

DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT, with HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Description of the existing property or site

Camden Town Hall is a Grade II listed municipal building situated on the junction of Judd Street and Euston Road in King's Cross, London. It was built in 1934-37 and designed by architect A J Thomas in the neo-classical style. The building was commissioned by St Pancras Borough Council (merged to become London Borough of Camden in 1965) as its new governing offices and includes the council chamber.

Between 2020 and 2021 the building was subject to refurbishment, including restoration to the interiors, enabling increased access and energy efficiency.

Camden Town Hall was listed Grade II on 19 April 1996 and the entry listing reads:

Includes: Camden Town Hall EUSTON ROAD. Town hall. 1934-7. By AJ Thomas. Exterior clad in Portland stone ashlar over a steel frame on all 4 fronts.

EXTERIOR: 3 main storeys. Channelled base, with plinth. Keystones over entrances carved by WCH King.

Judd Street front: wings of 5 windows width, each with central aedicule and windows with alternating rhythm of channelled and unchannelled surrounds on first floor; projecting centre over entrances of three windows width with giant Corinthian order consisting of outer pilasters and inner attached columns rising to a full pediment embedded in raised attic with pitched roof.

Euston Road front: 23 windows width, with wings of 5 windows width as in Judd Street and centre on the model of the Place de la Concorde with projecting pedimented pavilions as in centre of Judd Street front over subsidiary entrances flanking seven bays with giant Corinthian columns and raised attic with pitched roof over whole centre.

Tonbridge Street front: 23 windows width, with slightly recessed centre and raised attic of 13 windows width with pitched roof.

East front: with single-storey ground-floor projection including side entrances on flanks, 3 round-arched windows on first floor in centre rising through second storey and raised central attic of 3 windows width with pitched roof.

INTERIOR: Judd Street entrance with black and white marble floor and deep-beamed ceiling. Main balustraded top lit staircase of white marble with dark marble pilasters and variegated marble panels on walls, branching and leading to Members' Lobby on first floor with polished marble Corinthian columns and variegated marble panels. First-floor corridors panelled throughout to impost level and plaster-vaulted in manner of London County Hall (qv Lambeth). Council Chamber in centre of building top lit, rectangular with side lobbies under galleries and giant Corinthian pilasters, oak-panelled to high level with plain frieze over and horseshoe arrangement of oak seating. Along Euston Road front at first-floor level, Mayor's Parlour oak-panelled to full height, lugged and pedimented doorcases and fine marble fireplace with burnished steel grate; Chief Executive's Room panelled to full height in Norfolk cedar with good fireplace; good, panelled committee rooms. Assembly Hall on ground floor entered from Tonbridge Street, with foyer at south end, stage at north end with proscenium arch, deep south gallery and narrower west gallery communicating with Council Chamber. Light-fittings, fixtures and furniture throughout of a high standard, especially on first floor, and presumably largely designed by AJ Thomas. HISTORICAL NOTE: Camden Town Hall was designed as St Pancras Town Hall by AJ Thomas, a former assistant of EL Lutyens, the influence of whose Classical style pervades the building. Thomas designed several housing schemes for St Pancras Borough Council from 1924 onwards. (Architect and Building News: 25 June 1937: London; The Builder: 9 July 1937: London; The Building: July 1937).

The design principles and concepts behind the proposed development

The Culture Service at Camden Council proposes to install a heritage blue plaque on the Judd street façade of Camden Town Hall. This blue plaque will celebrate Britain's first Caribbean Carnival, a significant national event, which happened in this building on Friday 30th January 1959.

The plaque will be surface mounted to avoid impact on the Grade II listed façade of the building. The ceramic plaque shape is designed to be self-cleaning and will not induce rust-staining to the building (like metal plaques often do). The plaque will be attached using lime mortar. See attached installation method statement from the specialist manufacturer and installer, Ned Heywood.

Description of the intended use of the proposed development

The blue plaque will celebrate an important event in Britain's diverse history and Camden's role in it. It will ensure this story is accessible to all. This work forms part of Camden Council's Strategy for Diversity in the Public Realm, 2023 – 2028, which states:

'The built environment shapes the way we feel about a place, and where we can feel a sense of belonging. The public realm is key in shaping the identity of a city, town or borough; it is a cultural asset and reinforces a sense of place. It can be a place that reflects our rich cultural heritage and enable celebration. It can be a space that brings communities together, provide economic opportunities and the quality of public spaces can have a direct impact on people's health and wellbeing.'

Description of the layout of the proposed development

It is proposed to surface-mount the ceramic blue plaque on the left hand façade column at the main entrance way to the Town Hall, on Judd street.

Details of the scale of the proposed development

The blue plaque has a diameter of 485mm and will be installed at a height of 2780mm from the pavement to the centre of the plaque. The plaque will be centred on the stonework width at 560mm. (see plans for detail.)

Description of how public/private spaces will be landscaped in the proposed development

n/a

Description of the appearance of the proposed development

The blue plaque will be a London heritage ceramic plaque, made by specialist heritage plaque maker Ned Heywood. These style plaques are also made by Ned Heywood for English Heritage and Historic England. They are entirely handmade of stoneware, hand lettered, using a tube lined technique which outlines each letter. (see attached design.)

Explanation of how local context has influenced the overall design

The London blue plaque design is used throughout London (and beyond) by English Heritage and Historic England. It is fitting that this style plaque should be used for the listed façade of Camden's Town Hall. Blue heritage plaques of this design are recognised by many people as indicators for significant cultural stories, and they have an established visual signal of authenticity. It is appropriate to use this style plaque to celebrate Camden Town Hall's role in the development of Caribbean Carnival in this country.

Camden Town Hall does not have any blue plaques or heritage signage currently. The installation of this blue plaque will not increase visual clutter on the façade but, importantly, will profile the building as a significant heritage site.

The Town Hall is sited within the Kings Cross & St Pancras Conservation Area and the council is committed to ensure these are 'areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'. The installation of a blue heritage plaque will significantly enhance the special character and historic interest of the building and surrounding conservation area by presenting and celebrating this cultural and historical event of national significance.

Details of the proposed access to the development site.

The blue plaque will enable access to an important heritage story of the building (which has previously been overlooked) for all Town Hall visitors and passers-by. The location and height and lettering size of the blue plaque will ensure physical access for all.

The plaque will also be visible from Euston Road on the approach to the Judd Street junction.

The installation of this plaque and its proposed location will not prevent access to the entrance of Camden Town Hall.

Explanation of how the historical and architectural importance of the listed building has been considered when designing the development. In particular its physical features and setting.

The proposed location of the blue plaque considers the façade of the Town Hall as a whole. The site proposed would maintain the visual impact of the Judd street façade of the building and enhance its heritage value.

Use of the London heritage style blue plaque would add presence and meaning to the building, enhancing its cultural and architectural iconography. The plaque would affirm the Town hall's place in significant political and cultural activism and profile its important role in Britain's diverse history.

The Town Hall has been Grade II listed for its use of neo-classical architectural forms. By using the London heritage style blue plaque, we are conforming to established design quality and visual signifiers appropriate for a listed building of this type. (see below for more detail on the town hall's architectural presence).

Heritage Impact

Camden Town Hall's story

Camden Town Hall is a purpose-built municipal building which currently houses Camden Council's Chamber, governing offices and event spaces. Births, deaths and name changes are registered here, and the building plays host to weddings too. The building has played a central role in the key moments in many people's lives. This building also changed its name; from St Pancras Town Hall to Camden Town in 1965, when Camden was formed.

For many decades Camden has been a place of radical thought and activism. Camden Town Hall has been the site of local government and politics since it was built in 1937. During WW2 the Town Hall housed the Emergency Food Office (distributing ration cards) with an air raid in the basement.

The Town hall has seen many political meetings and protests over the years, including the 'Red Flag' raised over the building by socialist councillors (1958), the European Congress meeting of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (1959), 2,000 strong storming of the town hall in protest over rent increases (1960) and disgraceful race riots by fascists and empire loyalists at a meeting organised to protest unjust immigration restrictions (1961).

The Town Hall has been the site of many union and association meetings, examples include the Professional Footballers Association (1961), the Transport and General Workers Union (1966) and the annual meeting of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (1956).

The building has also hosted many dance and music events such as the Press Association annual dance (1948) and in May 1957 a submarine, trans-Atlantic cable was used to transmit a concert by singer, actor and civil rights activist Paul Robeson in New York to Camden Town Hall. Robeson performed and spoke frequently at the Town Hall; at the African Freedom meeting in April 1959 as well as performing at an anniversary concert in September 1960. His civil rights connection with activist and journalist Claudia Jones led to many of these performances.

It can be said that the most significant event in Camden Town Hall's history was the first Caribbean Carnival organised by Claudia Jones on Friday 30th January 1959. The Carnival was a positive response to the racism endured by Caribbean communities in this country and inspired carnivals across the country.

In September 1958 racist attacks on the Caribbean community, known as the Notting Hill riots, escalated. Activist Claudia Jones and her colleagues at the West Indian Gazette felt that the community needed something to show who they were and what they could give to British society. Jones said, **'we need something to get the taste of Notting Hill out of our mouths,'** so she organised the first Caribbean Carnival to celebrate culture and have a moment to relax at a time when many people were living in fear.

The first Caribbean Carnival was held in Camden Town Hall and was televised by the BBC. The Carnival was directed by Edric Connor, with his wife Pearl Connor and featured steel bands, calypso singing, dancing, costumes, a beauty pageant and lots of food. The carnival was very successful and ran at venues across London for five years, inspiring the Notting Hill Carnival, which now attracts around one million people every year

'Claudia, unlike the rest of us, understood the power of culture as a tool of political resistance. The spirit of carnival came out of her political knowledge of what to touch at a particular time when we were scared, in disarray.' Trevor Carter, activist, educator and stage manager of the carnival, 1959.

Desktop research conducted by an Arts Development Officer has indicated that this carnival was the first Caribbean Carnival in Britain. Further indoor annual carnivals followed in venues across London, and in 1966 carnival came to the streets of Notting Hill organised by community activist Rhaune Laslett. Other carnivals across the country soon developed in Leeds (1967), Bristol (1968), Nottingham (1970), Manchester (1970/71), Preston (1974), Derby (1975), Birmingham (1984), and Leicester (1985).

The architectural presence

The ideals of reason and rationality are presented through symmetry, balance and simplicity in neo-classical architectural theory. Neo-classical architecture was particularly popular from the mid-1700s, encapsulating the enlightenment theories of 'reason', which is fitting for a seat of local government. However, as a result of the grandeur and expense of these type of buildings, the style became associated with wealth and elitist power. By the 1900s the style was being used for municipal buildings, banks, company headquarters, art galleries and museums.

The Town Hall building uses neo-classical architectural features to present a sense of permanence, establishment and authority. Political power is articulated through the use of this architectural style from ancient Rome and ancient Greece. Using these neo-classical elements

such as giant Corinthian columns, a full pediment, large keystones and marble interiors also presents a sense of authority and imperialism, which reflected Britain and its empire at the time it was built.

It is interesting to consider that this building, built using these formal, imperial architectural signifiers has hosted many radical, political and anti-colonial meetings, conferences, protests and celebrations over the years. The social activism and radical political thinking happening inside the building has often been at odds with the imperialist architectural signifiers of the exterior of the building. With this in mind, the Town hall should be recognised as a site for exploring social activism and positive responses to injustice on the exterior of the building, which this blue plaque would reveal.

The Caribbean Carnival of 1959 is considered to be one of the most significant events held in the Town Hall. Its purpose - to bring together communities and to celebrate the cultural heritage of British citizens moving to London from the Caribbean inspired multiple carnival events across the country. It also used the Town Hall as a platform to showcase a positive community approach to responding to social injustices and violence. Commemorating this event through a heritage blue plaque would indicate the significance of the Town Hall in the history of Camden's political activism, community and celebration of diverse cultural heritage. It would also celebrate Camden's role in the history of Caribbean Carnival in the UK. The plaque would enhance the heritage significance of the building and its story; increasing its relevance to Camden's diverse communities and visitors.

Sensitivity to the fabric of the building and architectural elements

The plaque design has been chosen to complement the architecture of the building, using the visually familiar London Heritage design style (also used by English Heritage and Historic England).

The plaque will be surface mounted to avoid unnecessary damage to the façade of the building (such as 2 inch recess in-setting into the stonework, which is often used). The plaque is durable ceramic to avoid potential rust damage to the façade from cheaper metal plaques and screws. The plaque will be installed across two rusticated stone blocks on the facade, covering a (495mm plaque-wide) section of channelled joint. This section of channelled joint will be filled with lime mortar and grout to match the colour of the stonework. (See attached installation method statement from specialist Ned Heywood for more details on materials used.)

For the preparation of this application, I have consulted:

Conservation Area Statement 22 King's Cross, Camden Council (Published: June 2004) [5624 KX inside \(camden.gov.uk\)](#)

Camden Town Hall Listed status entry, Historic England [CAMDEN TOWN HALL, Non Civil Parish - 1379162 | Historic England](#)

Strategy for Diversity in the Public Realm, 2023 - 2028, Camden Council (published March 2023)

Email correspondence with Howard Spencer, Senior Historian, Blue Plaques, English Heritage (April 2024)

Email correspondence with Ned Heywood, Specialist heritage plaque maker and installer. (May – August 2024)

Email correspondence, Zerritha Brown (Head of Culture) with Symone and Alison Williams, Carnival Arts & Consultancy.

General research into Camden Town Hall's history and history of Carnival in Britain.