

12 July 2010

Dear Steve

Planning application: 2010/1434, Cardinal Pole Secondary School (185-205 Morning Lane)

The Hackney Society would like to make the following comments about the proposed scheme by Jestico and Whiles:

Demolition of heritage assets

The Hackney Society were appalled that the former LBH Training Centre for Adults with Learning Disabilities at 205a Morning Lane was demolished whilst the building was being assessed for listing by English Heritage. This action was all the more shocking, as no planning application had at that point been submitted to the Council for the proposed new school on the site. The Hackney Society strongly discourages existing buildings being demolished prior to planning permission being secured for the new building. This kind of behaviour causes planning blight, which in this perilous economic climate can all too easily become a reality. The headline in this week's *Building Design* (9.7.10): 'Axe falls on architects – scrapping BSF to hit at least 1,500 in the profession' is surely a stark warning to planning authorities that public funding for building programmes is not secure. The demolition of 205a sets a terrible precedent in the borough.

English Heritage notified the local authority's planning and education staff by letter and email, and followed this up with a number of phone calls in an attempt to arrange a site visit to the building. However on 10 May 2010, before a visit could take place, English Heritage learned from the Society that demolition work had already begun on 205a. This was confirmed by observation later that day, and at a site meeting on 13 May 2010. On the latter occasion it was explained that news of the listing application had not reached Hackney's BSF Department, and that the recent works had been precipitated by the expiry of a demolition notice, originally filed on 24 March 2010.

Currently, buildings being assessed for listing do not have the interim protection needed to save them from such action. This is a flaw within the system, but you would hope that Hackney Council, both as guardians of our heritage and owners of the building, should have behaved more responsibly. What kind of example does this set to other developers in the borough? This case illustrates the plight of many fine 20th-century buildings in the borough not currently protected by conservation legislation.

The Hackney Society believes that the building by Stillman and Eastwick-Field could have easily been adapted to meet the needs of the school and integrated into the new design. Instead, we learn in the *Design and Access Statement* that the LBH Training Centre will end its short (and glorious) life as recycled aggregates in the plaza concrete. We are

extremely saddened that the sustainability agenda only seems to extend to creating new energy-efficient buildings, rather than adapting older ones. Hopefully, the forthcoming 'austerity measures' will result in architects having to use their creativity to try and integrate existing good quality buildings into new schemes.

The Hackney Society would like to be assured that this kind of behaviour will not be repeated in any future case where a building is put forward for listing.

Despite our anger over the demolition of the former LBH Training Centre the Hackney Society supports the proposed design. Here are our comments:

Scale, massing and layout

We support the choice of the selected layout, which positions the main body of the building as a barrier between the busy environment of Morning Lane and the quieter spaces created behind. The building presents its front elevation clearly on the street side, with the creation of a welcoming entrance plaza, whose semi-public character is commended. The site and location could have supported a taller building, but we note the limitations to the ground loading brought by the presence of the channel tunnel link beneath the site. The general arrangement is extremely clear, with the organisation of the four Learning Communities in distinct wings. The creation of three rectilinear clusters on the eastern side maximises the spread of natural light. The different parts are linked together with a 'Central Street'. We are pleased to see that this 'street' is punctuated with vertical voids, bringing natural light and ventilation to the core of the building. Yet we fear that it will feel like an endless corridor, with hardly any break-out spaces provided, despite its stated aim of providing 'informal socialising'. We find the plan very conventional in its layout. Double loaded corridors and successions of rectangular rooms predominate, leaving an impression of monotony. Such a rigid organisation doesn't seem to leave much room for flexibility and we are concerned that future-teaching methodologies will not be easily supported in the building. We are pleased to see that the sports, assembly and catering facilities are planned to be opened for community use and that they have all been located on the ground floor with easy access.

Appearance

The architectural expression of the building is that of severe monolithic blocks with openings scored out of it. This is a heavy and serious building that distinguishes itself from the new Academies in the borough.

Entrance

The entrance signals itself clearly from Morning Lane, with its centrally located glazed area and the hanging mass of the chapel. The reception space successfully opens up visual links to the upper levels and the recreation space behind.

Materials

Consideration should be given to the specification of an appropriate brick type and wood panel finish. The detailing and position of the expansion joints on the façade should be carefully considered. We would like to be assured that a good quality and attractive brick and joint is going to be used with lime mortar to add interest to the plain and monolithic design.

Sustainability

We are pleased to see that ample provision for natural light and ventilation has been planned. Likewise, we appreciate that the need for cooling has been minimised with the simple use of thermal mass and night-time ventilation.

Landscaping

A contrast has been created between the hard landscaped areas around the school and the more protected greener spaces on the higher eastern part of the site. We regret that no consideration seems to have been made for permeable surfaces in the lower part of the site, where all materials are traditional hard surfacing. We also couldn't see any Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems to deal with rainwater run-off locally. We realise that such solutions would have to take into account the contamination risks caused by the former Berger paint factory. We find that the greenhouse and vegetable gardens provided are extremely modest and don't seem adequate to cater for the needs of 1,050 students. We also note that no storage has been planned for the grounds maintenance equipment and no watching area has been included alongside the MUGA.

Conclusion

Despite our anger over the demolition of the former LBH Training Centre the Hackney Society supports the proposed design by Jestico and Whiles. Since the appearance of the proposal is quite austere, the success of the project will depend largely on the quality of the materials used and their careful detailing. We will expect the materials to be the subject of a separate submission and that should also include typical details of junctions, joints and brick banding. We overall hope that the proposed school will help enliven this somewhat disfavoured part of Hackney.

Please confirm receipt of these comments.

Best wishes



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