

FAO Mr Steve Fraser-Lim  
Planning Officer  
Hackney Borough Council  
Hackney Service Centre  
1 Hillman Street  
London  
E8 1DY

12 February 2014

Your ref. 2014/0323  
Our ref. SPAB/SC/14/25695

Dear Mr Fraser-Lim

**48-76 DALSTON LANE, HACKNEY, LONDON  
DEMOLITION & REBUILDING OF FRONT FAÇADE OF TERRACE**

The SPAB has been made aware of the new planning application that has been submitted regarding the proposal to demolish and rebuild the façade of the row of early C19 properties making up 48-76 Dalston Lane. As you may know, we wrote to Mr Randall MacDonald on 30 January 2014 outlining our grave concerns that a scheme that was originally given consent on the basis of being ‘conservation-led’ has changed so radically in its nature that the intention is now to demolish almost all of the remaining historic fabric. As we noted previously:

*“The SPAB is deeply concerned by this turn of events, as we would always argue that every effort should be made to retain as much as possible of the existing fabric. We would therefore question whether demolition is truly necessary and would urge that you reconsider the possibility of retaining and repairing the fabric instead. In our long experience, where there is a willingness to work with existing fabric rather than take the easy route of demolition and rebuilding, then a solution can be found. Recording and replicating the existing buildings would be a very poor substitute for the careful conservation of the terrace.*”

*Whilst the creation of a facsimile structure may have the result of preserving something of the character of this section of Dalston Lane in terms of the overall form, massing and general appearance, the street will unquestionably suffer a significant loss of integrity and authenticity. The new buildings will be a pale shadow of the existing structures, as they will no doubt be quietly ‘squared up’ and made to fit the rigid geometry of modern building practices. Any sense of patina or age will be eradicated and a great deal of the spirit of the place will be lost forever. This would seem to be an unjustified and undignified way to treat a worthy and much valued, though undesignated, heritage asset.”*

We are, of course, aware that the local authority is concerned about the structural stability of the remaining structures and whilst we welcome the submission of the planning application, and the fact that the reports prepared by the architects and structural engineers are now available online for consultees to read, we would suggest that the applicant’s professional team may not be best placed to consider all the potential options freely and objectively.

We do however note that Hackney Borough Council have commissioned a further report from Alan Baxter and Associates (LLP) and have read the contents with interest. Whilst this report concludes that for the scheme proposed all the facades should be rebuilt, we would draw attention to the caveat in paragraph 1.2 that states that Alan Baxter and Associates (LLP) were not instructed to consider alternative schemes. We must therefore raise the question of what their advice might have been had they been asked to set out the options for possible repair rather than being asked to comment on the proposals for demolition only.

Furthermore, we support the view expressed in the report that the results of the brick testing are flawed (paragraph 5.4) as it is simply not appropriate to measure and assess historic brickwork by modern standards. To do so might lead one to suggest that a considerable number of perfectly stable buildings in the Borough should be demolished, as they would mostly likely fail the tests under the criteria being used, whereas we know that such buildings perform perfectly adequately as long as they are maintained.

The report from Alan Baxter and Associates (LLP) also makes the point that not all of the buildings are in the same condition. As one would expect, some of the properties are in better condition than others and therefore it seems highly inappropriate to treat the whole street frontage as one homogenous element. Surely there is an alternative strategy that might accept that some demolition is necessary but that in other areas it would be possible to repair the structure and stitch it into the new fabric?

Having considered the new information that has been made available, we suspect that total demolition is being pursued because it is the easiest course of action (and undoubtedly cheaper) rather than because it is the right course of action in terms of good conservation practice. In our view this is not sufficiently robust justification for stripping away the character of a street that has evolved gradually over 200 years and is interesting because it bears the scars of times past.

We therefore reiterate our view that if there was a willingness to pursue a conservation-led scheme of repairs then this could be achieved with the assistance of a sensitive conservation-minded structural engineer and we ask, once again, that the applicant reconsiders the possibility of retaining and repairing the structures rather than demolishing them. As it stands, we feel that we must object to this application.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Sara Crofts'. The signature is written in a cursive style and is set against a light yellow rectangular background.

Sara Crofts BArch(Hons) MSc IHBC FRSA  
Deputy Director / Head of Casework