

# **STATEMENT OF OBJECTIONS**

**LINCOLN'S INN - UNDER TREASURER'S HOUSE**

**(APPLICATION : 2015/4408/P)**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1. The existing proposal involves the demolition of a building which has been identified by the Council as making a significant contribution to the character and appearance of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area, and which is also listed by virtue of attachment to the grade II\* listed New Hall and Library complex, a Victorian masterpiece of national importance. There are no exceptional circumstances and no public benefits. Its demolition is therefore contrary to the Council's policies set out in Section DP25 of its Local development Framework, and to National Planning Policy Guidance and should be refused.
2. The proposed development by reason of its bulk, design, form, roof and glazed link would be detrimental to the character, appearance and setting of the grade II\* listed New Hall and Library, and to the wider character and appearance of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area contrary to the Council's policies in DP 25.
3. The proposal departs from a long-established design strategy for the Inn based on delicate urban surgery and contextual design, which has done so much to create a place of outstanding architectural and historic interest of national significance.
4. The applicant's aspirations for new accommodation can be met without the need for the demolition of the existing building.

## STATEMENT OF OBJECTION

I am writing to object to the current proposal to demolish the Under Treasurer's House at Lincoln's Inn in connection with various related applications for the erection of a library extension. I am the principal of my own international practice Philip Davies (Heritage and Planning) Ltd, which provides advice and guidance to a range of public and private sector clients in the UK and overseas. My objections are submitted in my own personal capacity.

In my various roles, I have been involved in Lincoln's Inn for over 40 years, most recently as Planning and Development Director at English Heritage, in which capacity I directed over £600,000 towards the phased enhancement of the streetscape and gardens of Lincoln's Inn Fields, the latter being a registered historic landscape. In addition, my most recent book *London Hidden Interiors* features the New Hall on the cover, and the book launch was held there. I have taken the unusual step of intervening personally on a current development proposal because it is so harmful for the reasons set out below.

Together with the Inner and Middle Temple, and Grays Inn, Lincoln's Inn is a precinct of outstanding architectural and historic interest. It is of national importance, hence its special status, and it lies within a designated conservation area, for which I was responsible for designating in 1968. Nearly all of its buildings are listed in their own right as buildings of special architectural or historic interest, many at grade I or II\*

The Inns of Court comprise one of the finest urban sequences of historic buildings and spaces in Britain. Before carrying out any intervention to an historic asset, the starting point is to understand the qualities which make it special, and which warranted the original designation. Such a fundamental analysis is lacking in this instance.

In spite of repeated requests to prepare one, there is no Conservation Plan to help guide development and change, while the Master plan for the Inn is woefully inadequate. The latter does not appear to have been the subject of any public consultation, or shared and adopted by either Camden Council or Historic England. It is simply an aspirational development strategy, which contains no conservation analysis or understanding of either the constraints, or the long-standing, architectural policies of the Inn, which have done so much to make the place outstanding.

Following war damage, in an enlightened piece of long-term management, the Inns were carefully repaired and, in places, reconstructed using the highest standards of craftsmanship in a delicate exercise in urban surgery. The only departure from this was a single block in Grays Inn, which was rebuilt in a bland contemporary design, which is now bitterly regretted. It would be tragic if such a mistake was to be repeated at Lincoln's Inn.

My specific concerns are as follows:

i) Hardwick's New Hall is a Victorian masterpiece and a major landmark building of national importance. It was built between 1843-45 in such a strong architectural vocabulary that almost 40 years later Sir George Gilbert Scott extended it to create the Library in a matching contextual style using diapered red brick. In 1961 the same approach was adopted for the current Under Treasurer's house, which is situated on the north side of the building, as well as for the reconstruction of the entrance gateway from Chancery Lane and much of Old Buildings between 1956-67, all of which are now listed. The result is an ensemble of buildings of various different dates, but each component group is harmoniously united by a common form, style, design and use of matching materials. To wilfully depart from this long-established approach for the new proposals will fragment the overall ensemble, and substantially harm the setting of the New Hall and Library, as well as magisterial views of the whole complex from Lincoln's Inn Fields.

ii) The Under Treasurer's house is listed by virtue of attachment to the New Hall. It is also ancillary and in the same ownership and use. Listed building consent is required for its demolition. While architecturally its detailing is unexceptional, in townscape terms it is a creditable attempt to provide an unobtrusive, but contextual, building which, crucially, is subordinate to the listed Library and Hall, and which sits discreetly at low level behind the existing perimeter boundary wall. Its domestic scale and character echoes Hardwick's original Stewards' House, which stood on the site, a photograph of which is attached as an appendix. Its relationship to the main hall and library is similar to that of domestic buildings clustered around a great cathedral thereby accentuating the majesty and grandeur of the main ensemble.

iii) The existing house has been identified rightly by Camden Council in its Conservation Area Appraisal as making a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. As a development in a conservation area, under Section 72 of the Act the local planning authority and, indeed, Historic England, must pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the conservation area. By definition, the proposal does not preserve the character or appearance of the conservation area, nor does it enhance ie. reinforce the qualities that warranted the original designation for the reasons set out below.

iv) Crucially, the existing domestic-scaled house, and Hardwick's original, are visually subordinate to the New Hall and Library. However, the proposed design deploys an entirely different and alien vocabulary and seeks to make an assertive architectural statement, which challenges the prominence of the Hall and Library. This can be seen in the use of a large bronze mullioned window, which is of the same scale as the fenestration on the library, unlike the domestic scale of the existing house. The parapet lines are plainly detailed, unlike the serrated crenellated form on the Hall and Library and other Victorian buildings in the Inn.

v) The new building would also be more obtrusive when viewed from Lincoln's Inn Fields. The shallow-pitched asymmetrical roof form is discordant when read against the steeper pitch and gables of the grade II\* listed parent building, and the backdrop of Stone Buildings. This harm is exacerbated by the overly large fenestration, which

jars badly when read against the carefully-composed proportions and balance of solid to void of the listed buildings. In addition, at present the link to the library is via a discreet matching red brick arch. Under the proposals this would be replaced by a two-storey glazed link, which would be another alien intervention detracting from the setting of the library and blocking views from Lincoln's Inn Fields through to Stone Buildings. The impact of this link has been underplayed in the illustrative material provided by the architects.

vi) The overall design is a poor pastiche of 1960s modernism, which fails to rise to the challenge of such an outstanding site, or to integrate successfully with the existing historic buildings. Its overall box-like form and bulk, design, scale, roof and glazed link cause substantial harm to the wider setting of the listed buildings and detract from the conservation area.

vii) In addition, the related proposals involve the loss of two trees, which are an important part of the wider setting of the Hall; a magnificent magnolia tree, and a lime for the creation of an unnecessary new path.

Camden Council has clear policies to resist the demolition of listed buildings, and unlisted buildings, which make a positive contribution to the character of a conservation area set out in DP 25 of its Local development Framework. There are no exceptional circumstances in this case. Lincoln's Inn provides offices for benchers in a private precinct where public access is restricted. The development involves substantial harm to the setting of the New Hall and Library, and to the wider conservation area, and no public benefit. It is clear that the proposal should therefore be refused consent in line with the Council's policies and the NPPG.

There is no reason why the Inn's aspirations for new and improved accommodation could not be met by a more sensitive and progressive approach retaining, adapting, and, if necessary, extending the house to meet the Inn's requirements.

Philip Davies  
August 2015

## **APPENDIX**



**Hardwick's Original Steward's House**



**The existing Steward's House: sensitive contextual design subordinate to the Hall and Library**



**Sensitive detailing, design and matching materials**

