



1. Applications for planning permission (2020/0946/P) and listed building consent (2020/1446/L) were submitted in respect of the grade II listed Drinking Fountain at Princes Circus, Shaftesbury Avenue, London Borough of Camden (The site) in April 2020. The Design and Heritage Statement that accompanied the current applications provided details on the proposed relocation of the fountain to a more accessible site adjacent to the Shaftesbury Theatre. The relocation of the fountain allows for significant infrastructure improvements to take place as part of LB Camden's West End Project.

2. Works are now underway at Princes Circus to realign the existing road layout. The drinking fountain is as a result in a more vulnerable position (figure 1) and its relocation has become more urgent.



Figure 1: The drinking fountain October 2020.

3. It is understood that there is no in principle objection to the proposals from LB Camden or any other party. As part of the application process, the question as to whether the existing fountain can be used to supply fresh

drinking water has been asked by LB Camden. While it is appreciated that the provision of fresh water is an LB Camden objective there are a number of issues that prohibit the use of the existing fountain for public drinking water. This matter has been given very careful consideration by LB Camden's West End Project Team but it has been discounted for the following reasons.

4. The existing fountain does not supply fresh drinking water and has not been used in this way for some time. Its internal condition is unknown until works can take place to relocate the structure and the interior of the fountain can be investigated. There is currently no available evidence as to whether the fountain can be used to accommodate a modern water supply (for example, we do not know the size of the space available for modern fixtures and fittings for the safe supply of water and appropriate drainage). Until consent is granted, a scheme for the design of appropriate fittings and fixtures cannot be prepared and could not be issued in the course of this application.

5. In addition, it is proposed to relocate the fountain and to afford it protection by raising it off the ground on a larger plinth. The latter will double as a seat and will allow the fountain to become more of a centrepiece. Using the listed structure as a drinking fountain is not compatible with creating seating within the newly landscaped area.

6. The drinking fountain also has a number of steps up to the water bowls and tap. The water bowls are already some way off the ground (the highest step is c. 600mm above ground level). This means that even in its current position, it would be difficult to make the fountain truly accessible for all. Given that the proposal involves raising the fountain to provide seating around its base, this would make access very difficult for all and potentially dangerous (and the seating and steps could become wet and slippery).



7. To make the fountain truly inclusive and accessible, it would require a platform and handrails which would clearly detract from its special interest.

8. The water originally flowed continually from the fountain - arrangements and alterations would have to be made to turn the water on and off as it would not be practical to allow a continuous water flow.

9. Adequate drainage, which the fountain doesn't currently have and wasn't designed with, would also have to be integrated through alteration and adaptation of the existing structure. As noted above, how this could be achieved, if at all, is currently unknown.

10. The fountain would also need regular maintenance if providing public drinking water. There is no obvious maintenance panel or access in the existing structure. The internal workings of the fountain are currently unknown (and whether there is any internal pipework at all given that it has already been moved once) and this can only be understood once works to dismantle and relocate the fountain are underway. As regular maintenance would be necessary, adapting the fountain to allow for this regular access would be required. This obviously has the potential to affect its special interest.

11. The existing fountain hasn't provided drinking water for a number of years and the proposal would preserve this arrangement while allowing for the delivery of substantial public benefits.

12. The fountain would require considerable ongoing maintenance and there is no available or future fund identified for this upkeep and care.

13. We do not consider the use of the existing fountain for drinking water to be appropriate for reasons as set out above. In this regard, considering the ability to future

proof the structure is somewhat hypothetical. Even if it were possible, the landscaping design is about to go out to tender. As the proposals for landscaping are particularly bespoke, any retrofitting work would be challenging and very expensive. The extent of retrofit works would be unknown until the fountain can be opened and assessed fully.

14. While the ambition to provide free drinking water is laudable, it has the potential here to run counter to other policy objective such as those relating to the inclusivity of the public realm. In order to create a more level access to the fountain, the structure would have to be sunk into the ground which obviously has an effect on its special interest.

15. In summary, the ability of the listed fountain to provide drinking water is unknown and without a consent, will remain unknown. It is evident that works to do so would be required and these have the potential to affect its special interest. Even if there was potential to future proof the fountain, its use for drinking water would be counter to what LB Camden's wider West End Project is seeking to achieve in its infrastructure and public realm works.