

SAVE BRITAIN'S HERITAGE

15 June 2016

Press release: Foyles War – SAVE calls on the Secretary of State to halt demolition of Soho landmark

SAVE has today written to Greg Clark, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, requesting that he call in proposals to demolish a landmark site in the Soho Conservation Area for a public inquiry.

SAVE has also launched a petition to Greg Clark, to demonstrate the public support for retaining and reusing these buildings. Please sign the petition [here](#) and circulate it.



The site in 2008. Foyles has since moved further down Charing Cross Road
Picture: Ewan Munro, Flickr <https://www.flickr.com/photos/55935853@N00/3229195889>

The proposals would see three unlisted buildings of merit, including the former Foyles store, demolished along with several other key buildings.

These are handsome buildings, Victorian, Edwardian, and twentieth century, in brick, stone and stucco with considerable charm. Foyles opened in 1929 at 113-119 Charing Cross Road and was the largest bookshop in the world. Together the

buildings make a clear positive contribution to the Conservation Area and surrounding heritage assets, and should be retained, adapted and reused.

In their place a monolithic nine storey office led development is proposed, out of character with the Conservation Area. It is much higher and bulkier than its neighbours – in marked contrast to the fine grain of the surrounding streets and the prevailing domestic scale of the Soho Conservation Area.



The proposal for a nine storey office building

Westminster City Council approved the application in May, despite strong objections from Historic England, the Victorian Society, and others. The Greater London Authority also stated that 'the loss of the original Foyles building causes significant harm to the conservation area'.

Last week the GLA announced they would not intervene in the application, and therefore SAVE has written to the Secretary of State, requesting that he call in the application for public inquiry.

Henrietta Billings, Director of SAVE said: "Soho's much-loved, unique character is full of history and diversity - a story laid out through its historic buildings, streets and open spaces. These 'buildings of merit' in the Conservation Area, deserve protection and celebration, not demolition. The proposed replacement is a monolithic corporate style re-development that risks chipping away at the very fabric that makes this place special."

Mike Fox, Deputy Director of SAVE said: “We saw last year during SAVE’s campaign for the Strand just how passionately people feel about buildings of this kind. Handsome, smartly detailed, and contextual to their surroundings, they are what makes London streetscapes so interesting. We call upon the Secretary of State to intervene and save these buildings.”

Marcus Binney, Executive President of SAVE said: “The proposals have been drawn up as if the Conservation Area, and indeed Conservation Area legislation, did not exist. The existing buildings have character and variety and if refurbished would, like comparable buildings in Soho, Covent Garden and all over central London, add greatly to the street scene. This is a Trojan horse of the worst and most dangerous kind and must be strongly resisted.”

Note to editors:

1. For more information please contact Mike Fox, Deputy Director at SAVE on 0207 253 3500 or office@savebritainsheritage.org
2. The petition can be signed here - <https://you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/stop-the-demolition-of-soho-save-a-key-west-end-landmark>
3. Letters requesting a call in of the planning application should be sent to npcu@communities.gsi.gov.uk, and must include Westminster City Council planning application number 15/11234/FULL.
4. SAVE Britain’s Heritage has been campaigning for historic buildings since its formation in 1975 by a group of architectural historians, writers, journalists and planners. It is a strong, independent voice in conservation, free to respond rapidly to emergencies and to speak out loud for the historic built environment. SAVE receives no government funding and relies on donations.

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