

From: Ralph Seward  
Sent: Monday, August 12, 2024 7:41 PM  
To: Planning  
Subject: Application 2022/0419/T

Dear Camden Planners,

I live at Flat 6, 12 Guilford Street and would like to again note my objection to Application 2022/0419/T to remove two plane trees in the garden of 8 Doughty Street.

I would like draw your attention once again to the comments submitted by Catherine Slessor by email on Jul 28, 2024, with which I wholeheartedly agree:

"The trees are veteran specimens, estimated to be between 200-250 years old and in good health. At six storeys tall, they can be seen from flats in Doughty Street, Doughty Mews, Guilford Street, Millman Street and Northington Street, and by the public walking through Doughty Mews and John's Mews. Their impressive scale and beautiful seasonal foliage brings huge pleasure all year round. I also have excellent views of the trees from my garden.

To remove such magnificent specimens would be to irrevocably alter a deeply cherished local landscape. Section 5.64 of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategy 2011 states that:

'The mature trees across the Conservation Area are a valuable part of the streetscape and make a positive contribution to its character and appearance.' Removing trees of such size and vintage also goes against the tenets of the Mayor's London Plan, which aims to increase tree canopy cover by 5% by 2025 to mitigate the effects of climate change.

It also notes that: 'Individual veteran trees should be given protection as once lost they can never be replaced.'

The trunk of one tree is physically pressing into the rear wall of no.

4 Doughty Mews, one the three properties belonging to the Egypt Exploration Society (EES), causing minor cracks. These have been assessed by structural engineer Price & Myers as 'aesthetic' rather than 'structural'. This situation has persisted for many years. On this basis, the EES has applied twice to have both trees removed.

Firstly, in December 2020 (2020/5587/T), which attracted over 70 objections from councillors and local residents on ecological and quality-of-life grounds. At that time, Camden Council rejected the application and made both trees the subject of Tree Preservation Orders (TPO).

Secondly, in February 2022 (2022/0419/T), which attracted over 250 objections, including a petition signed by 94 people. This time, despite noting that 'the council shares the view of those who have submitted objections with regard to the significance of the trees', Camden removed the TPOs, mindful of potential liability. To assist it in its decision-making process, the council commissioned its own independent assessment by engineers CampbellReith. This took the form of an evaluation of structural engineers' reports previously supplied by the EES and a group of objectors. CampbellReith concluded that the tree trunk was indeed causing limited cosmetic damage, but that a simple, cost effective solution could be adopted to repair the wall by creating a recess, so the tree was no longer impacting on it. It also noted that 'The tree has not caused structural damage and there is a risk that removing the tree might undermine the overall stability of the structure.'

Planning Officer Nick Bell's recommendation in a Delegated Report dated 30 March 2022, stated: 'It is recommended that the One Housing Group, whom the council understands to be the owner of the trees, works with the affected property owner to find a solution that allows for the retention of the trees and that a full assessment be undertaken to ascertain what impact, if any, the removal of the trees would have on the surrounding properties.'

The proposed redevelopment of the Doughty Mews site by the EES (ref: 2023/2928/P),

which was granted planning permission earlier this year, provides an opportunity to consolidate and improve the relationship between the trees and the EES properties for the long term, benefitting both the neighbourhood and the EES, as it plans for the future. The most obvious solution is to rebuild the affected wall to incorporate a recess, as has been suggested, which could be easily accomplished in the course of the development works. However, the proposals outlined in planning submission conspicuously failed to explore this or any other options for keeping the trees.

To date, the EES has proved reluctant to engage with a local group of construction professionals committed to reaching a viable solution that would retain the trees. Instead, it has consistently and vexatiously lobbied for the trees' removal. The pervading impression, from EES communications and, more overtly, at a meeting with neighbours on 7 December 2022 which I attended, was that the EES has absolutely no interest in the ecological and amenity arguments for their retention. Rather, the trees are perceived as a costly nuisance.

Reference was made to the challenge of roof and gutter maintenance, allegedly made more onerous and expensive by the presence of the trees, despite the fact that their maintenance is the responsibility of One Housing. In his most recent letter to neighbours, dated 10 July 2024, EES Director Carl Graves asserts that 'the trees are literally destroying our home', which is blatant hyperbole.

It seems to suit the EES to see the removal of the trees and its proposed redevelopment as entirely separate issues. But it is obvious that in this case, buildings and trees are connected - physically, structurally, historically and civically - and a solution needs to be found that reconciles both. It also raises the question of effective civic oversight and how local councils are supposed to provide it, balancing the needs of individual institutions to pursue development ambitions while maintaining the quality of neighbourhood and city life.

Camden Council should not be subject to pressure from the EES simply for taking action to safeguard two outstanding historic trees, a move supported by the overwhelming majority of local residents, councillors and the public. It is

quite shocking to think that a charitable cultural organisation, dedicated to exploring and preserving history, has displayed such a dismaying lack of concern for living history and the environment in the context of a global climate emergency.

Therefore, I urge the council not to renew permission to remove the trees and instead, give them the protection such beautiful and venerable specimens rightfully deserve by reinstating the Tree Preservation Orders."

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours faithfully,

Ralph Seward