welcome intervention if considered on its own, however, we cannot see how this can be compatible with the Listed building. Considering its close proximity to the Listed building, we believe that this would again have a detrimental impact on the setting of the Listed building as it would constitute a visual obstruction for pedestrians and vehicle passengers approaching the Listed building from the west side of Great West Road.
- *Furnivall Gardens re-landscaping*
The proposed re-landscaping of the northwest corner of Furnivall Gardens would create a solid visual barrier as regards the appreciation of the Listed building from Furnivall Gardens and the Thames riverfront. Although at present there are trees screening this end of the Gardens, these constitute a permeable and considerably less antagonistic barrier between Furnivall Gardens and the Listed building.

In summary, should these proposals be granted planning permission and listed building consent, two of the sides of the Listed building that are at present visible (west and south), with ample free space for their full appreciation, would be significantly compromised. As regards the north elevation of the Listed building, although the proposed demolition of the Town Hall Extension would make the top part of this elevation visible again, we consider the visual impact of the proposals on the basis of the building to be detrimental. It is for all these reasons that the Society believes that the negative impact of the proposals on the setting of the Listed building cannot be outweighed by any wider public benefits offered by the new development.

We note that specific aspects of the submitted Listed Building Consent application are directly dependent on the redevelopment scheme to which we strongly object. It is for this reason that we have made no particular comments on these proposals.

We hope our comments will be of help and taken into consideration. Should you require some clarification on any of the above, do not hesitate to contact me. I

would also greatly appreciate if you could keep us informed of any further developments on this case.

Remit: The Twentieth Century Society was founded in 1979 and is the national amenity society concerned with the protection, appreciation, and study of post-1914 architecture, townscape and design. The Society is acknowledged in national planning guidance as the key organisation concerned with the modern period (see *Annex to PPG15*), and is a constituent member of the Joint Committee of the National Amenity Societies. Under the procedures set out in *ODPM Circular 09/2005*, all English local planning authorities must inform the Twentieth Century Society when an application for listed building consent involving partial or total demolition is received, and they must notify us of the decisions taken on these applications.

Yours sincerely



Dr Christina Malathouni
Caseworker