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London Borough of Camden
Town Hall
Argyle Street
London WC1H 8EQ

By email

21 December 2023

Dear Sirs

Princes Circus Water Fountain (*Fountain*): request to remove a condition: ref 2023/4072/L (the *Application*)

I refer to the Application, of which I have only just been made aware. I am writing to submit an objection. I live overlooking the Shaftesbury Avenue Triangle and used to be able to view the Fountain in its original position.

For the reasons set out in this letter, I object to the removal of the condition in question.

This Application relates to the Fountain, which is a handsome Victorian water fountain which for many years stood at the apex of Shaftesbury Avenue (***Original Position***).

Before the works known as the ***Princes Circus Project*** began, the Fountain was removed from the Original Position and placed in what was then the gated Princes Circus. Quite why this was done is not clear, particularly as the area was never maintained and eventually was padlocked.

When public consultation took place about the Princes Circus Project proposals, one of the “selling points” was the refurbishment of the Fountain and its return to operational use.

The Princes Circus Project is now substantially complete and there is a tarmac rectangle outside (and very close to) one of the facades of the Shaftesbury Theatre where, one assumes, the Fountain should be placed.

I understand that the work (and therefore the associated costs) of refurbishing the Fountain are largely complete.

An operational water fountain is particularly important given the popularity of the new space and the need for hydration as a result of climate change. I note in this connection that Camden has declared a climate emergency. Camden must presumably wish to cut down the number of plastic bottles of water consumed (and thrown away) in the borough.

Camden have declined to indicate the amounts they have spent on the Princes Circus Project, but it was clearly long in the planning, with plenty of special and technical advisers. The application reference is dated 2020, which indicates that the team have had plenty of time to work out how to make the Fountain operational, as they knew they must.

The letter dated 27 September (**September Letter**) from “the Heritage Practice” indicates that the connection has been achieved “in part”. The September Letter claims that the final connection was “impossible”. Impossibility is a very high test and no explanation has been given, so that one suspects that the word is being used rather loosely and conceals a lack of willingness to comply with a condition readily accepted as a condition of the relocation of the Fountain. The proximity of the Shaftesbury Theatre makes any claimed “impossibility” inherently implausible. I assume this is not a question of defective design by one of the professionals advising on the Princes Circus Project.

I also note that the September Letter modishly and vaguely invokes health and safety issues, without being specific. These have not changed materially since the 2020 application, and should have been factored into the design, so, again, one wonders how genuine an excuse this is.

This is a listed Building application, not just a planning application. There is no justification for converting a working heritage asset into a souvenir.

I see no reason why Camden should be released from the obligation which was part of the basis to justify the expense and inconvenience of the lavish Princes Circus Project, including the refurbishment of the Fountain.

I hope the committee will not give the applicant any favours because it is the council itself. Indeed, I hope there are procedures in place to ensure that the Council’s own applications are scrutinised with particular rigour, having regard to the risk of conflicts of interest.

I should add that Camden should, in planning matters, behave in an exemplary fashion and should not be seen to accept conditions, only to seek to get out of them when that happens to suit the Council. Nor in the current economic climate should it be seen to be wasting taxpayers' money by seeking to evade the terms of its planning obligations.

If there are cost concerns, perhaps the Shaftesbury Theatre, which benefits enormously from the new space, should be invited to make a contribution.

In conclusion, the condition was rational and proportionate when imposed and remains so today, so should not be removed.

Please advise if the applicant clarifies the application and if there is a hearing to discuss the application.

Yours faithfully

Peter Bloxham