**10 Bertram Street**

**London N19 5DQ**

David Fowler

Principal Planning Officer

London Borough of Camden

5 Pancras Square

London N1C 4AG

6th April 2017

Dear Mr Fowler

**Planning Application - 2016/6088/P - Highgate Newtown Community Centre Unit A, B, C, D & E - 25 Bertram Street London N19 5DQ - Planning Objection**

I am writing to you to following my letter of objection dated 30th November 2016 where I indicated that I had requested further information from the Council and may need, in light of that information, to present further objections to the above planning application.

Following an FOI request in September 2016, I have now received the full HNCC Site Condition Survey produced in October 2011 which has been used as the basis for the Council’s published assertion that “the existing buildings are reaching the end of their life”; and that the survey “ identifies costs of over £2m to carry out all the refurbishments necessary to bring the building up to a basic standard”.

This Condition Survey was also used as a basis for information provided to the Cabinet when considering this matter in February 2016.

Since requesting the Condition Survey, however, the Council has now stated that: **“these costs arising from the 2011 condition survey are no longer current and cannot safely be relied on”**

This admission comes just one year after the Cabinet decision and it is clear that they could not and should not have been relied upon in making the decision in February 2016 to demolish and redevelop the site.

Moreover, not only were Cabinet Members not made aware of the unreliability of estimates for refurbishment, they appear to have been misled in the report with regard to the amounts required. In the Cabinet report, officers reported that this would cost “£3m over 5-10 years”.

In fact, the only condition report available to the Council at that time was the 2011 Condition Survey and it represented **a repair and maintenance programme over 20 years** not 5-10 years.

Moreover, the gross figure quoted in the Condition Survey did not reflect the figures provided to the Cabinet. The total cost in the Condition Survey was comprised of 3 elements of expected expenditure over 20 years:

HNCC £1,099,640

FYA £359,503

Caretaker’s House £75,303

Total £1,534,446

The report also failed to advise Members that the FYA had some £300-400k of building improvements since the 2011 Condition Survey, through Section 106 funding arising from the neighbouring Chester Balmore development.

The required expenditure on the Caretaker’s House (which has now been vacant for several years) should also have been presented as a separate element of a refurbishment option as an ‘invest to earn’ proposition to support the refurbishment of HNCC.

The total sum required, therefore, for HNCC over 20 years was £1,099,640.  It is accepted that inflation at 26% (as advised by the Council’s relevant consultants) needs to be added to this figure, which brings the total required to £1,385,546. This required sum over 20 years, with a lease arrangement in place, would have been an entirely different proposition for the Cabinet to consider but was not presented to them as an option.

It is accepted that this consideration should also have suitable adjustment made for works that have since been completed and significant items identified since.

For example, I am aware that recent major works undertaken by the Council at HNCC include:

* replacement of heating/lighting units in main hall;
* installation of new boiler and associated works;
* repairs to rear roof area behind main hall.

In addition, major works undertaken by the HNCC charity using private funding include:

* upgrading the cafe and kitchen area to meet current standards involving redecoration and catering equipment;
* improvements to toilet facilities and general redecoration of common parts.

Further, intrinsic to the refurbishment option would be a long lease for HNCC clearly setting out landlord and tenant obligations for repairs and maintenance. This would be essential to enable HNCC to raise external capital funds for repairs and improvements. Further, the Council would be receiving its proposed £120k per annum in rent and service charges to assist it in meeting its landlord obligations. It would also be possible for the Council and HNCC to proactively seek external funding opportunities both jointly and separately to provide funding for specific improvement programmes e.g. double glazing; solar panels on a new sports hall roof etc.

As previously mentioned, an imaginative scheme to repair or rebuild on the site of the Caretaker's House could bring in a significant initial cash injection to launch a match funding fundraising drive e.g. from the Big Lottery Building Communities Fund.

In conclusion, the Council, in seeking to justify this major development, has relied on a condition survey which the Council, itself, admits “cannot safely be relied on” and has made a series of unsubstantiated comments about the condition of the building, which have been continually repeated by officers, Members and various consultants to back up the case for demolishing the buildings.

I do not believe that the requirement to consider the alternative option for sensitively altering or retro-fitting the buildings has been fully considered by the Council as required under the Development Management Policy DP22 and I would be grateful if these further points can be taken into account in the Council’s deliberations.

Yours sincerely

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