**From:** Alex Bowring [<mailto:alexb@victoriansociety.org.uk>]   
**Sent:** 07 July 2017 13:54  
**To:** Planning <[Planning@camden.gov.uk](mailto:Planning@camden.gov.uk)>  
**Cc:** [jez.donovan@communities.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:jez.donovan@communities.gsi.gov.uk)  
**Subject:** 2016/4869/P & 2016/5032L Victorian Society comments

Dear Mr Glasgow

**RE: Ambassadors Theatre (Grade II, WGR Sprague, 1913); demolition of listed building behind retained façade**

Our ref: 2016/12/021

We trust that this application will now be assessed on the basis of the revised list description. The summary principal reasons for the theatre’s designation makes it resolutely clear why this application is unacceptable:

\* Architectural interest: as an 1913 theatre designed by W G R Sprague, one of the most important late C19 and early C20 theatre architects;

\* Completeness of design: both the Classical style exterior and the interior in Louis XVI style were designed by Sprague and include foyer, circle bar, auditorium and some original backstage features;

\* Degree of survival: both exterior and interior are little altered;

\* Historical interest: the theatre saw the West End debut of many famous artists including Ivor Novello, Hermione Gingold, Paul Robeson, Margaret Lockwood and Vivien Leigh and it was the original home of 'The Mousetrap', the world's longest running show;

\* Group value: adjoins St Martin's Theatre of 1916, also by Sprague (Grade II) and 24 West Street (Grade II)

None of these qualities would be sustained by the proposals and retaining certain features in a severely compromised state is almost not worth the trouble, when it is the integrity and harmony of the original fabric which is so important. If the application is to be determined on the basis that the substantial harm is necessary to deliver a substantial public benefit, it is essential that the various issues that are being used to justify the proposals are separated out; it appears that two tenuous arguments are propping one another up.

First is the apparent impossibility that this development could take place anywhere else in the West End. The applicant states that *‘the idea that this could be done by building a completely new theatre on newly acquired land in the West End is simply too remote to contemplate’* and ‘if *the kind of development now in view is to take place at all it will almost certainly have to be accommodated on a site fully occupied by an existing theatre’*. Yet, a new theatre is set to open on Tottenham Court Road, run by Nimax. This is on newly acquired land (a rundown and unlisted music venue/night club, originally a cinema), compulsorily purchased as part of the Crossrail project. If the Sondheim Project presents a substantial public benefit, then it should also materialise as a strategic planning gain in a larger redevelopment, like the new Nimax. The location of it may be within Camden’s jurisdiction or Westminster Council’s. Although the applicant states that the search for a site has been 20 years long, which is a not inconsiderable length of time, a relatively small number of sites have been assessed which would suggest that the project has only been prioritised sporadically and that the search has not been exhaustive.

Secondly, the challenges that the Ambassador’s faces as a venue, due to its size and layout,  should be caveated by the simple fact that the theatre is still open and therefore presumably viable. Therefore, these issues cannot be considered as a basis for the demolition of the theatre, particularly in the absence of investigation into possible sensitive solutions by a non-interested party.

We reiterate the conclusion of our original letter –  as an application which would entail substantial harm to a Grade II listed building, the local authority’s default position is the refusal of consent. If it is believed that the circumstances really are exceptional, then this is exactly the sort of case that should be decided by a public inquiry.

Yours sincerely,

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