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22 January 2020

By Email: leela.muthoora@camden.gov.uk

Ms Leela Muthoora
Development Management
Camden Town Hall
Judd Street
WC1H 9JE

Dear Ms Muthoora,

PLANNING APPLICATION REFERENCE: 2019/5983/L – LISTED BUILDING CONSENT FOR THE INSTALLATION OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS EQUIPMENT TO INCLUDE 6X ANTENNAS, 2X CABINETS, ANCILLARY RADIO EQUIPMENT TOGETHER WITH FIXTURES AND FITTINGS AT AFRICA HOUSE 70 KINGSWAY LONDON WC2B 6AH.

This statement has been prepared by YoungsRPS Ltd on behalf of Daejan Holdings (the Owner of Africa House), and is submitted in objection to a Listed Building Consent application to Camden Council (the 'Council') for the installation of telecommunications equipment to include 6x antennas, 2x cabinets, ancillary radio equipment together with fixtures and fittings at Africa House, 70 Kingsway, London WC2B 6AH (the 'Site').

The Owner wishes to express their strong objection to the above proposal, on the grounds that it conflicts with the policies set out in Camden Local Plan 2017 (CLP), London Plan (2016) and the National Planning Policy Framework 2019 (NPPF).

Paragraph 11 of the NPPF sets out a 'presumption in favour of sustainable development', provided the benefits of granting planning permission are not significantly and demonstrably outweighed by any adverse impacts. In this case, the detrimental impacts both environmentally and socially far outweigh any associated economic benefits. The Owner considers the information provided by the applicant in support of the proposal to be insufficient and in part factually incorrect, by virtue of identifying the site to fall within the wrong conservation area, and therefore is lacking key information. The application clearly fails to capture and accurately assess the social and environmental aspect of sustainable development and is, therefore, contrary to NPPF objectives.

Africa House is a Grade II Listed Building located within the Kingsway Conservation Area, not in Bloomsbury Conservation area as identified in the planning and heritage statement. The Kingsway Conservation Area Statement (2001) (Page 10) states that, the *"Rooflines have an overall cohesion, which unsympathetic alterations can harm"*, and goes on to recognise that *"Alterations, even minor ones, have resulted in the loss of detail and have harmed the Conservation Area" and contribute to the loss of original detail"* (Page 13). There are many architectural elements that contribute to the distinct character of the conservation area, including the application site (Africa House).

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The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires local planning authorities to have “special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting”. We consider that that the application has not fully considered or assessed the impact from a heritage perspective, and in our view the proposal will have a significant detrimental impact on the integrity of the Listed Building and the character of setting of Kingsway Conservation Area and Africa House.

Paragraphs 193-197 of the NPPF have regard to the consideration of potential impacts of development on heritage assets. The degrees of harm are defined in the NPPF as ‘loss’, ‘substantial harm’ or ‘less than substantial harm’ of a heritage asset and advises Local Planning Authorities to balance the level of harm against the benefits of the proposed development. As stated above, there are various heritage assets within and adjacent to the application boundary, listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, consisting of;

- Kingsway Conservation Area – which encircles Kingsway from Sardinia Street (South) to Theobald’s Road (North) and was first designated in 1981 as an area of architectural and historic interest desirable to preserve and enhance. Africa House is situated within Kingsway Conservation Area.
- Africa House (Listing entry number: 1379261) is Grade II listed and an impressive stone-faced steel framed building with two orders of giant columns and prominent lion sculptures above the cornice.
- The Roman Catholic Church of St Anselm and St Cecilia (Listing entry number: 1379265) is also Grade II listed and is located adjacent to the southern elevation of Africa House. The Kingsway Conservation Area Statement recognises the character and importance of the timber tunnel-vault roof.
- Bloomsbury Conservation Area – sits adjacent to Africa House and the wider Kingsway Conservation Area. Bloomsbury Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategy (2011) recognises that “Prominent external telecommunications apparatus, including cable runs, can harm the appearance of an historic building. Efforts should be made to find discrete solutions appropriate to the character of the area”.

Paragraph 195 states that “Where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm to (or total loss of significance of) a designated heritage asset, local planning authorities should refuse consent, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or total loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm...”. The proposal impacts the integrity of the building it is situated on, the setting of the adjacent listed building and wider conservation area. Although proposed telecommunications apparatus provides some public benefits, by virtue of maintaining a desired level of indoor coverage, in this case it cannot be considered substantial as the applicant has recognised in the Planning Statement (paragraph 6.5) that the impact on coverage is “relatively small in size”. As such, it does not outweigh the substantial harm on designated heritage assets that will result from the proposal.

London Plan Policy 7.8 seeks to ensure that alterations and extensions to properties affecting conservation areas preserve or enhance such areas whilst London Plan Policies 7.4 and 7.6, require well designed proposals that will respect the appearance, scale, bulk, form, proportions, materials and character of the original building and their surroundings.

Policy D1 of the CLP seeks to secure “high quality design in development”, specifically the Council require that development “(a) respects local context and character, (b) preserves or enhances the historic environment and heritage assets... (m) preserves strategic and local views and (o) carefully

integrates building services equipment". More specifically, Policy D2 of the CLP considers matters relating to heritage and "The Council will not permit development that results in harm that is less than substantial to the significance of a designated heritage asset unless the public benefits of the proposal convincingly outweigh that harm." For conservation areas, this means that "The Council will (e) require that development within conservation areas preserves or, where possible, enhances the character or appearance of the area". Moreover, in relation to Listed buildings "proposals for a change of use or alterations and extensions to a listed building [will be resisted] where this would cause harm to the special architectural and historic interest of the building"

The Digital Infrastructure Camden Planning Guide (2018) states that "...the Council will aim to keep the numbers of radio and telecommunications masts and the sites for such installations to a minimum consistent with the efficient operation of the network. Existing masts, buildings and other structures should be used unless the need for a new site has been demonstrated to the satisfaction of the Council. Where new sites are required, equipment should be sympathetically designed and appropriately camouflaged where possible" (Paragraph 13).

The proposal has been promoted by the desire to redevelop the existing mast site and as a result, the potential decommission of an existing shared mast at 99-103 Kingsway. We do not consider that the applicant has provided sufficient evidence with the exact details and timescales for the redevelopment proposals relating to this, including evidence that renegotiation has been explored to the extent necessary to justify a new mast in a sensitive and more prominent location. If renegotiation was successful and the telecommunication equipment could be incorporated into the redevelopment proposal, we note there could be a potential short-term reduction in indoor signal quality during the construction phase, but this would not be significant to justify a new site when considering the public benefit and the overall planning balance. Furthermore, should a new mast be deemed necessary the applicant recognises that "...new telecommunications facilities can be installed in a variety of places, using a variety of construction techniques" (paragraph 6.8 of the planning statement). Taking this into account, it is hard to believe that Africa House was the only suitable site. Furthermore, the justification for discounting alternative sites is vague and subjective.

As an example, 129-133 Kingsway was considered as an alternative site and the planning statement states that this building is "Part listed, difficult to design due to window cleaning rail. Would probably need to be taller than parapet and hence visible down High Holborn and Southampton Row." Firstly, the fact that the building is part-listed is no more a reason for discounting than the current application site, especially given that Africa House is listed in its entirety and therefore more of a consideration. Secondly, the use of language undermines the scope and comprehensiveness of the exercise, whereby the mast "would probably need to be taller than parapet". For each possible option absent of a reasonable and demonstrable degree of certainty that the telecommunication equipment could not be facilitated, such as 129-133 Kingsway, these should have been pursued to the same extent in order to shortlist a range of sites to compare at the design stage.

The application proposal is intended as a way to maintain 4G indoor coverage, however, the applicant also recognises that without a new cell site (to which this application relates) "...the operator won't be able to efficiently deploy new 5G coverage" (paragraph 6.4 of the planning statement). It is therefore reasonable to assume that intensification and additional equipment will be required to bring the site up to 5G standards. Approving the subject application would weaken the Council's ability to defend future applications for additional equipment that would further impact on the significance of the heritage assets in this location, given that a new precedent will be set. Drawing number 301/A refers to "Proposed 1No. VF Future Cabinet", suggesting that the operator intends to intensify site operations in due course and should this cabinet be built as part of the proposal, it appears to be inconsistent from the description of development.

In summary, we do not consider the location or the building suitable for a telecommunications mast of this scale and the proposal in its current form would not preserve the character and appearance of the conservation area or listed building. The proposal is therefore in direct conflict with local and national planning policy, in so far as the economic and social aspects of sustainable development far outweigh any potential public benefit in this instance.

Yours sincerely,



Tom Hutchinson

For and on behalf of YoungsRPS