

Gentet, Matthias

From: Soraya Syed [REDACTED]
Sent: 11 August 2017 11:24
To: Gentet, Matthias
Subject: Re: urgent withdrawal of objections needed - Att. Gideon Whittingham 5180

Re Planning Application 2016/7088/P

Please read carefully: our objections to the proposed demolition of the Rochester Square Spiritualist Temple and redevelopment of the site
(Please also see the further numbered objections that form the latter part of this document)

ON THE SUBJECT OF DEMOLITION AS OPPOSED TO RESTORATION

To begin with I would like to discuss the proposed demolition of Rochester Square Spiritualist Temple. I wholly oppose the destruction of this significant Religious and Historic building. The National contribution the Spiritualist Movement has made since its inception, particularly after the First World War when the whole country was grieving, its connections to the science of empirical discoveries and the lives that have been touched and made better communally by these Temples in their working states must be subjects carefully considered before assessing the fate of these vulnerable religious buildings under threat and out of respect for the many people who work and utilise these essential spiritual spaces today.

It is against every moral code to destroy religious buildings. Spiritualism is a recognised religion in this country and environmentally, restoration and conversion should always outweigh destruction and re-development.

It is also extremely important to protect our historic buildings. Not just for the country but for Camden's historical prosperity. The RSST is almost one hundred years old, less than nine years shy of being eligible for a Historical Listing. Its interior is exquisite, with intact carvings, glasswork and original murals - and its exterior could very easily be restored and returned to its former glory. Having entered the building (on many occasions over the years) and conversed with the individuals who tried so hard to restore it (against adversity from 'above') and contributed to its past use on occasion, I can tell you that the building was very much appreciated and loved and attended not just by its official membership but by many members of the local community including ourselves. Since it has been closed (we thought for restoration) it has been in the press due to an issue with a set of squatters who have now vacated the building.

From the Evening Standard:

Graham Hewitt, assistant general secretary of the Spiritualist National Union which owns the church, said: 'Our congregation has been there since 1926 when Sir Arthur Conan Doyle laid down the church's foundations. I don't know what this group is doing here, all I know is I want them out.'

The question is, who is then therefore responsible for putting the site up for sale to developers ... ?

and just how was it previously agreed that another developer was allowed to build right up against the RSST's wall ?
When will the strict guidelines of this Conservation Area start being effectively enforced ? These guidelines must be upheld.

PLEASE HELP US SAVE, RESTORE AND PRESERVE THE ROCHESTER SQUARE SPIRITUALIST TEMPLE ONCE AND FOR ALL

Contrary to the insistence of the developers the building is not derelict nor is it ripe for demolition. Whether the powers that be at the Spiritualist National Union now conveniently consider the Temple of absolutely no worth to the point that they are willing to dismantle and steal its exterior and brickwork and sell the site to these developers, is another subject that should be under discussion here. It certainly does not take into account the emotional impact: the wishes and feelings of all of the local residents who pass the temple each day and or whom can view aspects of the RSST and its lovely garden from their houses and consider it of historical and architectural importance to Camden:
internationally - because one of our country's most famous authors and the creator of the Sherlock Holmes detective novels, the writer Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, was the founder of this very place as well as an influential advocate of the Spiritualist Movement (his foundation stone is the first thing a pedestrian would notice)
or the fact that it is a beloved historical sight directly within vicinity of our homes, as residents of Rochester Square, a Camden Conservation Area and a building of significance that we all feel emotionally connected to as part of our home here in this Square

It is absolutely shameful that this religious centre of hope has been closed and deliberately left empty in order to force a redevelopment of the site, when any redevelopment should be primarily concerned in preserving what is already there. This is a building of significance which desperately needs your protection and support, in your authority as the Planning Department of Camden Council.

OUR EMOTIONAL & MATERIAL ATTACHMENTS TO THE ROCHESTER SQUARE SPIRITUALIST TEMPLE SITE AND ITS CURRENT CONDITION - FOLLOWED BY THE REMAINDER OF OUR DETAILED OBJECTIONS

Speaking up for all the residents, the Rochester Square Spiritualist Temple is part of our home and our neighbourhood as well as a religious centre.

In our time living at Rochester Square we have all experienced some use of the Temple, enjoyed its Summer Open Days and had conversations with many passers-by and members regarding its significance and importance to the community. The tourists who pass by or seek it out specifically are touched and intrigued by the presence of the foundation stones and by the building itself. Residents along this terrace and beyond had hoped for an imminent restoration of the Temple and its garden, which also provides a much needed green space in the area.

The RSST is a small and simple yet beautiful building, a fine example of a Spiritualist Temple from the early part of last century. The original building is sound, all the heating pipes are new and the only major issues are with the glass areas of the roof. There is also very very skilfully painted gold mural of the seven principles inside that needs to be seen to be believed.

We would urge you make it your priority to visit and assess the Temple for yourselves, our only fears being that criminal damage could be made in anticipation of such a visit. It is very clear that there are unscrupulous forces at work here, those who would wish for the Temple to appear a unsalvageable wreck fit only for demolition. We as residents are watching carefully for signs of any criminal damage to its facade and contents and will be reporting any breaches to the Police.

OBJECTIONS ON THE SUBJECT OF REDEVELOPMENT

The apparent reasons the application provides for redeveloping the site are not valid:

The design of the relevant application is actually a divisive proposition for our Conservation neighbourhood - as is the destruction of the Temple in favour of a much larger commercial build - any redevelopment would be the cause of an unconscionable amount of distress and anguish for us as residents, as well as causing major disruptions, dust and noise pollution and traffic at the entrance to our Square which provides the only thoroughfare from the Camden Road directly into Rochester Square and neighbouring areas. It would mean that large construction vehicles would have to access the site from this aspect only. Also nine apartments behind our small gardens and a so called communal space would mean a lot more noise, pedestrian and vehicle traffic and naturally if there are many more residents, as well as families of residents and visitors to the building, they will want to use their outside spaces both on the ground and on higher levels, as they wish, causing a lot of invasive noise pollution.

With UrbanLabs proposed community facilities (which we can't trust will even feature in the final build or if so, how long it would remain) the added extra human and vehicle traffic and blockages would prevent us from being able to use our Square as we have been accustomed to and as established residents, we have full rights to. This could cause no end of misery, not to mention the general adverse affects it would have on all of the nearby residents during a lengthy noisy and messy build - on our homes and our businesses. Many of us work from home and some of us rent our properties to other families - who would naturally wish to end their tenancies and all of the above would prevent us from procuring any new tenants. Therefore the financial impact would be immediate and deadly. For us personally we currently have tenants in our house, without them we would not be able to pay our mortgage and would be in danger of losing our current main home, also in North London. Looking ahead, we would also not be able to return to Rochester Square as was the plan. We would be prevented from returning to a home where where our views, access to light, privacy and fears of long term structural issues due to the below objections would be prevalent. Our children would be extremely sad about this.

The destruction, redevelopment and final structure would therefore greatly impact on our abilities to enjoy our homes both immediately and long term, impair our ability to work from home in a peaceful environment and pay our bills and mortgages, causing us unacceptable and prolonged mental, emotional and financial stress and disruption and subject us to an ugly view and loss of privacy in our homes and gardens.

Of particularly grave concern is the fact that our rear garden wall, which runs along the end of the terrace, lies on the boundary of the proposed development. This wall is original. It would be unacceptable for this wall to be dismantled and for the old brickwork to suddenly be rejoined onto new brickwork where it meets the railings of the RSST.

The Temple itself also forms the majority of our rear boundary, therefore we would be without a boundary at the bottom of our garden which, considering that we wholly object to the demolition and redevelopment, surely has some legal standing and is something we would be prepared to exercise if necessary. It is unacceptable to imagine a new wall there - simply put, the period aesthetics at the end of our garden and our direct neighbours as well as along the terrace, would be severely and unacceptably altered. We would also feel much less secure.

Another subject (dealt with below) is the sheer inappropriate and unsympathetic design of the proposed building in comparison to what is already currently there. This cannot be fully assessed from their plan, its a drawing, the reality would be much worse. Our views of other surrounding period homes would also be greatly affected. All this hampers our rights within the Conservation Area we live in.

We have been told by the developers that the new residents would not be entitled to Camden parking passes. This seems preposterous as surely as residents they would be entitled to passes?? Parking around the Square is already challenging at the best of times. However if this is accurate then surely they would park illegally anyway, causing blind spots where our children would be unable to cross the roads safely. Or perhaps the basement excavation might provide them with a car park. Of course, this also is an utterly preposterous proposition due to the ground limitations as well as the risks of subsidence.

Further to this, we do not require an additional community arts hub, having an spacious artists\ ceramic studio in the centre of Rochester Square and a huge and more than adequate childrens' play centre just meters away in neighbouring Camden Square. We also do not need a noisy environment right against the back of our garden or our peaceful enjoyment of our houses and sleep to be interrupted by said hubis proposed nightly events.

Other objections as you will know by now feature information on what the Temple was built in that particular location and the limitations presented by the water table concerning ground water. There were also important fossils found on the site which means the garden area is of archeological interest. This presents yet another reason why this application and further applications need to be refused.

To conclude, if the RSST site was to be sold to developers, any applications for redevelopment of site it would have to be extremely considered, taking into account:

-The wishes and feelings and real impact on directly affected residents in the surrounding Conservation Area neighbourhood concerning the impact on their homes and lives and their wishes and concerns for the preservation of this Historic Building

-Propose a sympathetic restoration of the site where any additional and adjoining structure added to the Temple would not overbear, encroach on the views or access to natural light overshadowing our gardens and caused prolonged major disruption, noise or traffic

Not feature a basement excavation: as in this application - inappropriate and worrying in this Conservation Area and in such close proximity to our terrace of Early Victorian houses and all other dense housing in the vicinity

A willingness to ensure there would be no after-effects to the build or build extension - e.g. as with the nearby Julian Court development where surrounding residents are still suffering the effects of the build in an area where the water table is very high, losing trees and experiencing water damage and damp in their homes

and specifically not to add the presence of the unsympathetic neighbouring development adjacent to the Temple which included an unscrupulous third party wall agreement as part of its successful application

DETAILED FURTHER OBJECTIONS

Comments on the proposed development of the Rochester Square Spiritualist Temple.

We formally object to this proposal on the following grounds:

- a) There will be an adverse effect on the residential amenities of the houses 29 - 36 Rochester Square and many of the flats in Julian Court by reason of overlooking, loss of privacy, noise and disturbance due to the proximity of the dwelling units and community spaces. The entire proposal shows an egregious disregard of CPG6 regarding proximity to other dwelling units
- b) The proposal sets out an unacceptably high density and over-development of the site in this Conservation Area. It involves loss of the open aspect of most of the houses overlooking the east façade of the site.
- c) The visual impact of the development is detrimental to the houses on the eastern side and to the flats on the western side. It is over-bearing and out-of-scale in terms of its appearance compared with existing development in the Camden Square Conservation Area. The Google Earth map of the Area shows that the proposed close proximity to the existing habitations is not replicated anywhere else.
- d) The proposal to make a community space by demolishing, rather than creatively re-using, the historically important Temple, will have an adverse effect on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. We urge a rethink particularly in the Applicant's interpretation of sections of the Camden Core Strategy, The London Plan (2016) and various parts of NPPF, in particular sections 56, 57, 58 and 61.
- e) Many details on the Architect's drawings, and the interpretation put upon them in the Planning Statement, are a) wrong b) inadequate c) questionable and are grounds for objection in themselves.

Detailed Submission .

Planning Statement 8.17 is a statement of opinion with which we fundamentally disagree.

1: The claim in submitted Planning Statement 7.82 that the increase in bulk of the new building will be broken down by being heavily articulated does not bear in situ scrutiny. The argument concerning the VSC and Daylight Distribution evaluations in Planning Statement 7.7 is entirely specious.

Rather, the narrow obscured glazed windows and the vertical steel louvres create a modernist version of a medieval fortress with arrow slits and defensive portcullises. It will be a heavy bulk over 10m high (when seen from the lower ground patios of

the houses in Rochester Square, approx. 1 metre beneath ground level) and barely 10 metres from the rear rooms of those houses. We contend it is out of keeping with the ethos of a Conservation Area.

The existing pitched roof of the Temple gives a sense of space and airiness to the rear of the Rochester Square houses. Its removal and replacement with a solid structure will have a major deleterious effect on the quality of the light and the outlook of the adjacent houses.

See also 3 below

2.1 Planning Statement 7.81 is factually wrong. The entire proposal contravenes Camden's guidelines in CPG6 of a minimum distance of 18m between the windows of habitable rooms of different units that directly face each other.

The distance from the rear facing windows of 29 → 36 Rochester Square to the existing eastern boundary of the site is between 8 and 9 (eight and nine) metres not 15 (fifteen) as submitted. The proposal provides a partial buffer (see below) but there will still only be 12 meters between the new buildings windows and those of the houses 29 → 35 Rochester Square.

This runs counter to Camden's guideline of 18 metres between overlooking windows in CPG6 and is unacceptable, especially in a Conservation Area.

2.2

Planning Statement 7.82 is factually wrong and misleading in claiming the buffer provided by the site is 2 metres wide.

Architect's plan GA_033 shows the buffer as reducing from 3 metres in front of numbers 36 and 29 to 1.5 metres in front of numbers 35/34 and 31/30

There is no buffer at the site boundary with Numbers 32 and 33.

Numbers 32 and 33 actually have a terrace running up the boundary of the site on the first floor.

Number 35 has a terrace proposed to end only 1.5 metres from the boundary wall. This will directly overlook a shower room/toilet and a living room on the ground floor of No 35 at a distance of less than 10 metres.

The 1st floor west-facing rooms of the existing houses on the eastern flank do not only serve staircases and bathrooms (see submitted document DS Report 4.3.1). They are also living rooms and bedrooms. These will be adversely affected and overlooked by the proposed development.

The proposed terraces, even though not actual rooms, are still areas of occupation and will impact heavily on the privacy of the houses.

3 The views expressed in Planning Statement 7.83 are factually wrong, misleading and contentious.

Architect Drawings GA_033 and GA_034 show that the proximity of the mass of the building and the terraces on both the first and second floors, even with the proposed vertical COR-TEN steel Louvres, however angled, will not mitigate the intrusion on the neighbour's privacy. The terraces are intended for use, not as decoration. They will need lighting, as will the bedrooms. Even with obscure glazed windows, there will be light and noise pollution affecting Nos 36/35, 33, 34, 30 and 29.

There will be further light pollution from the ground floor plan. Submitted Documents GA_032 and GA_063 show full-length, unobscured windows directly overlooking the rear of the houses 36 → 34; in the case of numbers 35 and 34 they will be less than 10 meters away. There is no indication of the height of these windows or of how the interior space will be illuminated. There is no indication of how this luminance will be mitigated. One might surmise from GA_041 that there will be a wall 2 metres high forming the site boundary but there is no accurate plan or any statement of its construction/depth/lighting. The bricks shown in the mock ups (GA_063 and GA_064) are inappropriate and out of character with the old London bricks used on the boundary side walls of the existing houses.

The proposal for additional community space is welcome. But we contend that the architectural proposal pays insufficient attention to its effect on the neighbours. The plan for the Ground floor (GA_032) shows two public access routes for the Community areas. One has direct access from Rochester Square south. The other, also serving the entrance to living accommodation units 1, 2 and 3, is directly adjacent to the boundaries of numbers 32, 33, 34, 35 and 36 Rochester Square. The visual representation (GA_064) shows this. However there is no indication of the lighting plan or of any security precautions. Given that an Exclusion Order was recently enforced on the Rochester Court estate; that until recently drug dealing was commonplace on the junction of Camden Mews and Rochester Square; that when the squatters in Rochester Square Gardens were evicted evidence of drug use was found there, it is surely an issue of great environmental and social importance to ensure appropriate illumination and security.

This illumination will cause yet more light pollution to the neighbouring houses and will add to the already extensive adverse effects of the proposal.

Planning Statement 7.44 says there will be, inter alia, public performances of literary, theatrical and film events. There will inevitably be noise from the building, from users and from audiences as they arrive and depart; the public access route referred to above is the only external space available for smokers. We note there is no information concerning sound insulation, lighting or facilities such as a refreshment bar in the plans. All of this is cause for objection on the grounds that it will adversely affect the right of peaceful enjoyment of the residents of 32 to 36 Rochester Square. Additionally it will have a negative effect on the residential amenities of the other residents.

4 We are not confident of the assertions in the Structural Report 8.18 concerning the basement. The report suggests that the plans for the basement are technically questionable.

The BIA Structural report indicates a lack of confidence. It notes groundwater is considered to form a thin but laterally continuous aquifer unit that is possibly confined and that it is considered prudent to adopt a conservative approach to the basement construction. It highlights the problems of damp and the challenges this presents, (see BIA Appendix C(1)) both during and after construction. BIA Appendix C(1) also says that the excavation of the basement may undermine the adjacent property and could lead to settlement in gardens and damage to buildings and below ground services (our italics). None of that is an unequivocal endorsement of the proposal. Given the history of damp in the houses on the eastern flank and in Julian Court this is especially worrying and is cause for objection to the proposed development.

We respectfully request that unless the revised plans to be submitted materially address these concerns the Council's Planning Committee should review and reject this proposal,

a) on the grounds of it having a major adverse effect on the privacy, outlook, the right of peaceful enjoyment, and the loss of existing views of the residents of 29 → 36 Rochester Square and occupants of Julian Court.

b) on the grounds that the proposed increase in volume and mass and the proximity of the building to adjacent residential properties is overbearing, out of scale for the area and out of character of the existing plot.
c) on the grounds that its appearance represents an unsympathetic alteration to the balance between old and new in a designated Conservation Area, especially in relation to the Victorian buildings it abuts, and creates an undesirable precedent by its disregard of Camden guidelines for residential building and not insignificantly because it would require the demolition of an important historical building.

CONCLUSION

The Rochester Square Spiritualist Temple forms a deeper and more meaningful part of this community than it is being given credit for and in the spirit of the original congregation of 1926 who all had to buy their own chairs, we urge you to listen to the power of the people and exercise your authority by refusing this application. A lot of residents and concerned parties in Camden are away at the moment as it is August. Otherwise the number of objections you are getting through would be quadrupling. The extension of the deadline until the 17th of this month is nothing more than a token gesture. If UrbanLab were serious and genuine they would have withdrawn this application completely and consulted with our Conservation neighbourhood in order to find out what we feel would be an appropriate solution to regenerating this plot of land sandwiched in between our gardens. The sheer fact that not even one consultation was organised prior to entering their application is damning. If we had been consulted the resounding opinion would of course be to save the RSST and to work from the standing point of the original building, to preserve and improve upon what is already there.

What is evident here is that a lot of people are very upset and will be upset by this going forwards. This site is simply not suitable for a large and unattractive, unsympathetic and inappropriate multiple occupation dwelling. This is a Conservation Area. The new builds in this area are very few but there is dense occupation and green spaces are in short supply. Lessons need to be learnt about destroying the few green spaces we have left. The water table is high in this area and large building excavations destroy plants and trees and anything of archeological interest will be lost forever under the concrete.

The Temple, even in its empty state, was serving the community by supplying much needed views of greenery and a very attractive structural shape which greatly added to the urban historical landscape with no structural or visible threat to our houses. Its pitched roof adds a much needed aesthetic to the skyline in that area where Conservation and historic buildings should and must take precedence.

This Temple was and could still be a centre of community spirit - we all wish to see this happen and there are many of us. For almost one hundred years, its provisions and services have been instrumental in assisting its many member and visitors in dealing with all areas of human grief, a subject that needs to be on the map in this country. Further to that we all feel an incredibly deep attachment to the building and garden. I know that we speak for much of Camden when I talk about the spotlight on preserving our historic buildings.

This significant building should be allowed to have a more appropriate use than filling the pockets of developers. The RSST site, building and garden, should never be redeveloped but should be preserved to form part of an historic trail on literature and Spiritualism through the borough of Camden, spanning the distance from Baker Street to Marylebone and onwards to Camden Town. Equally this archeological interest could be further explored before the garden could re-seeded with additional meadow and native ornamental plants. If any influential members of the SNU are reading this, this appeal goes out to you, please do the right thing or ensure that you sell this wonderful temple to someone who will.

To conclude, planning application 2016/7088/P for proposed redevelopment of the RSST site by UrbanLab features a token area of communal use in a building which would feature at least nine apartments and very possibly a future basement excavation. It is simply unacceptable that this could be allowed to happen. The contents of this application are in many ways abhorrent, inaccurate and unwelcome. To destroy the historic Rochester Square Spiritualist Temple in a transparent bid for profit and subject us to this ominous, unsympathetic and unwanted modern building in such unacceptable close proximity to our properties would be incredibly tragic. In consideration of all of the above objections contained in this document and out of great concern for the Temple which currently resides on the site, we strongly object to this application and oppose any revised or further applications to demolish the Rochester Square Spiritualist Temple and redevelop the site.

Soraya Syed
36 Rochester Square London NW1 9RZ

