

Heritage Statement: London Telecom Tower, 60 Cleveland Street, London W1T 4JZ

Savills have applied for planning permission and listed building consent for the:

Install 2 x 0.6m transmission dishes on to the existing transmission tower. The dishes will be fitted onto galvanized steel frames at a height of 136m there will also be a small equipment cabinet and ancillary equipment installed internally.

GENERAL BACKGROUND

The London Telecoms Tower was added to the List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic interest at Grade II by English Heritage under reference 798-1/98/10169 in March 2003. It is described by English Heritage as;

Radio tower, proposed 1954, built 1961-5 to the design of the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works Architect's Department; Eric Bedford Chief Architect, G R Yeats, senior architect in charge; S G Silhan, senior engineer MPBW, structural engineer; J J Taylor, senior engineer MPBW, services engineer; Kenneth Holloway, Post Office engineer.

Sleek reinforced concrete cylinder, board mark finished to lower 130 feet and 582 feet high, with 40ft mast on top. Reinforced concrete floors. Deep raft foundations. Central chimney like shaft of reinforced concrete, the upper section 22ft in diameter and with walls one foot thick, tapering outwards to 35ft external diameter at base with 2ft thick walls. The lower seventeen floors of equipment rooms, ventilation plant and offices clad in triple curtain wall comprised externally of stainless steel glazed with Antisun glass. 103 feet of hospitality floors at top of tower, on six levels, originally with observation floors, restaurant and kitchen, and with three further storeys housing plant room above. The aerials and dishes had to be mounted between 365 and 475 feet to achieve adequate ground and obstacle clearance, and were mounted on circular galleries to give the maximum flexibility for adjustment and for subsequent new equipment. The circular shape dictated by the aerials has been retained in the remainder of the tower, to maintain consistency of form and to provide minimum wind resistance. Because of the building's taper the lower five floors are substantially smaller. Ground floor entrance on Maple Street leads to tower foyer, with exhibition space on concave link floor above. Lift lobbies lead to 65ft diameter restaurant floor which originally revolved once every 25 minutes, with former cocktail lounge and weather station above. The building, originally with public access to galleries and restaurant, now serves only BT's guests. The interiors have been entirely refurbished. The telecommunications and servicing equipment is not included in the listing.

The BT Tower was built as a centre of national and international telephone communication by ultra high frequency (UHF) microwave transmission. The site was chosen at the rear of the Museum Telephone Exchange, because this exchange was already the focal point of the telecommunications system and the vision cables network for London, with cable connection to Broadcasting House (q.v, City of Westminster). However, as telephone use soared in the 1950s, and was correctly predicted to increase still more quickly in the 1960s, it became increasingly difficult to provide adequate cable links in central London. Radio telephones using low frequencies had long been used, but the use of high frequencies was in its infancy, and this commitment to the use of high frequencies on a potentially massive scale placed the tower at the forefront of international design. 'It will represent a considerable advance on any existing international centre' (Institution of Civil Engineers, 1965, p.33). The sensitive equipment meant that the tower had to be exceptionally stable to maintain the accuracy of the narrow beam transmitters. By means of tests in the National Physical Laboratory wind tunnel, it was stiffened so as to deflect only eleven inches in a hundred mile an hour gale. The cylindrical shape reduced wind resistance.

The height was raised to over 580 feet as building commenced, in order that the tower should be taller than the office buildings then being erected in London. Its waves were relayed across Britain via a series of masts, the nearest being at Harrow. The design was carefully considered for its elegance. 'The massing is a very welcome addition to the urban landscape' (Architects' Journal, 22 June 1966, p.1543). The design to include restaurant facilities was made only in mid-1961, and is part of a movement across North America and central Europe in favour of landmark restaurants connected with radio masts. However, the comparable, slightly earlier towers at Dortmund, Stuttgart and Vienna were only television transmitters, and the Space Needle at the Seattle World's Fair (opened 1962) was principally a place of entertainment. The restaurant and observatory floors give stability to the structure, and raised the Post Office's image when first built. The observation floors were closed to the public in 1971, and the restaurant in 1980.

Office building along Cleveland Street and Maple Street forms a visula plinth to the tower with a supporting link on the fourth floor, but it has its own entrance on the corner of Cleveland Street and is not itself of special interest and not included in the listing.

The Telecom Tower was originally known as the Museum Radio Tower, and subsequently the Post Office Tower and Telecom Tower.

The BT Communication Tower represents an iconic symbol within the London skyline. The building was the tallest building in London between 1964 and 1980, being designed and built for the purpose ultra-high frequency microwave transmissions. Built to cater for the exploding demand for both public and private communication from the 1960s onwards, the tower is a symbol of Britain's progress during this era. The building's design was based around the philosophy of form following function, with design ensuring the building had rigid strength reducing any flexing under wind load as far as practicable. This was to ensure the pencil beam microwave transmission links were not broken during poor weather conditions. This utilitarian function follows throughout the steel cantilever lattice, through to the anti-sun glass used on the external shell.

The building itself provides, through its slim structure a significantly positive contribution to the local skyline. Although the microwave transmission dishes previously located the central part of the structure have now been removed, the building itself still hosts a host microwave transmission equipment. This equipment is now sited on the roof of the BT advertising section above the gallery, due to the requirement to provide line of sight links.

From this brief summary and from the listing statement, it is clear that the significance of the BT Communications Tower is primarily associated with its historical interest being a symbol of the "white heat of technology" era of telecommunications in Britain.

London Telecoms Tower is a Grade II listed transmission station. This statement proposes to assess the Tower in relation to Paragraph 131 of the NPPF that sets out 3 issues that the LPA's should take into account when determining applications relating to heritage assets. These issues relate to:

- A. Sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets,
- B. Positive contribution that the conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities.
- C. The desirability of developments making a positive contribution to the local character and distinctiveness.

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A. SUSTAINING AND ENHANCING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HERITAGE ASSETS.

The significance of the heritage asset in the instance of the BT Communications Tower is that it is a landmark structure with historical importance in relation to British telecommunications history. The historical significance is linked directly with the evolution of ultra-high frequency microwave transmission.

To 'sustain/'keep in existence'/ 'maintain' the significance of the tower it will therefore be necessary to:

1. Protect the physical structure, limiting the potential for damage both in the short and long term. By protecting the structure, the significance of its architectural value will be sustained. The proposals would assist to facilitate this by providing income for the owner, ensuring the up-keep and future maintenance of the asset.
2. Keep a functional relationship between the structure and microwave telecommunications in order to sustain its historical and functional significance. The proposals would enable the future of the site to be secured with the on-going use of the tower for its original purpose as a microwave transmission facility.
3. Ensure that the tower remains visible on the London skyline. The proposals would not have any significant impact upon the setting of the structure within the London skyline and as such would not harm the setting or the character of the building. The dish would not be any larger than the largest of the existing dishes, as such would not have a negative impact upon the structure.

B. POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION THAT THE CONSERVATION OF HERITAGE ASSETS CAN MAKE TO SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES &

C. THE DESIRABILITY OF DEVELOPMENTS MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION TO THE LOCAL CHARACTER AND DISTINCTIVENESS.

The NPPF requires LPAs to consider how the conservation of a heritage asset can make a positive contribution towards sustainable communities, including their economic viability. It is considered that the proposals can contribute towards creating and maintaining sustainable communities through the protection of the BT Tower. As discussed previously the tower has much historical and cultural value, which would be sustained and potentially enhanced by the proposed development. In this context, it is clear that the positive financial contribution and functional tie of the development can contribute towards enhancing the social sustainability of both Camden and the wider London area. The proposed addition of 2 microwave transmission dishes on the tower would help to sustain the positive contribution that the tower makes, in historic, technological and architectural terms, to the character and distinctiveness of Camden and wider London area.

In summary, in our view, the installation of additional dishes on the tower would sustain and enhance the asset more than if the development were not permitted. The proposed development would generate income for the upkeep and on-going maintenance of the structure. This would protect the tower in respect of its importance in the protected views across London and assist in maintaining the city skyline. The tower itself is a symbol of technological advancement and British engineering ingenuity. The proposals would assist in retaining a functioning relationship between the structure and its historical significance for microwave telecommunications. In maintaining this relationship and facilitating the on-going protection of this asset, the proposals would help to ensure the benefits of London's cultural heritage are maintained assisting the creation of sustainable communities.

The planning application and listed building consent proposals are therefore considered to be in accordance with Paragraphs 131 and 137 of the NPPF and also in accordance with Development Plan policies (Camden Core Strategy Policies CS14, Development Plan Policies DP24 and DP25, and London Plan Policy 7.8).

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For Savills Telecom
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