

Cany Ash

23 December 2020

Dear Planning Officers,

Trees at the back of 8 Doughty Street garden application 2020/5587/T

These trees are significant on so many levels and should be protected from an action which is irreversible and fails to recognise the established ways by which their value is to be ascertained. This needs far more serious study and consideration, but I will sketch in this letter of objection a responsible approach to such important assets under these recognised indicators:

- their historic value
- their evidential value
- their communal value
- their aesthetic value
- their planetary value

historic and evidential value

While only one of them has a TPO it is likely the protection would have been accorded from a mapping exercise and so the two were mistaken, in an aerial view, as single tree. The trees are of the same age, very probably planted at the time that Doughty Street and its mews was built between 1790 and 1810. The two trees frame the bricked up doorway, visible in the brickwork of 4 Doughty Mews, leading from the main house to the stable where a carriage and horse would be waiting. They evidence a way of life and show how each garden was conceived as a miniature estate to the listed Doughty Street houses and should be protected by virtue of being *in the demise* of 8 Doughty Street. A key constituent to the character of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area is of course its trees; the reason that so many lived in the area and that the place is enriched by their histories. Camden benefits from the tourism that the heritage value of the area and it is clear that this Mews has a particular narrative and placemaking role in the fabric of Holborn, bringing footfall, local spend, fashion shoots and filming rights, all of which are very obvious when you live here.

Communal value and Aesthetic Value

I have lived in this street since 1982 and have been a champion of its greening. It was a 'working mews' with printers, electrical contractors and around half a dozen garages. Cars would cut out a queue in Doughty Street and tear down the mews at full speed weaving among parked cars, old style revvings and brake testings skidding on old oil that was openly poured into the drains.

In some ways we miss that economic activity, but cities change and Camden has become less car centric. It is wonderful to see that the mews has found a new role in the community. it is a place children rush to play in a well loved puddle on their way to and from Coram Fields from the Bourne Estate and further afield. The smallest children know the value of this 'country lane' with its overhanging trees, the largest being the grand old plane trees that reach up into the sky. The trees are visible from the back of the library an important local landmark adding to the sense of wellbeing for everyone. A constant stream of happy classes from St George the Martyr Primary School take this route to Coram Fields especially in the summer months. I often meet people who feel isolated of all ages in the Mews and hear about how the trees and the complexity of green in this bit of public space what supports their mental health. It is a place where people do talk to each other about the seasons and weather in a way they would not in say Guildford Street or Doughty Street. Camden clearly needs more of these friendly green streets. Tree officers need to be fierce guardians of public interest, using TPOs for these highly visible and loved trees. These trees should not be victims of a casual decision; they are not causing trip hazards or knocking the windows at the top of buses...some of the numerous reasons we sometime have to accept the loss of our heritage trees in the public realm.

Planetary value

I need not remind you as planning professionals how important it is to follow through high level policy with action, or the fact that net positive biodiversity and climate resilience are of the utmost importance. Just as Camden has declared a Climate Emergency so we too, as architects, have declared and are set on taking action against climate and ecological breakdown. These trees are home to a huge variety of bird, mammal and insect life, helping to deliver London a National Park City '*a large urban area that is managed and semi-protected through both formal and informal means to enhance the natural capital of its living landscape*' the ambition driving the new Local Plans and supplementary guidance in most boroughs.

Losing two of our generous natural allies in the fight against pollutants seems an almost obscene mistake at the end of this year when so many people are still struggling to breathe. The future is unclear and we need to be extremely careful in what we do now to live within our planetary boundaries. This is a local and global decision so the solution is to replace some cement render with lime plaster and not get confused about our priorities and responsibilities to the coming generations. There is apparently no know case of a plane tree dying of natural causes and these are old but still young trees.

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