



Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State
The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC)
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

CC: Joanna Averley, chief government planner, DLUHC;
Sarah Allan, head of architecture, DLUHC;
Prof Alan Penn, chief scientific advisor to the DLUHC

18th May 2022

Dear Secretary of State,

Your recent decision to suspend the demolition of Marks & Spencer's flagship store at Marble Arch pending a review by your department was entirely correct.

We believe the overall strategy for this site is wrong, with a development which is environmentally wasteful, destroys an elegant and important interwar building and, many feel, negatively affects Oxford Street and its wider West End neighbourhood. We should be adapting the building, not destroying it.

We now urge you to hold a public inquiry into these proposals which would unnecessarily pump nearly 40,000 tonnes of CO₂ into the atmosphere. In contrast to the slow release of carbon from existing buildings, these emissions would be released immediately because of the vast quantity of raw materials required such as steel and concrete.

As you will be aware, a report by the renowned sustainability expert Simon Sturgis – an advisor to the UK Parliament and the GLA among others – found that the M&S plans were incompatible with the Government's commitment to reduce emissions by 68% by 2030, Westminster Council's declaration of climate emergency and the GLA's policy to prioritise retrofit. Despite this, London Mayor Sadiq Khan chose to wave through the plans last month.

While it cannot undo the harm caused by demolition, the proposed new M&S building makes several positive environmental moves and we believe this same design ingenuity could help deliver a comprehensive and successful retrofit scheme which would extend the life of this 1929 art deco landmark by another 100 years or more.

We urgently need to explore a new form of architectural solution for sites like this which are in such high demand from developers. As set out in the AJ RetroFirst campaign, the greenest building is the one that already exists – a notion fundamental to SAVE Britain's Heritage's mission right from the start.

We believe a public inquiry would be beneficial because it would allow you to examine the carbon calculations in detail and to test whether the office and retail scheme on the table is the right proposition for this site or whether, for instance, a number of new homes could also be part of the mix.

The built environment sector stands willing and able to assist with a more sustainable solution for this important and cherished building, but first we need your help.

Yours sincerely,

Henrietta Billings, director, SAVE Britain's Heritage
Marcus Binney, executive chairman, SAVE Britain's Heritage
Will Hurst, managing editor, The Architects' Journal
Robert Adam, owner, Robert Adam Architectural Consultancy
Peter Barber, founder, Peter Barber Architects
Julia Barfield, founding director, Marks Barfield Architects
Rab Bennetts, founder, Bennetts Associates
Ben Bolgar, senior design director, The Prince's Foundation
Nicholas Boys Smith, director, Create Streets
Basil Demeroutis, managing partner, Fore Partnership
Sara Edmonds for Households Declare
Mark Farmer, CEO and founding director, Cast Consultancy
Lizzie Glithero-West, chief executive, The Heritage Alliance
Jacob Loftus, CEO and founder, General Projects
Lesley Lokko, architect, academic, curator
Kevin McCloud, broadcaster
Alice Moncaster, senior lecturer in engineering, Open University
Philip Oldfield, head of school of built environment, University of New South Wales
Femi Oresanya, honorary professor, Bartlett School of Architecture
Griff Rhys Jones, president, Victorian Society and Civic Voice
Ian Ritchie, founder, Ian Ritchie Architects
James Rixon for Architects Climate Action Network
Charles Saumarez Smith, writer, curator, art historian
Jonathan Smales, executive director, Human Nature (Places)
Amin Taha, chairman, Groupwork
Sarah Wigglesworth, director, Sarah Wigglesworth Architects
Chris Wise, senior director, Expedition Engineering