

From: cath slessor
Sent: 25 February 2022 17:13
To: Planning
Subject: OBJECTION 2022/0419/T

RE: PLANNING APPLICATION 2022/0419/T
OBJECTION

I wish to object in the strongest possible terms to the application to remove two veteran plane trees in the garden of 8 Doughty Street. I have excellent views of the trees from my garden at 3 Doughty Street. Their impressive scale and beautiful seasonal foliage brings huge pleasure all year round.

The arborist's report accompanying this latest application, made by Dr Carl Graves of the Egypt Exploration Society (EES) states: 'There is no doubting the trees are large and locally significant although *their wider public amenity is somewhat limited* by their rear garden location.' On the contrary: their considerable size, at some 6 storeys tall, means they can be seen from flats in Doughty Street, Doughty Mews, Guilford Street, Millman Street and Northington Street, and by the public walking through Doughty Mews and John's Mews.

For those without access to gardens, the mental health benefits associated with views of nature in cities are clear and assumed a new importance during the Covid pandemic. To remove such magnificent specimens, estimated to be between 150-200 years old and still in good health, would be to irrevocably alter a deeply cherished local landscape.

Beyond their visual appeal, the trees have considerable ecological amenity. Their leafy canopies are home to many species of birds and their presence brings other wildlife into the area. The trees also have health betterments. London planes are especially good at resisting pollution, sequestering carbon and removing toxins from the air. All this benefits a largely residential neighbourhood which includes a nearby primary school, St George the Martyr, and Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital.

As a trained architect, I remain unconvinced by the rationale presented in the structural engineer's report, commissioned by the EES, occupier of 2-4 Doughty Mews, on the alleged damage the trees are causing to

the rear wall of 4 Doughty Mews. It is my understanding that the cracks, which have been manifest for some time, are largely superficial and not considered a serious structural threat. Since the last application to remove the trees, which was made at the end of 2020, no monitoring of the cracks has been carried out and no proposal put forward for short or long term remedial works that might retain the trees.

Instead, in a recent letter circulated to neighbouring residents, Dr Carl Graves has stated unequivocally that 'the trees must come down', claiming that the EES premises (and very future) are under threat. This is sheer hyperbole. The trunk of one of the trees is pressing on the rear wall of one of the three EES mews properties. This has been happening for years (if not decades) and presents no imminent danger.

In fact, tree and wall have formed a kind of stable hybrid structure, while a handful of hairline cracks have developed in the thick and brittle plaster of the inner wall. There are no subsidence issues, but if the trees were to be removed, it is possible that ground heave would conspire to seriously destabilise the surrounding buildings, a risk acknowledged by the engineer's report accompanying the latest application.

Previously, it was thought that the EES planned to sell its trio of unmodernised properties (conspicuously the least well maintained in the mews), which would raise considerable capital, enabling it to fund a new headquarters elsewhere. But the trees posed a 'problem', deterring potential buyers. Removing them would effectively solve that problem, though it would put short term profit over long term environmental and community benefits.

Now, however, it seems the EES plans to remain in the mews and is recruiting a development officer to oversee a three year fundraising programme in order to remodel its buildings. Nonetheless, it has still applied to have the planes felled. It is the second such application in just over a year, which borders on the vexatious. The previous one, filed just before Christmas 2020, attracted over 70 formal objections, indicating the high level of public concern. At that time, Camden Council rejected it and made both trees the subject of Tree Preservation Orders, which recognises their amenity value.

To reiterate: the two planes are exceptional and their loss would be disastrous, impacting on local residents and the wider public. The culling of such ancient and beautiful specimens on the basis of sketchy and

inconclusive evidence would be a complete travesty. Section 5.64 of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategy 2011 states that: 'The mature trees across the Conservation Area are a valuable part of the streetscape and make a positive contribution to its character and appearance.' The removal of the two plane trees would be innately damaging to this character and appearance.

Removing trees of such size and vintage also goes against the tenets of the Mayor's London Plan, which aims to increase tree canopy cover by 5% by 2025 to mitigate the effects of climate change. It also notes that: 'Individual veteran trees should be given protection as once lost they can never be replaced.'

Beyond the narrow adversarial compass of engineering reports and legal liability, it should be possible for trees and buildings to co-exist. Currently, regular pruning keeps the planes under control and there is no reason why this should not continue. I know that local architects have also been working to devise simple, cost effective engineering solutions that would allow the trees to be retained as well as protect the wall of 4 Doughty Mews.

If the EES intends to remain in the locality, this presents an excellent opportunity to collaborate on a project which would secure its long term future, as well as that of the trees. I fully support this effort and it is a testament to how much local people value the trees that they are prepared to give their time and resources to work together to try and retain them.

Yours faithfully,

Catherine Slessor
MA Arch, Dip Arch, MBE

Flat 3
3-4 Doughty Street
London
WC1N 2PN