

Henry Herzberg's comments on The Castle Planning Application

Application No: 2014/5900/P, The Castle, 147, Kentish Town Rd., NW1 8PB

My objections to the current Planning Application are as follows.

The elevation to Castle Street of the new building is entirely unsatisfactory and needs to be redesigned. The new part steps out from the old building and unless carefully handled will dominate the historic facades we are all so anxious to preserve. The elevation proposed is crude, fussy and a muddle of discordant elements. It needs to be a much calmer, simpler design expressing its role as a separate element sitting modestly beside the existing building, rather than trying to pretend that it is a continuation of a Victorian one. The variation in window pattern at each level is disjointed. The attempt to extend the piano nobile in a weak version of the real thing is ill considered, whilst the glazing taken down to pavement level is both unnecessary and undesirable. Despite the internal functions of both parts being the same, the design problem of preserving the integrity of the Victorian building would be better resolved by presenting the new part in a contemporary design and delineating the historic Castle from the new addition by incorporating a small recess between the two facades.

The roof extension is crude and sits uncomfortably on top of both the old and new parts of the building. With respect to the Victorian part, the roof shape is unsatisfactory and, if any extension at this level is to be granted, which due to the consent given to the adjoining building would be difficult to resist, this would be better treated as a slated mansard with dormer windows in line with the windows below. The floor plans show office use at Ground level and, although no furniture is shown, presumably offices are also to be included at Basement level. However, the plans do not indicate that any provision has been made for plant rooms which would normally be positioned at Roof Level. This matter needs to be clarified as so many buildings have been harmfully affected by the late inclusion of mechanical plant on the roof.

The lack of information on the drawings submitted is lamentable. The cross section through Castle Street has absolutely no annotation, no levels are provided, the depth of the extended basement is not defined, the location of the section position is not shown on any of the plans, and this is the only section submitted. In addition to the additional information that needs to be added to this cross section, a further long section (drawn at a right angle to the cross section) should be included in the application and its location also identified on the plans. The plans of the existing building fail to show the layout of the internal walls and these should be on the drawings. As regards the retained facades no details have been included to show the appearance, or any notes that define the quality of those elements which have been prematurely demolished, and which are required under an enforcement notice to be returned to their original condition. The elevations fail to show the levels of the floors that are behind the facades. This information is significant in understanding the relationship between window cills and heads and the internal floor levels, and is particularly important in regard to the changes in floor levels shown on the plans. The details of the windows, doors, and external materials have not been provided and consequently the final

appearance of the proposed scheme remains unclear and undefined. The Drawing Schedule submitted with the application does not in any way represent the actual drawings included in the submission and the extent of the drawings on which the application is to be determined needs to be clarified before consent is granted.

Given the importance of this application and the extent of local community interest and involvement, the submission should include a computer generated image of the proposed building taken from an agreed viewpoint and derived from a photograph to which it can be accurately compared. This image should illustrate both the retained and the new parts (best taken from Kentish Town Road looking diagonally across the corner with Castle Road) and should be colour rendered and clearly show the appearance of the materials to be used.

Whilst these comments are directed at the drawings submitted with this application, there remains the fundamental objection, which is the demolition of the internal structure of the Castle building, which has the status of a non-designated heritage asset (as defined in the National Planning Policy Framework). The building is something of a local landmark. It makes a significant contribution to the architectural heritage and character of Kentish Town, and it is capable of being successfully refurbished and put back into use. The current proposal to demolish all the interior structure and only preserve the façade is to be profoundly regretted. This solution begs the question as to whether the proposed development is fundamentally flawed. It is important that, to whatever use the building is put, activity at street level is preserved in the interests of maintaining continuous street frontage to link the north and south parts of Kentish Town Road. This could be achieved by the Ground floor level reverting to a bar or alternatively put to restaurant or retail use, or for the general services associated with a High street, but converting the building to office use at ground level does not provide the same continuity of activity as exists elsewhere along Kentish Town Road. The solution being proposed in this application is one in which only the external elevations are preserved whilst the main structure and fabric of the building are destroyed. In the interests of preserving this attractive and much valued Victorian building this application should be rejected.

This application should be refused pending further design improvement, the provision of more information, and further consideration of the retention of the complete building fabric of the Castle.

Henry Herzberg.



26th Sept., '14