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Ben Farrant
Planning Department
Camden Council
5 Pancras Square
London
N1C 4AG

Your reference: 2020/2470/P
Our reference: 158892

23rd June 2020

Ben.farrant@camden.gov.uk

Dear Mr Farrant,

RE: Greater London, Camden, Former Central School of Arts & Crafts (Grade II*, A.H. Verstage & others, 1905-1908); redevelopment of the site including refurbishment of the Lethaby Building, partial demolition, external alterations, basement excavations and extensions to the existing buildings to form a hotel.

Thank you for notifying us of this application which was discussed by our Southern Buildings Committee. We object and offer the following comments.

The Central School of Arts & Crafts is listed at Grade II*, a designation held by only 5.8% of listed buildings. The architectural quality of its confidently designed north and west facades plays a key factor in this listing, whilst also allowing the building to make a strong contribution to the Kingsway Conservation Area in which it is included. Internally, the building retains much of its original fabric, and of particular interest are the large, public spaces on the ground floor and the surviving stair cores. Although the buildings to the rear are not themselves listed nor in a conservation area, they occupy a highly sensitive location within the setting of both of the above designated heritage assets, as well as the Bloomsbury Conservation Area to the east. As such, it is imperative that any proposals concerning these are undertaken with the utmost sensitivity allowing them to contribute, rather than detract from all of these designated heritage assets.

It is our view that that which is proposed would not achieve this, however. We note that the 1960s buildings which currently occupy the space are not overly sympathetic to the Grade II* building, nor the conservation areas, but they are still lower than that proposed, and the bulk is limited to a much smaller area. The two proposed buildings, rising to 10 and 15 storeys, would represent a complete overdevelopment of the site, and have a negative impact on the Central School of Arts & Crafts, competing with this important building and dominating the northern façade. Moreover, the prominence of the site would mean that buildings of such a scale would have an overtly negative impact on both the Kingsway and Bloomsbury Conservation Areas. The proposed materials, particularly those suggested for the Red Lion Building, which appear to take greater inspiration from the surrounding buildings than the Central School of Arts & Crafts itself,

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would only culminate the above harm by making the building appear at odds with the actual building it is adjoined to. To lessen this harm, the development should be reduced by at least six storeys, and the building proposed in place of the Cochrane Theatre, which would dominate the façade, by considerably more. Essentially, this replacement building should not exceed the cornice line of the Central School of Arts & Crafts.

Finally, we have no objection to the conversion of the Central School of Arts & Crafts into a hotel which appears largely sympathetic and would allow for the retention of key public spaces, as well as the significant stair cores. Moreover, we welcome the proposals to remove the later additions within the Lecture Theatre and restore the space to its former proportions. We would ask that more information is provided as to how this would be done, however, and whether there is enough evidence of that which was originally present, to replicate.

In conclusion, the proposed development to the rear represents an unacceptable level of harm to three designated heritage assets. We are not opposed to the principle of converting Central School of Arts & Crafts into a hotel, nor to the demolition and rebuilding of the blocks to the rear, but it is essential that a more sympathetic approach is employed so as to limit the potential harm to the Grade II* building, and the Bloomsbury and Kingsway Conservation Areas.

I would be grateful if you could inform me of your decision in due course.

Yours sincerely,

Olivia Stockdale

Conservation Adviser