

Argles James

From: Planning Support
Subject: FW: Comment Received from Public Access

Application Reference No. : HGY/2017/2220 Site Address: Hornsey Town Hall The Broadway London N8 9JJ London Comments by: Hornsey Town Hall Creative Trust

From:
Room 15 Hornsey Town Hall
The Broadway
Crouch End
London

N8 9JJ
Submission: Support
Comments:

Room 15
Hornsey Town Hall
The Broadway
London N8 9JJ

26 September 2017

Mr James Hughes
Planning Service
Haringey Council
Wood Green
London N22 8LE

Dear Mr Hughes

Re: Planning Applications in relation to Hornsey Town Hall - HGY/2017/2220/2222/2223

The Hornsey Town Hall Creative Trust (HTHCT) is an independent body which was established in 2007 with the sole purpose of working to ensure the refurbishment of Hornsey Town Hall and provision for arts-focussed community use and access. See hornsey-town-hall.org.uk

Many of the current trustees were members of the Town Hall Advisory Panel to Haringey set up in 2004 and then its successor the Town Hall Community Partnership Board, established in 2007. We therefore

have extensive and detailed knowledge of this project and the many attempts over all of those years to try to find a viable and sustainable future for the Town Hall consistent with the community's aspirations for the building.

All of the trustees are volunteers and local residents with their own experience of living, working and raising families in the area. Trustees also have expertise relevant to this project to include: architecture, development, planning law, PR, arts education, arts operators, cultural businesses, and charitable and community enterprise.

We write in support of the application and wish to make the following observations in relation to what we regard as key elements of the project:

FUNDING FOR THE REFURBISHMENT OF THE TOWN HALL AS WELL AS THE ESTABLISHMENT AND RUNNING OF A DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE ARTS OFFER

For well over ten years now, the HTHCT has been actively involved in and has scrutinised all of the various proposals for the refurbishment of the Town Hall. Our work over the years has led us to the clear view that the only way in which this project can be funded is by means of the enabling development as well as an anchor tenant who will provide the very large sums of money required not only to refurbish the building to the high standard that it requires but also to make it fit, long term, for the community / arts uses which are an integral part of the scheme. The continuing significant dilapidation of the building over the years that we have been campaigning has only increased the cost of the refurbishment. FEC is currently in a position to commit to the significant investment that this project requires.

In the absence of any other viable proposals and without this investment by a financially viable developer / operator the Town Hall will remain in peril. The Town Hall has been on Historic England's At Risk Register since 2000.

QUALITY OF DESIGN

Throughout its work with the local authority over many years, and in the context of previous Town Hall initiatives, HTHCT has highlighted the need for high quality design of the whole site, commensurate with the national (and international) significance of this building. We are encouraged by the high quality of the design proposals to date.

The reanimation of the Town Hall Square has long been a key priority for HTHCT and we are pleased to note the well-considered and historically appropriate proposals for the Town Hall Square which were developed in close consultation with local people who, understandably, feel a particular connection to the Square.

Another key concern of HTHCT has been for there to be an holistic approach to the entire site as well as permeability through the site. We feel that the proposals address these issues very well. We welcome the emphasis on green space around the Town Hall and all in all feel that it is a very well-considered scheme.

HTHCT is confident that the local authority has, for some considerable time now, been committed to only permitting a scheme which would allow for as much community use and access as is compatible with a viable and sustainable scheme. We were pleased to be uniquely permitted to participate in the OJEU process for the selection of an operator / developer to the extent of devising the Community Use Agreement which should now bind any future developer / operator. The requirements of the CUA are not an add on. They are an integral part of the refurbishment of the Town Hall and, as such, we have been arguing from the outset that the design must be developed in conjunction with the arts operator.

After a rather concerning delay, we were very pleased to learn on 21st September 2017 that Piers Read of Time + Space Co. has been appointed as the arts operator. We regard this as a very welcome addition to the high calibre team already involved in the project. We anticipate that there will now be very close working between Time + Space Co. and Make architects to ensure that ultimate design / refurbishment of the Town Hall will optimise the use of the Town Hall spaces for community use, access and arts provision.

The far more contentious element of the design is the height, density and impact of the two new residential blocks, inextricably linked to which is the question of whether the scheme can include affordable housing. We have carefully considered the EVA report by ULL and we await the local authority's own economic viability assessment.

This project is clearly far more complex than many developments, requiring as it does the wholesale refurbishment of a much dilapidated building to a very high standard as well as provision for thriving, future-proof, diverse and publicly accessible arts spaces, consistent with the wishes of the local community. The public benefit of the refurbishment as well as the arts centre is clear and has always been the central objective of any enabling development.

When HTHCT supported the scheme that was approved in 2010, the principle of "public benefit" in the restoration of the Town Hall in lieu of provision of affordable housing was accepted. We were pleased that the 2010 scheme did, nevertheless, provide for some affordable housing. We are disappointed that the current scheme does not provide for any affordable housing. Our priority, as a building preservation trust, is the restoration of the Town Hall. We are keenly aware of the public concern in relation to the lack of affordable housing and the fact that the lack of affordable housing appears to run contrary to local and regional policies. We are also alive to the risk that the challenge of providing affordable housing in this project could jeopardise the public benefit of the scheme. And there is no "plan B" to save this building.

The assessment of height and volume of the two new residential blocks is clearly a matter for planning officers and their advisors. We have been impressed by the work undertaken by Make architects to soften the impact of Block A. We do not note any similar efforts to soften the impact of Block B which is a simple orthogonal form, is two storeys above the Town Hall (i.e. higher than the 2010 scheme) and abuts the Town Hall itself.

In our scrutiny of the ULL viability assessment we were concerned to note that the sum allowed for the refurbishment and fit out of the Town Hall, listed as in the region of £5 million, appeared to be significantly

lower than figures that have been discussed in the context of previous schemes. We would welcome further explanation as to how the figures for the Town Hall fit out are calculated and welcome FEC's pledge to publish the restoration costs in the near future. Consideration of the sums permitted for the fit-out also link to the key issues addressed above, i.e. that the refurbishment must be planned in close consultation with the very recently appointed arts operator in order to maximise the prospects for a flexible, successful, high calibre, sustainable, inclusive and fit-for-purpose arts programme for the community.

IMPACT ON THE TOWN HALL AS A LISTED BUILDING AS WELL AS THE SURROUNDING CONSERVATION AREA

HTHCT welcomes the thoughtful and sympathetic redesign of the Town Hall Square as well as the added gardens e.g. between the Town Hall and the Library.

We are concerned that there should be sufficient amenity areas between the Town Hall and the residential blocks, particularly in relation to Block B.

More work to mitigate the impact of the increased height of the residential blocks – Block B in particular – would be welcomed. For example, Make architects have responded to residents' concerns by lowering the height at either of end of Block A and stepping back the elevation facing the current housing or even separating slightly the upper levels of Block B from the HTH. We hope that leave the design mitigation to the planning officers and architects.

TRANSPORT

HTHCT has long advocated for a creative approach to the transport challenges of the site taking into consideration the need for an ecologically sustainable approach thus emphasising the use of public transport and cycling rather than encouraging the use of private cars. We note that, in addition to the s 106 contribution sought by TFL, the Community Infrastructure Levy has the potential to assist in addressing the transport issues.

Trustees' own personal experience of public transportation in Crouch End as well as particular knowledge in relation to delivery vehicles leads us to be less pessimistic than some commentators in relation to the transport challenges. But we would welcome more creative transport solutions to the increasing use of the Town Hall as the objective is to increase activity.

THE CREDIBILITY AND CAPACITY OF FEC TO DELIVER THIS PROJECT

FEC underwent a rigorous OJEU process in order to satisfy the local authority that it has the financial resources to invest in this scheme. HTHCT is independent of the local authority and had no locus to participate in the full OJEU process to select a developer / operator. We did however participate in the OJEU process, including evaluation of the relevant parts of the tender relating to the community and arts

use which was a key ingredient of the tender process, and the subsequent drafting of the Community Use Agreement (CUA) see below.

HTHCT has a detailed understanding of the previous schemes approved by planning in 2010 and implemented 2013. The HTHCT welcomes the scrutiny necessarily afforded by a fresh application for planning permission. HTHCT remains vigilant and vigorous in comparing the earlier approved schemes with that currently proposed by FEC.

We note recent publicity in trade press about FEC's status as Manchester City Council's development partner for the Northern Gateway regeneration scheme which is set to deliver 10,000 homes, and their aim to secure large regeneration projects in the South East as well as their ambition to be part of the Mayor of London's development planning framework which, if successful, would mean that FEC would be one of 30 developers chosen to deliver residential-led schemes across the capital. (Source: Property Week Today, 15 September 2017, Samantha Partington).

HTHCT is impressed by FEC's commitment to deliver a high quality scheme – both in terms of the refurbishment as well as the housing development and will continue to remain vigilant in ensuring that what has been promised matches what is delivered.

The planning application has also triggered the Historic Building Report by highly regarded firm of Architects and Historic Buildings Consultants Donald Insall Associates. The context within which the planning application is scrupulously assessed by Insall Associates – The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and the National Planning Policy Framework - should serve to give those who are not experts in this field the reassurances they rightly seek that the refurbishment of this highly significant building can only be undertaken with great care and to a high standard.

Insall Associates's report reminds us that – This is a near complete survival of a seminal 20th Century building and for this it has very high significance. The extent to which the historic fabric and features of the building have been preserved at Hornsey Town Hall is one of its most significant qualities.

In weighing up – as the law requires them to do – the balance of any harm caused by any of the plans with the public benefit achieved, Insall Associates clearly conclude that permission should be granted.

HTHCT is pleased to note that Insall Associates finds that the current proposals – offer a more sensitive approach to the fabric and features of the historic building than the scheme granted consent in 2010 and 2013 and present a realistic chance of addressing the significant repair backlog at Hornsey Town Hall.

Insall Associates's conclusion that – If there were an easy solution to the problems presented by the building, then previous initiatives would have succeeded and schemes granted consent in the past would have been brought to completion – will chime with anybody, public or council officer, who has strived for so many years to save this building.

HTHCT is aware of public comment about the figures which were inadvertently made public in the ULL’s Economic Viability Appraisal Report July 2017. We await the local authority’s separately commissioned economic viability report. We note that the profits estimated were in relation to the site as a whole and not just to the Town Hall.

THE PROFESSIONAL TEAM

HTHCT is very encouraged by the high calibre of professionals employed to prepare this application. The architects, Make, and the historic buildings experts, Donal Insall Associates, are firms of high renown and well known to members of the Trust who work in the field. We take the view that this is a great strength of the application and bodes well for FEC’s intentions for the quality of the refurbishment and new build. HTHCT will expect the local authority to be vigilant in seeking to ensure that the quality of the refurbishment and build promised matches what is delivered. Assurances that the professional team currently engaged in the project will remain until completion of the project should be encouraged and allay community anxieties about the ultimate quality of the work undertaken.

THE ARTS OPERATOR

The provision of an arts offer in the Town Hall is an integral part of the scheme and, while possibly not per se a matter for planning, it is inextricably linked to the matters to be considered.

Insall Associates, for example, in conducting the balancing exercise which the legislation and guidance requires of it i.e. any harm to the building versus ‘public benefits’, refers to the ‘broader public benefits’ which come about through these proposals. These include:

- ‘ Significant public access to the common parts of the building including parts which were historically closed to the public or to which access was restricted (former members areas, Mayor’s Parlour, Council Chamber, Committee Rooms)
- ‘ Provision of new office space on a co-working basis, which supports smaller businesses
- ‘ Provision of new cafes and restaurants which will bring new life into the forecourt
- ‘ New residential accommodation in the form of 146 units
- ‘ Improvements to the environmental performance of the Town Hall and Broadway Annex

These aspects of the proposals will generate broader social and economic benefits for the area, all of which the National Planning Policy requires planning authorities to take into account.

The overwhelming public benefit offered by the proposals, however, is that specifically mentioned in paragraph 134 of the National Planning Policy Framework: ‘securing [the] optimum viable use [of a designated heritage asset]. Hornsey Town Hall is a building which lacks a viable use at present, and has been underused and deteriorating for some time. The scheme as outlined above seeks to introduce a viable new use into the large civic building, to fund the repair and to ensure that maintenance will take place on a ‘stitch in time’ basis in the future’

Consideration of FEC’s commitment to delivering a high calibre community / arts centre is, therefore, in our view integral to this planning application.

COMMUNITY USE AGREEMENT

HTHCT has long advocated for a robust mechanism whereby community use of and access to the Town Hall can be guaranteed for the long term. We are confident that this has been achieved by means of the Community Use Agreement (CUA) which we were instrumental in drafting. The CUA is not optional and must be mandatory for the duration of the 130 lease granted on the Town Hall.

It is important to emphasise that the CUA guarantees a minimum of 60% community use and allows a mix of community and commercial in order to ensure its long term viability.

The combination of this mechanism, i.e. a compulsory requirement for adherence to the CUA for the duration of the lease, as well as the appointment of a renowned arts operator who can now work closely with the design team to maximise the arts offer in the Town Hall is very encouraging. It should go some way to allaying the fears of some members of the public who remain sceptical about the local authority’s and FEC’s long term commitment to public access and an arts offer in the Town Hall. We expect the Council, along with the HTHCT to remain vigilant to ensure that what is envisaged is delivered and that the safeguards designed to ensure community use and access in the long term remain in place and undiluted.

Yours sincerely

Hornsey Town Hall Creative Trust

Sue Davidson

Celia Greenwood

Graeme Jennings

Sheila Kavanagh

Benjamin Lesser

Kevin Pinnock

Liz Sich

James Souter

Lucy White

Please note: Although Cllrs Doron & Elliott are members of HTHCT and attended the Trust's meeting to discuss this response, they were not involved writing or commenting on it. Their support for the application in their role as ward Councillors is contingent upon the concerns set out in their open letter (link below) being addressed to their satisfaction.

<http://https://crouchendlabour.wordpress.com/2017/08/09/open-letter-to-fec/>