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Development Control
Planning Services
London Borough Of Camden
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Town Hall
Argyle Street
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TP/LNE/2023-128

15th August 2023

Dear Sir/Madam,

APPLICATION FOR TEMPORARY REMOVAL AND STORAGE OF K2 TELEPHONE BOX AND RE-INSTATEMENT AT A LATER DATE, MURRAY STREET, CAMDEN (ASSOCIATED WITH THE RE-CONSTRUCTION OF BRIDGE SPC1/14, AGAR GROVE, CAMDEN)

Please find enclosed the completed form and associated plans relating to a request for Listed Building Consent for the temporary removal, safe storage and eventual re-instatement of the K2 listed telephone box situated on Murray Street, Camden. This is required in association with the re-construction of bridge SPC1/14, Agar Grove.

General Description

The Midland Main Line out from St. Pancras station crosses beneath Agar Grove by means of a 2-span riveted steel overbridge with masonry jack arches spanning between longitudinal girders. The bridge is supported on masonry abutments and a central masonry pier.

The structure carries Agar Grove and the road junctions between Murray Street and St Augustine's Road over the electrified lines. The superstructure to both spans is a series of 20 main girders supporting transverse jack arches. The spans are supported on masonry brickwork piers and abutments. The railway beneath is electrified with the 25kV OLE system, supported from the soffit of the bridge decks.

An assessment of the bridge carried out in 2019 concluded that the bridge failed its Bridgeguard 3 assessment for 40 tonne weights and has corrosion issues. It also has weak parapets and footpaths on the low mileage side. In addition, the parapets are not a compliant height for an electrified railway.

The re-construction of the bridge necessitates the removal of all furniture at street level, including the telephone box. Whilst the bridge re-construction itself is “permitted development”, does also include the demolition of walls within a conservation area and the removal of mature trees within the same conservation area. These are the subject of separate consents which have been applied for concurrently with this application.

The telephone box is to be disconnected and carefully lifted in one piece to a safe storage area. Upon completion of the bridge the telephone box will be craned back into position and re-connected to the network as a working facility.

Relevant Policy

The Act

Section 16(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 ('1990 Act') imposes a statutory duty on local planning authorities, when considering whether to grant listed building consent to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the listed building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interests which it possesses. The Courts have held that when a local planning authority finds that a proposed development would harm a heritage asset the authority must give considerable importance and weight to the desirability of avoiding such harm to give effect to its statutory duty under section 16 of the 1990 Act.

Since the key planning consideration is in relation to the temporary removal of the listed structure within the Camden Square Conservation Area, it is pertinent to look at advice at both the national and local level. Central government guidance is contained in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, February 2019). Paragraph 8 of the NPPF says planning should contribute to the achievement of sustainable development by balancing its economic, social and environmental roles. Paragraph 11 says that planning decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development; footnote 6 of paragraph 11 contains restrictions where this presumption in favour of sustainable development does not apply, including designated heritage assets.

Of particular relevance to this application is Section 16 of the NPPF which requires local planning authorities to take account in determining applications of the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets, and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation, the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities and the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness. It advises consent to be refused (paragraph 195) where there is substantial harm to a heritage asset unless it can be demonstrated that this is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits or (Paragraph 196) where there is less than substantial harm, this be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.

Local Plan

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compensation Act 2004 requires that determinations be made in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. For Camden the development plan consists of the Camden Local Plan which was adopted on the 3rd of July 2017.

Paragraph 1.34 of the plan sets out strategic objectives which include: creating the conditions for growth, to strengthen Camden's nationally important economy, to promote and support the successful development of growth areas including Kings Cross/St Pancras, to promote sustainable transport for all, to promote and protect the high levels of amenity and quality of life.

The following specific policies are relevant to the consideration of the listed building application and the conservation area planning application:

- Policy D1 'Design' seeks to secure high quality design including preserving and enhancing the historic environment and heritage assets in accordance with policy D2.
- Policy D2 confirms the position of the NPPF that substantial harm or loss of a heritage asset will not be permitted unless it can be demonstrated that substantial public benefits outweigh the harm or loss. Similarly, less than substantial harm to the significance of heritage assets will not be supported unless the public benefits convincingly outweigh that harm. Further policy D2 says that proposals to alter or extend listed buildings will be resisted where this would cause harm to the special architectural and historic interest of the building.
- Policy T1 seeks to promote sustainable transport by prioritising walking, cycling and public transport.

Since the fundamental purpose of the scheme is to ensure the safety and integrity of the road bridge over the Midland Main Line it is clearly in the best interests of all to look favourably on the principle. Given it will ensure the on-going reliability of the bridge and that the "do nothing" scenario could lead to the closure of both the road and railway, it is important for the economic and environmental well-being of the Borough that the bridge is re-built.

Significance

In assessing the significance and contribution of the telephone box to the Conservation Area, the starting point is to look at the Camden Square Conservation Area Appraisal of 2011. Whilst it does not specifically mention the architectural quality of the telephone box as a notable feature of the Conservation Area, it is identified as an important listed building (one of three such telephone boxes) in the conservation area.

Since that time there have been many alterations to the area, including the development of the plot of land on the corner of Agar Grove & St Augustine's

Grove. Therefore, the context and the assessment of the conservation area will have changed to some extent. Nevertheless, the statement confirms that the conservation area contains some of the most important historic buildings and structures in the Borough and identifies areas in need of improvement, including the NR compound at the junction of Murray Street and St Augustine's Road.

The history of the K2 box is well known. The K2 kiosk was Britain's first red Telephone Box. It was the winning design from a 1924 competition to find the design for a national kiosk. Designed by British architect Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, the K2 was introduced in 1926 and over the next nine years some 1,700 examples were installed mostly in London. The design of the K2 incorporates many influences of classical architecture. Just over 200 examples remain in Britain, and these are given Grade II listing status by English Heritage. The Murray Street box was listed in February 1987.

The K2 kiosk is constructed of cast-iron sections, bolted together, standing on a concrete base. Its general form is a four-sided rectangular box with a domed roof. Each side has fluted architrave mouldings at the outer edge. At the base is a blank rectangular panel with trim moulding-surround. Above, on three sides of the kiosk, are six rows of three small rectangular panes of glass, with trim mouldings and internal beading; the equivalent back panel is blank. There is reeded moulding around the window panel corresponding to the dimensions of the door opening, disguising that there is an opening on one side only. The door is of teak, with a metal "cup" handle. For weatherproofing there is a drip cap above the door. Above the main body of the kiosk is an entablature, set back from the face of the kiosk, finished with a crown-moulded cornice. The entablature carries a rectangular slot for signage, with trim moulding. Set into the slot is an illuminated telephone sign, with serif capital lettering on opaque glass. The roof of the kiosk is domed, formed by segmental pediments, with reeded mouldings. The pediments carry a pierced Tudor crown for ventilation.

The K2 is the second most populous survivor of telephone boxes on the streets after the K6 but is very rarely found outside London.

Although removal of the telephone box technically amounts to demolition, the demonstrable harm through its removal is only of a temporary nature for the duration of the construction works associated with the bridge. This is expected to be a period of no more than two years maximum. As there will be considerable construction activity surrounding the whole of the bridge with its consequent visual intrusion of hoardings, the loss of mature trees and demolition of boundary walls (though the latter are to be re-built as original at a later date), the temporary disappearance of the telephone box is not considered to be detrimental to the long-term appearance of the conservation area.

Additionally, the public benefit that accrues from the re-constructed rail bridge is unquestionable, given the importance of the railway line below linking the Capital and the Midlands, as well as the importance of Agar Grove for road traffic and public transport through the Borough – not to carry out the bridgeworks would have serious implications for both road and rail traffic alike to the detriment of the local and regional economy. As such we are confident the proposal is consistent with Policies D1 & D2 of the Local Plan.

At present we cannot give exact details as to where the telephone box would be temporarily stored, as that would be a matter for the owner British Telecom to confirm, but we would be comfortable with a condition that seeks detail on the method of removal and details of temporary storage as part of any consent.

You will find enclosed the following:

Location Plan

Annotated photo of a K2 box with dimensions

Extract of Site Plan showing exact location (1:200 scale)

Selected photographs of existing telephone box

Please let me know if you require any further information. No doubt you will acknowledge the application in due course.

Yours Faithfully

Tony Rivero
Town Planning Manager EM & LNE