

Swiss Cottage Library Refurbishment

Design & Access Statement

Camden Borough Council

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This design and access statement
forms part of a planning application for
concrete repairs at Swiss Cottage
Public Library



Executive Summary

Swiss Cottage Library is a public building that was built in 1963-4 for the borough of Hampstead by Sir Basil Spence (Coventry Cathedral). The cigar shaped building plan is orientated on an approximate north - south axis that is adjacent to Avenue Road and was designed in the Modernist style. The building was listed Grade II in 1997 and is considered to be “one of Spence's most accomplished civic buildings” (HE list entry)

Atkins conducted a high-level qualitative inspection of the fins on the 13th of April in order to examine a badly damaged fin, and more generally to assess the general condition of the concrete fins on the building façade, following reports by the contractor of existing cracking being observed during the current works.

The proposal at this stage is to gather sufficient information to inform a future scheme of structural repairs. Inevitably some intrusive works will be required as part of the current investigation the scope of which is to be agreed and monitored.

The proposed method of investigation is set out to fully assess the condition of the fins, and develop a building maintenance and remedial strategy, a detailed survey of every fin should be conducted, including testing to assess the corrosion risk such as for carbonation, chloride presence, half-cell potential, and cover-meter surveys.

The works will also identify any immediate works e.g., to remove risk to health and safety of the public and/or potential structural failure is removed.

The Design and Access Statement should be read in conjunction with the heritage impact assessment and supporting information.

1. Introduction

1.1. The application

This Design and Access Statement has been written to support an application for Planning Permission for fabric repairs to cast concrete structure of the listed Swiss Cottage Library.

Atkins are acting as the Agent on behalf of Camden Borough Council and in accordance with the Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) for England which relates to the repairs to concrete 'fins' and supporting frame identified following recent works of refurbishment including the replacement of windows under application(s) reference 2021/5034/P and 2021/4889/L

1.2. Site location and description

1.2.1. Site address

Swiss Cottage Library 88 Avenue Road, London NW3 3HA.

The Swiss Cottage Library is a public building built in 1963-4 for the borough of Hampstead by Sir Basil Spence (Coventry Cathedral). The cigar shaped building plan is orientated on an approximate north - south axis that is adjacent to Avenue Road and is bounded by five conservation areas: Belsize, Elsworth, Fitzjohns-Netherhall, South Hampstead, St. John's Wood (Camden) and St. John's Wood (Westminster).

The list number is 1272259.



Figure 1 - Site location

1.2.2. Site description

The public library consists of a reinforced concrete frame with first and second floors clad in pre-cast black basalt concrete spandrel panels finished in Portland stone aggregate, between projecting and finely finished concrete fins set at 2'6" intervals, set above a smooth ground floor of Portland stone and concrete. The cigar shaped building plan is orientated on an approximate north - south axis that is adjacent to Avenue Road.

The building main entrance is located at the northern end of the site and consists of a basement, ground, first and second floor. Plant services are located in the basement and latterly on the roof. The roof also includes a series of north facing raised roof lights that were intended to introduce borrowed light into the building.

1.2.3. Physical context of the proposed scheme

Swiss Cottage Central Library was built between 1963-4 to the designs of Sir Basil Spence. The proposal originally was intended to provide a new Civic Centre for what was then the Metropolitan Borough of Hampstead; however, with the reorganization of the government in 1964, only the library and the adjoining swimming pool were built. The original swimming pool has been subsequently demolished to make way for a new Leisure Centre complex that remains today.

The Swiss Cottage Library is directly adjacent to Avenue Road and within sight of "Ye Olde Swiss Cottage", the public house that the area is named after. The library is also near to Finchley Road that, together with Avenue Road can be understood as important elements in the urban development of the area.

The building is located 3.25 miles north-northwest of Charing Cross. Adjoining neighborhoods include Hampstead Village to the northeast, Chalk Farm and Camden Town to the southeast, Belsize Park to the east, St John's Wood to the south and West Hampstead to the west. Regent's Park is within walking distance of Swiss Cottage.

It is bounded by five conservation areas: Belsize, Elsworthy, Fitzjohns-Netherhall, South Hampstead, St. John's Wood (Camden) and St. John's Wood (Westminster).

The library forms an important landmark that can be seen from the dominant principal roads serving both the local and wider area and the adjacent medium rise buildings that were built in the second half of the C20.

The Swiss Cottage library is built in the Modernist style that emerged in the early part of the C20 in a response to large scale changes in both technology and society. The ideals of Modernist architecture can be easily understood in Spence's Swiss Cottage Library. Internally the architectural design has been based on openness and light, which is itself a metaphor for the libraries principal purpose of enlightenment.

The exterior form is based on rigid lines, harsh concrete forms and elements arranged at 90-degrees to each other that emphasise both horizontal and vertical lines.



Figure 5 - General view_North elevation



Figure 5 - General view_South elevation



Figure 7 - General view_West elevation



Figure 7 - General view_East elevation

In 2000 the building underwent a significant refurbishment by specialist modernist restoration architects John McAslan and Partners. Part of the refurbishment included changes to the original internal layout that had resulted in poor wayfinding within the library. McAslan & Partners moved the information desk to the top of the central staircase from the entrance and introduced colour-coding via the use of spot colours on walls and floors; new building elements were also introduced that included varying sections of wood and glass intended to articulate the central passage; and the use of transparent glass throughout the first floor to enable one end of the library to be seen from the other and at various sections throughout the library

1.2.4. Social context of the proposed scheme

The Swiss Cottage Library is considered to be a landmark building that adds considerable value to the civic pride of the local area. The building can be seen from the dominant principal roads serving both the local and wider area and the adjacent medium rise buildings that were built in the second half of the C20.

The overall articulation of the vertical and horizontal design elements' contrasts with the adjacent buildings and be easily understood as a Modernist building from the second half of the C20.

The conservation led refurbishment of the library in 2000 carried out sensitive alterations that relocated the original reception area from the ground floor to the first floor and improved wayfinding across the building.

1.2.5. Economic context of the proposed scheme

The Swiss Cottage Library continues to be used for its intended purpose and has been adapted to include data connectivity and refreshment areas. The library is considered to have significant communal value as a public amenity serving the local and wider community.

2. Planning policy context of the proposed scheme

2.1. National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (March 2019)

The National Planning Policy Framework (2019) sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied¹. It provides a framework within which locally prepared plans for housing and other development can be produced.

The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development that meets economic objectives, social objectives, and environmental objectives.

Section 6 sets out that, in building a strong, competitive economy *"Planning policies and decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand, and adapt. Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, considering both local business needs and wider opportunities for development. The approach taken should allow each area to build on its strengths, counter any weaknesses and address the challenges of the future."*

Paragraph 83 indicates that planning policies and decisions should enable:

- 1) *"sustainable" rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside; and*
- 2) *"The retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship"*

Section 8 promotes healthy and safe communities where planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive, and safe places which:

- 3) *"promote" social interaction, including opportunities for meetings between people who might not otherwise come into contact with each other – for example through mixed-use developments, strong neighborhood centres, street layouts that allow for easy pedestrian and cycle connections within and between neighborhoods, and active street frontages.*
- 4) *are safe and accessible, so that crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion – for example through the use of clear and legible pedestrian routes, and high-quality public space, which encourage the active and continual use of public areas; and*
- 5) *enable and support healthy lifestyles, especially where this would address identified local health and well-being needs – for example through the provision of safe and accessible green infrastructure, sports facilities, local shops, access to healthier food, allotments and layouts that encourage walking and cycling"*

2.2. Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990

The primary legislation relating to Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas is set out in the Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

Section 66(1) reads: “In considering whether to grant planning permission for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the local planning authority or, as the case may be, the Secretary of State shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.”

2.3. Local planning policies

The Council has a statutory duty to prepare, monitor and review a Development Plan for the district. This document is Camden’s Local Plan that was adopted in 2017. The document sets out the Council’s planning policies and replaces the Core Strategy and Development Policies planning documents (adopted in 2010). It ensures that Camden continues to have robust, effective, and up to-date planning policies that respond to changing circumstances and the borough’s unique characteristics and contribute to delivering the Camden Plan and other local priorities. The Local Plan will cover the period from 2016-2031

2.3.1. Local Plan

Within the Local Plan (adopted 2017) key challenges and issues have been addressed in the context of the social, economic, environmental changes faced by the area. The Plan seeks to support sustainable communities that will improve the health, wellbeing and inequality issues of the community and safeguard the attractive and historic neighborhoods of the wider borough. These ambitions form part of the Strategic Objectives of the Local Plan.

2.3.2. Strategic Policy C3

Strategic Policy C3 identifies that the council will seek to protect and retain existing cultural and leisure facilities, as well as consider whether the scheme would be detrimental to health and well-being through the loss of facilities which provide meeting spaces for the community.

2.3.3. Strategic Policy D1

Strategic Policy D4 seeks to secure high quality design in development. The Council will require that development:

- 6) *Respects local context and character*
- 7) *Preserves or enhances the historic environment and heritage assets in accordance with Policy D2 Heritage*
- 8) *Is sustainable in design and construction, incorporating best practice in resource management and climate change mitigation and adaptation*
- 9) *Is of sustainable and durable construction and adaptable to different activities and land uses*
- 10) *Comprises details and materials that are of high quality and complement the local character*
- 11) *Integrates well with the surrounding streets and open spaces, improving movement through the site and wider area with direct, accessible, and easily recognisable routes and contributes positively to the street frontage*
- 12) *Preserves strategic and local views*
- 13) *Carefully integrates building services equipment.*

2.3.4. Policy D2

Policy D1 states that the Council will preserve and, where appropriate, enhance Camden's rich and diverse heritage assets and their settings and will not permit the loss of or substantial harm to a designated heritage asset, including conservation areas and Listed Buildings.

3. Consultation, evaluation, and design –

3.1. Consultation

Consultation with Camden Borough Council planning department officer, Mr. Alan Wilto, took place during the design development stages in August / September to discuss the proposed conservation-based refurbishment and introduction of low energy and renewable energy installations which informed previous applications ref. 2014/5034/P & 2021/4889/L.

Following earlier discussions, it became apparent, with close access provided by the erection of scaffolding to facilitate refurbishment works, that the concrete 'fins' and connections were showing signs of weathering and cracking associated with corrosion of underlying steel reinforcement. The resulting investigation recorded wholesale cracking across the concrete elements and the need for repairs to arrest further deterioration.

Following further discussion which outlined the need for further detailed investigation and intrusive works to establish appropriate repair solution it was agreed (with Alan Wilto) that it would be appropriate to lodge an application for listed building consent on the basis of the following:

The structural engineer has set out a survey specification which includes some non-intrusive and some following intrusive items (number not known until completion of a stage 1 review). Given the nature of decay and the fact that there is some concern on the stability of parts of the concrete fin elements/framing fixings it is considered appropriate to proceed as efficiently as is practical therefore rather than await the outcome of a stage 1 investigation to determine type/location of intrusive investigations we lodge an application with the information we have available at this point. This would be on the basis that further work of intrusive investigation would be advised and agreed prior to works being undertaken thereby requiring the approval of an appropriate protocol and methodology. This will enable us to complete investigations/making good before we get into the winter months which will see further deterioration.

3.2. Evaluation

The proposal for investigation and appropriate 'temporary' repair has taken account of the heritage status of the building and the historic context of the site. Consequently, the proposed scheme has been based on the following principles.

3.2.1. Heritage fabric

The scheme has identified the significance of the site and setting and proposes to make changes that have negligible or no impact on the heritage asset

3.2.2. Heritage structures

The scheme does not propose any changes to the structural characteristics of the existing building.

3.2.3. Building obsolescence and future use:

The proposed will have a positive impact on the economic viability of the building for the future.

3.3. Ecology

The proposed changes are not considered to have any impact on the ecology of the site or setting.

4. Proposals – Swiss Cottage Library

4.1. Proposed Works

4.1.1. Principles

The development of the proposed investigations/repairs has been based on site visit survey information, record drawings and historical records. The necessary repairs will be based on detailed survey information and a good understanding of how the building works and why its materials are failing.

The methodology going forward will be based on sound conservation principles which include:

- Techniques and materials which have been demonstrated to be appropriate to the fabric. This includes matching the materiality and style of the original materials.
- Interventions that will maximize the life expectancy of significant building fabric and maintain its significance.
- All works to be adequately recorded and the records made available for others.

4.1.2. Defects

Atkins conducted a high-level qualitative inspection of the fins on the 13th of April in order to examine a badly damaged fin, and more generally to assess the general condition of the concrete fins on the building façade, following reports by the contractor of existing cracking being observed during the current works.

A record of the visual inspection carried out by Atkins Structures is attached.

The following is noted under the Executive Summary (of the survey report):

Whilst the fins appear to be in good visual condition given the age of the structure and the exposure conditions, there are obvious signs of deterioration. Many of the fins have horizontal cracks both internally and externally and it is likely that this is due to the fins being restrained by the structure as they undergo heating and cooling due to thermal effects and also the long-term shrinkage of the concrete.

Whilst previous attempts appear to have been made to address the external cracking, in some cases the cracks have reopened giving rise to a risk of corrosion due to water ingress. It is likely that cracks will continue to open, and form, and that the risk of corrosion will increase because of this.

In several locations at the bottom of the fins, there is significant cracking and corrosion that may lead to large pieces of concrete spalling at some point in the future that would present a risk to public safety. At roof level, whilst the tops of the fins appear to be in good condition, the fact that a large piece of concrete became detached during the inspection, and the apparent low cover to the reinforcement, suggests that there is a risk of further pieces spalling that would be a significant risk to public safety should they fall onto the footpath, or road, below.

Given the apparent lack of adequate cover to the reinforcement in the fins, it is not possible to use current crack width limits as a guide to ongoing durability in this Report. In addition to the issues of the fins acting as a cold bridge across the façade line, the cracks that bridge this line may also lead to water ingress into the building.

4.1.3. Method

The proposed method of investigation is set out in the document prepared by Atkins Structures attached. This follows recommendations set out in the Executive Summary of the survey report as follows:

To fully assess the condition of the fins, and develop a building maintenance and remedial strategy, a detailed survey of every fin should be conducted, including testing to assess the corrosion risk such as for carbonation, chloride presence, half-cell potential, and cover-meter surveys.

The detailed concrete investigation is required to obtain the following information:

Stage 1

- The sizes of the fins, their reinforcement provision and material properties. This is to allow for structural assessment of the fins.
- The condition of the existing concrete and level of deterioration from the 'as new' condition.

It is proposed that the concrete investigation be undertaken in two stages as follows:
Stage 1: General information collection and condition survey to identify the extent and severity of defects to include:

- Concrete surface examination and photographic survey
- Rebound hammer tests
- Ferro scanning of reinforcement

Stage 2:

For fins with defects identified in Stage 1, testing for assessing corrosion risk of reinforcement. It shall include:

- Carbonation tests
- Chloride tests
- Half-cell potential surveys

The works under Stage 2 will include the need for core samples to be taken although the number/location will be informed following completion of stage 1. No intrusive works will be permitted until a schedule setting out the scope including location/type is complete and has been agreed with Camden Borough Council planning department officer. Works will then be monitored as they progress.

Any concrete that has been damaged or broken during the survey or where surfacing has been removed is to be made good temporarily and a suitable permanent repair method should be agreed. For temporary concrete repairs, grout is to have the following properties:

- High strength,
- non-shrinkage,
- Bonded,
- Compatible coefficient of thermal expansion,
- Colour and surface texture match with the original concrete fin.

This will be subject to the presentation and approval of a sample repair prior to works proceeding.

We note that some additional temporary repairs may be required potentially to include:

- Mitigation measures to address the risk of spalling at roof level before the current scaffolding and its sheeting is removed. Similarly, at ground level the boundary fencing should be retained until the risk of spalling at the bottom of the fins is addressed.
- The two fins where fixing points have been noted to have failed to be assessed structurally to develop a suitable remedial solution.
- The fixing detail between fins and cladding panels should be reviewed generally due to two instances of this detail having failed.

In addition, we note that the scaffolding erected ahead of the previous works of sustainable improvements was placed with a number of mechanical fixing points placed directly within the concrete façade without prior consultation with the design team and consequently the planning officer. These interventions will remain until completion of stage 2 works following which they will be repaired as scaffold is removed to the same standard/criteria as agreed following stage 1 investigative works.

4.2. Proposed use

The existing building continues to be used for its intended purpose as a public library.

4.3. Proposed amount

Whole external façade to be assessed under Stage 1 inspection. Extent of intrusive investigations to be established during Stage 1.

4.4. Proposed layout

There are no changes proposed that will alter or affect the existing layout.

4.5. Proposed scale and massing

There are no changes proposed that will alter or affect the existing scale/massing.

4.6. Proposed landscaping

There is no landscaping associated with the refurbishment project.

4.7. Proposed appearance

The proposed scheme will adopt a conservation approach that seeks to

5. Access

Access to the existing public will not be affected by the proposals. No additional changes are proposed that will affect the existing internal layout.

5.1. Scheme design

5.1.1. Parking

There are no changes proposed to the existing car parking provision.

5.1.2. External circulation and pedestrianized areas

There are no changes proposed to the existing access routes to the library

6. Summary and conclusion

The proposed scheme aims to address the current concerns which relate to the deterioration of the external fabric.

The proposal at this stage is to gather sufficient information to inform a future scheme of structural repairs. Inevitably some intrusive works will be required as part of the current investigation the scope of which is to be agreed and monitored.

The works will also identify any immediate works e.g., to remove risk to health and safety of the public and/or potential structural failure is removed.

As such, it is considered that the proposed works comply with both the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, and the NPPF.

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