



Crouch End Neighbourhood Forum
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Comments by the Crouch End Neighbourhood Forum

LBH ref. HGY/2023/1703

Hornsey Town Hall, The Broadway, London N8 9JJ

Approval of details reserved by a condition 15 (Heritage Management Plan) of the approved planning permission HGY/2017/2220.

Dear Sam,

Please find below comments on the Conservation Management Plan (CMP) submitted on behalf of the Far East Consortium (FEC) and drafted by Donald Insall Associates. This is a welcome and important document that we hope will successfully guide the future conservation of a landmark listed building and its setting. We don't feel a full commentary is necessary here, though there are one or two points where we seek reassurance and other content which deserves support. As the project completes, we hope a quality of workmanship will be revealed that meets conservation aims and objectives and succeeds in maintaining and enhancing the character of Hornsey Town Hall (HTH).

We note the sister document, the CMP for the annexe buildings, which is found at HGY/2023/1512.

Management and Use

The setting out of conservation policy and management structures and accountability is extremely welcome. The planned use of the Town Hall is likewise well considered in the CMP – uses which are inappropriate could cause harm to the building and erode the intangible significance of the Town Hall.

Happily, FEC's proposals for Arts Centre and hotel use at HTH are well supported, and with an eye on the building's historical civic and community role, the CMP rightly states: "*...continued public access is a key success of this project, given the original design intent of this civic building*".

With reference to and building upon the existing Community Use and Access Agreement, the CMP notably sets out a series of ideas including volunteering and outreach opportunities, and the establishment of a 'Friends' group. We look forward to the submission of the Community Use Plan and the Public Access Plan which may expand upon these thoughts. As an aside, it occurs to us that a Friends of Hornsey Town Hall group may offer a future direction for the building preservation remit and the long-serving HTH Trust.

In addition, the remarks regarding the placemaking value of HTH are particularly welcome. As a residents and traders group primarily concerned with local planning and regeneration, the significance of the Town Hall's uses and its setting in improving Crouch End town centre does not escape us (we note, "*Avoid clutter and paraphernalia in the setting of the building, especially when viewed from the front elevation – the Broadway Town Square*").

Management of Future Change

After some consideration we have a couple of suggestions.

Firstly, with the current team overseeing the restoration departing the scene, it may be useful for the CMP to contain a detailed *appraisal and postmortem of project restoration deliverables*. Identifying ongoing issues would be of value after the coming handover.

Secondly, it may be useful to place on record an understanding of *long-term conservation management challenges* uncoupled from the current scheme.

The present project of Arts Centre and hotel, which offers so much in terms of intangible public goods, is not bomb-proof and must be commercially viable to survive. The scheme may have duties to the community, but the community needs to know the project requires their support and patronage. Such desired outcomes as "*future redecoration scheme to the hotel rooms ... inspired by the Art Deco design of the Hornsey Town Hall*" or "*Local food and retail businesses [should be] integrated with the ... visual distinctiveness of the Town Hall*" are wholly dependent upon the success of FEC's project. At some point, hopefully distant, proposals of changes of use are likely (indeed, the community organisations mentioned in the text, such as the Crouch End Festival, are themselves transitory in nature).

While the CMP as compiled is appropriately focussed upon the current project (with much useful detail of conservation, maintenance, and repair delivery), it may therefore be worth highlighting that in the long term significant and *permanent* conservation safeguards are limited to:

(a) *the statutory listing*; and

(b) *the undertakings regarding community use and access contained in the lease, and the associated due diligence required in any future assignment of the lease.*

We take note that both are the responsibility of the Borough of Haringey, as LPA and landlord.

Conservation: Appraisal and Understanding

There is somewhat of a problem with the CMP. As things stand the appraisal is badly lacking in detail, failing to provide an adequate evidence base to understand heritage significance. Presented with a snapshot of a building some way through construction and the extensive restoration, photos are often of empty voids, interiors hidden behind protective boarding with historic fittings removed, in storage and yet to return, with accompanying text descriptions frequently completely blank.

It is nevertheless appreciated that the CMP is intended as a dynamic document, and clearly both Insalls and Longlane Architects are aware of the issue. As the covering letter confirms, *"final photographs of complete status of each room are to be updated within the report at completion of the project and post construction."*

Although we fully expect all agreed historic fabric to reappear, the concern is that much is being taken on trust here. By way of reassurance we would like to see overt reference made to the *HTH Schedule of Historic Items* (Make, July 2019), the *HTH Salvage Strategy* (Make, July 2019), and the *Historic Building Report* (Donald Insall, October 2017). These documents provide detail of historic fabric in situ plus a rationale of conservation decision making, which is of great value to future occupants of the building*. We would hope the promised update to the CMP will be treated as an urgent requirement.

**The fate of a variety of items remains unclear to us. For example the restoration of the Synchronome master clock system, or the decision not to restore the teak sprung floors in the Assembly Hall (once one of the largest in the country) and Supper Room. The 'Trada report' (January 2020, available under HGY/2023/1580) assesses the AH floor as "generally in a serviceable condition".*

Movable original furniture (tables and chairs, etc.) is due to return to HTH from storage, in some cases after many years in Haringey's care. Is a description and inventory available?

Lastly, it would be useful to see greater clarity regarding the major architectural interventions. New arrangements are often inadequately differentiated from original form in the document. Certainly the partition of the Assembly Hall and the creation of the Function Room and the Cinema is a wholesale and controversial intervention starkly affecting building significance, yet it appears curiously underplayed in the CMP. Key conservation decision making could be adumbrated in the CMP.

Please feel free to pass on our (hopefully helpful) remarks to the various project stakeholders.

Best regards,

Mark Afford

Chair, Crouch End Neighbourhood Forum