

Nick Russell
23 Chetwynd Road
London
NW5 1BX

19th October 2010

Objection from Nick Russell and the St Pancras North Branch of the Liberal Democrats to planning application 2010/5052/P

Dear Mr Markwell,

We object to the planning application to redevelop the former polytechnic Assembly Hall at 187 Kentish Town Road. The development is bulky and out of keeping with the townscape, and fails to provide affordable housing.

Improving and protecting our local environment

At the time of writing, over 300 local residents have signed our petition that states:

We the undersigned oppose the application 2010/5052/) on the following grounds:

The effect the development would have on the integrity of the attractive 1929 building.

The effect on the Kentish Town townscape particularly given its proximity, physically and architecturally, to the landmarks of Kentish Town Baths and Una House.

The lack of any proposal for social housing within the scheme.

We would like to draw your attention to the fact that since the previous application was approved in 2007, planning policy has changed. There is a clear statement in PPS5 published in March 2010 that local planning authorities should “identify and assess the significance of any element of the historic environment that may be affected by [a] proposal,” **not** only listed heritage assets. This should include a consideration of “**the value [the heritage asset] holds for this and future generations**” and that this should include

consultation with the community for which the asset has significance (PPS5 policy HE7).

Neither the developer nor the council has sought to ask local residents whether or not the Polytechnic Assembly Hall holds significance for them. This means that they lack the necessary information to decide whether this heritage asset is worthy of protection. Our petition provides powerful evidence that **this building is dear to the local community both because of its historic connotations and its contribution to the local townscape.**

Many local residents have told us that they have a long association with and love of the building. A number have cherished memories of attending the polytechnic.

The developer's consultant Dr Mervyn Miller notes that there should be a presumption in favour of retaining heritage assets, and that this includes non-designated heritage assets. He further notes that the Assembly block "relates to the townscape of the area and has some affinity" with surrounding buildings. However, he then says it is not worthy of protection because it is "of some local interest". We think that this "local interest" should not be casually dismissed, and planning policy says that it cannot be dismissed, given the importance in planning policy of the significance to which local communities attach to local heritage assets.

We also note that sections DP 24 and DP 25 of the Council's new Local Development Framework (LDF) set higher standards than in the preceding UDP with respect to protection of our heritage and environment, in line with PPS5.

Specifically, we note that DP 24 states in 24.13:
Development should not undermine any existing uniformity of a street or ignore patterns or groupings of buildings.

Given that the Assembly Hall was designed and built as an integral part of the Polytechnic group of buildings, with which it shares many architectural features, we contend that it contributes strongly to the existing uniformity of Prince of Wales Road and should not be demolished.

DP 25 states in 25.9:
Due to the largely dense urban nature of Camden, the character or appearance of our conservation areas can also be affected by development which is outside of conservation areas, but visible from within them. This includes high or bulky buildings, which can have an impact on areas some distance away, as well as adjacent premises.

The Council will therefore not permit development in locations outside conservation areas that it considers would cause harm to the character, appearance or setting of such an area.

187 Kentish Town Road is within yards of three conservation areas, Inkerman Road containing Kentish Town Baths, Kelly Street and Bartholomew Estate which indicates the sensitivity of this area. The polytechnic group of buildings, of which it is a part, is visible from Kentish Town Baths and from parts of Kelly Street. The proposed new buildings are much more bulky than the current buildings and bear negligible relation to them architecturally.

In particular, the council's investment in the renovation of the Kentish Town Baths has significantly improved the streetscape along Prince of Wales Road. It has put the other historic buildings on the street into a context that demonstrates physically the development of the area through the 20th century. Una House opposite is another distinctive building of similar age and scale to the polytechnic, which complements it and contributes to the overall harmony of the built environment of the street.

We therefore believe that it would be a seriously retrograde step to break up the rhythm of the streetscape by demolishing 187 and replacing it with a five storey modern building that has no connection with its neighbours.

We also feel that the internal design of 187 Kentish Town Road is such that it still has lots of potential to contribute actively to the local community. Although it has currently been adapted for use as a restaurant, many of its principal features, such as the roof lights and the mezzanine seating area, retain the character of its original design as an assembly hall.

We would repudiate any suggestion that it might not be viable as is, since it could easily be adapted for use as a local cinema like the Everyman or Screen on the Hill, or a place of worship or for some other commercial or community use.

Contribution to the supply of affordable housing

A further reason why we oppose this application is that, even if the arguments about preserving the local streetscape and architectural heritage were not sufficient for a thoroughly well-conceived housing development, we believe that this proposal is deficient in housing terms also.

The LDF states that affordable housing should be incorporated into the design when a development exceeds 10 properties. Despite proposing 14 flats, the developer is not proposing any affordable homes and is arguing that it is not viable to do so. Furthermore, 12 out of the 14 flats (86%) are of 1 or 2

bedrooms, when the desperate need across the borough, including in Kentish Town is for larger, family properties of three bedrooms or more.

So this proposal is not fulfilling the aspirations of the LDF in that it is not contributing significantly to the supply of family homes or affordable housing. Having spoken with many residents in the local community who wish to retain the Assembly Hall, we cannot see why the council should approve an application for the destruction of a landmark piece of architecture that may profit the developer but will not profit the community in its housing provision.

Access for construction

The council has recently spent a considerable amount of time and money re-aligning the junction of Prince of Wales Road with Kentish Town Road as it is so busy, congested and awkward.

We are very concerned at the problems the prolonged construction period might cause for this junction and the community who use it.

The site does not possess any ready access other than from those main streets. To the west it is bounded by the rest of the polytechnic building and to the south it is bounded by Church Avenue, a private road which does not have any public right of way and no guaranteed access. So the impact of the construction on the junction is likely to be catastrophic.

We regret that planning consent was granted before, noting that DC attendance on 21st December was low. We do not feel that that consent should set a precedent for the application on this occasion. Surely the purpose of granting consent for a limited period is because situations and communities evolve, and what may have been appropriate at one time ceases to be appropriate after a period.

We contend that such a change has occurred, generally in terms of the LDF and specifically in terms of Kentish Town Baths and the review of the Kelly St conservation area. So we would urge the Development Control Committee to reject this application on grounds of heritage and the lack of affordable housing.

If the committee is minded to accept it, we would argue that consent should be withheld until such time as there has been a proper assessment of the heritage asset value of this building, including the significance of the building to the local community.

For an idea of the latter, we attach a number of the comments submitted to us by local residents in the appendix below. Time and time again, residents say it is a landmark building that they cherish.

Thank you for your attention.

Yours sincerely,

Nick Russell and the St Pancras North Liberal Democrats

Appendix: comments from individual Kentish Town residents submitted via our website

*I.D., NW5 (Stop Pizza Express Re-development: Oct. 11th, 1:46 pm)
I strongly oppose the plans to demolish this landmark building.*

*E.W, NW5 (Stop Pizza Express Re-development: Oct. 10th, 8:53 pm)
This building has a fabulous airy interior space that must surely lift the spirits of everyone who goes inside. And the outside is a gracious exterior which chimes well with the newly refurbished Sports Centre - we should surely keep this wonderful building for present and future residents of Kentish Town to enjoy*

*J.S, NW5 (Stop Pizza Express Re-development: Oct. 10th, 6:41 pm)
I would be very sad indeed to lose this wonderful Kentish Town landmark.
Please save it - once it's gone there's no return!*

H.F, NW5 (Stop Pizza Express Re-development: Oct. 10th, 6:38 pm)

Demolishing this building would be a real loss to Kentish Town. It's a unique building quite different from any others in the street and it adds real character. Inside it is also a fantastic space and it seems a waste to replace this with yet more flats in an already densely populated area. Ideally this building could be used as a music venue or provide some alternative facility for local people. Or keep it as a restaurant. This building must not go!

*G.T. , NW5 (Stop Pizza Express Re-development: Oct. 9th, 11:00 am)
The present modified Art Deco building is indeed a landmark in Kentish Town and would be much missed. What is proposed would close and crowd a key corner.*

*J.L. , NW1 (Stop Pizza Express Re-development: Oct. 8th, 6:23 pm)
This is shocking! Although - like the nearby former Kentish Town South station, now in a poor condition - its Art Deco style contrasts with the rest of the street this is an exceptional building which MUST be saved!*

*K.V, NW5 (Stop Pizza Express Re-development: Oct. 8th, 10:44 am)
To change this attractive building would be a shame. Changing the North London Poly building into flats was change enough. No thank you. Keep Pizza Express.*

*P.F. , NW5 (Stop Pizza Express Re-development: Oct. 6th, 7:59 pm)
The last thing Kentish town residents need is another modern ugly development anyway, but to knock down such a lovely building to create it would be shameful. Kentish Town hasn't got that much in the way of "beauty" so let's fight for the rare gems we do have!*

*C.P. , NW1 (Stop Pizza Express Re-development: Oct. 5th, 2:25 pm)
The Pizza Express building is one of the most stylish, unique and iconic landmarks in Kentish Town. Why do these greedy developers keep being given permission to transform our high streets into character-less clones????*

*J.G, NW1 (Stop Pizza Express Re-development: Oct. 4th, 6:52 pm)
A landmark building on Kentish Town Road, and should not be redeveloped. It's got history and elegance combined, not something one could say about the new plans.*

*A.V. , NW1 (Stop Pizza Express Re-development: Oct. 4th, 6:37 pm)
It would be a real shame to see a building that integrates so well into Kentish town disappear to become an ugly and non-descript block of flats.*

M.L. , NW5 (Stop Pizza Express Re-development: Oct. 4th, 4:27 pm)

I agree with the above statement. The building has a lot of history and is still an excellent venue

J.J. , NW5 (Stop Pizza Express Re-development: Oct. 4th, 9:06 am)

This is a beautiful building and very much part of the areas character. I cannot believe any one would consider destroying it.

R.M, NW5 (Stop Pizza Express Re-development: Oct. 4th, 8:06 am)

The building is a well-known and much loved landmark. It would be a real shame if it was demolished. It's part of Kentish Town's history and should be preserved.

J.S., NW5 (Stop Pizza Express Re-development: Oct. 3rd, 9:43 pm)

It would be a crying shame if this lovely building was destroyed. I support Nick Russell's campaign to protect Kentish Town's heritage.

This comment has been approved:

S.G, NW1 (Stop Pizza Express Re-development: Oct. 3rd, 9:33 pm)

Please don't destroy this wonderful interior space - I rejoice in its beauty at every visit to Pizza Express - in fact I go there for the building as much as the pizza!

P.C, NW5 (Stop Pizza Express Re-development: Oct. 3rd, 9:20 pm)

I agree that this historic building should be preserved - bad enough it has already been sold to Pizza Express after being part of North London Polytechnic. New flats that have no provision for social housing should not be built i this overcrowded area.

R.V, NW1 (Stop Pizza Express Re-development: Oct. 3rd, 5:21 pm)

It's a shame, it's such a building, we should take care about this kind of buildings, renovation can be always done other way then knock it down...

M.H, NW3 (Stop Pizza Express Re-development: Oct. 3rd, 4:55 pm)

The existing building is a ray of sunshine on part of the High Street that is particularly unpleasant on the eye. Turning past it into Prince of Wales of Road leads on to the gloriously restored baths. Having eaten inside many times is there no chance that at least the facade could be protected?

M.N, NW5 (Stop Pizza Express Re-development: Oct. 1st, 7:09 pm)

There are some buildings in the area no one would miss, this isn't one of them. I don't get the feeling there is anything in this for the people who live in Kentish Town and I'm not happy with the idea that it's going to go ahead without our consultation.

J.R, NW5 (Stop Pizza Express Re-development: Oct. 1st, 6:54 pm)

We need to preserve as much of this area's original architecture as possible.

The planned development would bring nothing but money to the developers.

Residents like myself would be the ones short-changed.