

# Ash Sakula Architects

HAMPSTEAD OLD TOWN HALL, Wac Arts  
Ash Sakula responses to CAAC comments  
9 September 2019

## CAAC comments are shown in blue

Ash Sakula responses are in black. They are preliminary comments and we will welcome the opportunity to explore fully the issues raised during our upcoming on-site meeting with Camden Planners and English Heritage.

These proposals are disappointing. They are too utilitarian and uninviting, do little to reinstate the historic building, improve its setting or enhance the surrounding streetscape.

The building sits confidently and foursquare on its corner, as it has done for 150 years. We do not consider there is a requirement for 'reinstatement'. Rather, what we have aimed to do is to acknowledge the multi-elevational nature of the building by providing appropriate new landscaping to its north-west and north east elevations.

Currently the north west side of the building is an uninviting service yard and car park, with an uncertain relationship with the pedestrian public realm and the street corner. Our proposal replaces this with a carefully considered raised pedestrian terrace which will enliven a currently dead corner of Belsize Park's public realm.

The main frontage onto Haverstock Hill, the north east frontage, is currently a messy assemblage of disparate signage, underwhelming planting and an inaccessible entrance. We have replaced this with a carefully considered new landscape which, we believe, will enhance this stretch of pavement and draw people into the new facilities inside the Old Town Hall.

The front approach is cluttered with cycle parking, raised walkways and a disabled lift. All could be located elsewhere. The glazed balustrades on the front facade and main staircase are highly reflective and not in keeping with the existing architecture. A new forecourt with planting, integral seating and trees?

We think this comment speaks of a slightly old-fashioned approach to public realm. We have carefully integrated the requirements for access into an arrangement which in fact enhances the symmetry of this important frontage. Having banished car parking, appropriately, to the rear of the building, we have front-staged cycle parking because this is 2019 and we need to encourage sustainable transport. The cycle parking will be carefully detailed and paved, and the present disparate planting will be replaced with an integrated planting scheme of shrubs, climbers and trees. Similarly, we abhor access arrangements where disabled folk are sent 'round the side' or 'round the back'. We consider it essential that the disabled lift, like the cycle parking, is 'front-staged'.

We have thought long and hard about the nature of the guarding to the new walkways and café terrace. We consider that the proposed structural glass balustrading will be reticent and understated, especially in comparison with the alternatives, which would either be to continue the brick retaining wall up to form a balustrade – which would work against the intention to open up the building to a new audience – or to use steel railings, which we believe would be unnecessarily fussy and inappropriate. We want to welcome people onto the new café terrace and to make it as visible as possible. There is no glass balustrading to the main staircase: the existing steel balustrading is retained.

It is worth pointing out that the main run of glass balustrading runs round a curve, so that any reflections will be multiform and dispersed.

"A new forecourt with planting, integral seating and trees?" Yes indeed. This is precisely what we have proposed.

Only a part of the land on the N/W has been considered. This area could be designed comprehensively to include completing the avenue of trees right up to Haverstock Hill and a much needed play area on the lower level.

Wac Arts have a many-phased masterplan for the whole of their estate, of which this proposal is just the first stage. Our remit did not cover the lower level, and it may well be that play areas and other landscaping in this area will be proposed in the future.

We have retained the important chestnut tree on this frontage, and we recognize the line of chestnuts on the opposite side of Belsize Avenue. We would be happy to consider the possibility of additional tree planting along the side of the building to create an avenue along this first part of Belsize Avenue, and this could be discussed with planners post-planning, as part of discharging their detailed landscape design conditions.

The café garden has zig zag benching which leave slivers of no-mans-land, unusable from either side.

This is not a no-man's-land, but part of a carefully considered arrangement of planting which both connects and separates the new terrace from the adjacent raised pavement.

The grim S/E area needs to be fully addressed.

Agreed. This is Camden Council land and falls outside of Wac Arts' ownership boundary and our planning boundary.

There is nothing special or uplifting about the interior design of the cafe', nor does it belong to the architecture of the building.

The interior design of the café is at an early stage and it will be developed in detail and submitted to planners, post-planning for conditioned approval. We are confident that its final *parti* will be appropriate and delightful.

There is little information on materials, finishes, colours, joinery or stonework.

We believe that we have provided an appropriate level of detail for this stage of design development.