

Rafi Miah



Dear Jennifer Walsh

Planning reference 2022/1320/L and 2022/1041/P

Further to my email of 8 May 2022 objecting to these proposals i have now been able to look at further items of the extensive documentation submitted and wish to make the following observations for your consideration, and for the attention of your Planning Committee and the Councillors involved in the review of this applications.

1 - gia Daylight and Sunlight Report

It is notable that this report, while most extensive in its consideration of the effect of the proposals on properties in Ossulston Street, where it is minimal, appears to ignore the serious consequences for the

Grade I Listed St Pancras International Station and, even more ironically, its profound effect on the north elevation of the Grade I Listed British Library itself, parts of which are within 20 metres of the, over 30 metre high, vertical face of the extension, which is surmounted by a further 20 metres of sloping glazing. The resultant consequences for daylighting of the many, and various rooms and landscaped terraces looking on to this proposed building are surely deserving, at the very least, of the same intense scrutiny as was focussed on its more distant neighbours.

While not within the scope of this particular report, it should also be noted in passing that, the effect on the outlook of these north facing areas will be even more detrimental, and in direct contravention of the statutory requirement that the setting of Listed Buildings should be preserved and that new developments should enhance the setting of designated heritage assets. As a Grade I Listed Building the Library is clearly in that category and therefore deserves commensurate consideration.

2 - Townscape and Visual Built Heritage (off-site) Assessment

Among the many views covered in this Assessment, that in ES Volume 2, Page 127 is the most telling in respect of the effect on the Library's setting from the south. The illustration is entitled "Euston Road junction with Mabledon Place" and shows that the whole of the sloping glazing to the top of the proposed new extension will be clearly visible, and prominent above the full length of the Library's south elevation. While, in the illustration it is shown in a discreet, pale-blue tone, in reality it will be a highly reflective, glittering surface of the most distracting kind. A totally inappropriate intrusion on the setting of this, the most important, main approach to the Library. Clearly this would have the most fundamentally detrimental effect on the setting of a designated heritage asset and should not be allowed to happen under any circumstances.

3 - Heritage Impact Assessment

The opening paragraphs of this document make many powerful statements on: Preserving the settings of Listed Buildings, The conservation of heritage assets, The need for new development to enhance the setting of designated heritage assets, and the need to minimise and mitigate against any heritage harm. Not one of which is honoured in subsequent comment on the proposals, brazenly maintaining that they will have "substantial public benefit and some low level, less than substantial harm to the significance of the British Library and the British Library Conservation Centre". One has to conclude that obliterating and dominating the one, and demolishing the other doesn't constitute substantial harm in the mind of the report's author.

The report goes on to state that "the north elevation is not of the same quality as the street elevations". A truly ridiculous comparison, bearing in mind the very different functions served by them. Sandy and MJ regarded this elevation as a most important part of the Completion Phase design, being expressive of the many diverse functions there, and by virtue of its visibility from the international rail approach as well as from the side exit of St Pancras Station. In his book on the Library Roger Stonehouse says of it, a composition of "balanced asymmetry sitting on a base and bracketed by two vertical elements..... each elevation is of a very different nature and scale, each telling stories of the complex and varied activities of the building". Architecture Today said of it " the most expansive of the elevations, a great informal/formal equivalent of an English country house".

In several other places the report rather sniffily refers to the restaurant as the staff cafe. As if intending somehow to demean its importance. As the architect within the CSJWP team directly responsible for it, I can categorically confirm that it was designed, and always served, as a restaurant. Sandy and MJ valued its role as the focus of the composition, and enjoyed and acknowledged the inspiration of Gunnar Asplund's 1930 Stockholm Exhibition restaurant in its design.

Throughout the report there are numerous assertions of the virtues of the extension in relation to the parent building, so we have: "The impact on the setting of the British Library would be beneficial". The extension is " skilfully modelled so that it sits comfortably behind the British Library. "Great weight has been given to the conservation of the British Library and its setting.....taking opportunities to enhance and better reveal heritage assets". " Takes inspiration from the architecture of Alvar Aalto..... the proposal sits well within its context (of the) British Library, whose setting it complements". Elsewhere it maintains that the proposals represent "The completion of (the) CSJWP masterplan for the St Pancras site through the enlargement of the British Library on a site intended for extension".

In fact not one of these assertions is borne out by even a short appraisal of the drawings presented with this application. A single section drawing, RSHP-P-1301-S-C01, demonstrates fully how the commercial imperative to load 76,000 sq.m. of office/laboratory-enabled space on this site to pay for 10,000 sq.m. of accommodation for the Library has completely overwhelmed any meaningful opportunity to respond sensitively to the needs of extending "the UK's most significant public building of the late 20th century" and a Grade I Listed Building by "an eminent architect and academic Sir Colin St John Wilson and his architectural partner M J Long". Just compare the scale of the current Library, on the right, with the proposed extension, to the left!!! And this is following your Council's request that the extension be of "appropriate height in relation to the listed building and the wider context". Clearly not the case here. As for the assertion that this "completes the CSJWP masterplan for the site through the enlargement of the British Library on a site intended for extension", nothing could be further from the truth. Sandy MJ and Rolfe showed the way with the Conservation Centre, which respects the existing building, and a similar approach satisfying the Library's needs, while retaining the BLCC intact, could easily have been accommodated on the vacant site to the west. The present proposals ride completely roughshod over everything Sandy and MJ worked and stood for. Without wishing to be irreverent to their memory, I suspect that they must be turning in their graves at the prospect of this proposal proceeding. Please ensure that it does not.

Yours sincerely

Peter Denney Dip Arch. RIBA.