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BORIS SET TO GUT MAJOR SPITALFIELDS LANDMARK

SAVE CALLS FOR LISTING ON 1929 BAROQUE FRUIT AND WOOL EXCHANGE BUILT IN HOMAGE TO HAWKSMOOR

London's Mayor should stay his hand this Wednesday before condemning the handsome London Fruit and Wool Exchange just three weeks before the 83 anniversary of its opening on October 30, 1929.

Despite the fact that the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, the local planning authority, has unanimously rejected plans for a massive redevelopment by Exemplar Properties next to the greatest baroque church in London, Hawksmoor's Christ Church Spitalfields, Boris Johnson has decided he will personally decide the application and appears set to overrule the local council and grant planning permission following a two-hour public hearing on Wednesday.

SAVE's President Marcus Binney says: "The rescue of the whole Spitalfields neighbourhood from decay and destruction is one of the great regeneration successes of modern London. SAVE helped lead the way when we held the first public event in Christ Church Spitalfields in 1976 after it had been used as a furniture store for 15 years.

"The current scheme leaves no more than the centre of the façade of one of the most handsome public buildings erected in 1920s London, an architectural triumph in an age of austerity. The wings go, the flank opposite Christ Church goes, the fine hall and staircase go as well as the theatre-style fruit and wool exchanges with their tiers of seating."

Mr Binney continues "We have called on the Secretary of State for an immediate spotlisting of this important landmark. We are supported by leading London historians and champions, including Dan Cruickshank, Ptolemy Dean, Sir Simon Jenkins and Gavin Stamp. We demand that the Mayor stays his hand until the Minister has had a chance to properly assess the special architectural and historic interest of this fine civic building, which in our view is a superb example of dignified and handsome street architecture sensitive to its context."

The Exchange is designed in the vigorous and lively Renaissance style (named for Sir Christopher Wren) and built of warm red brick with an abundance of Portland stone trim – the materials used for the rebuilding of London after the Great Fire of 1666. All the carved stone architectural detail is of outstanding quality.

Mr Binney continues: “The Exchange equals in quality and character another famous landmark of the era, Fortnum & Mason in Piccadilly which has a Grade II listing and is built in the same materials. The developers and the City Corporation should take their cue from the Garfield Weston group which has recently extended Fortnum’s into neighbouring buildings in a sensitive manner.”

The Exchange was built to the designs of Sydney Perks, the City Corporation’s longstanding Surveyor. (Surveyor to the City of London from 1905 to 1931; City Architect & Surveyor from 1928 to 1931).

Clem Cecil director of SAVE says: “we do not understand why the City Corporation is so careless of its own heritage. SAVE stopped the demolition of Old Billingsgate Fish Market, designed by another City Surveyor, Sir Horace Jones, and is now battling to stop the gutting of another Horace Jones landmark, the General Market at Smithfield, next to the famous meat and poultry markets.”

In SAVE’s view both wings of The Fruit and Wool Exchange should be retained as well as the centre – and also Barclays Bank on Commercial Road and The Gun Pub on Brushfield Street which were built to complement the Exchange and form appropriate neighbours for Christ Church. The red brick plays up the white stone of the church in precisely the same way that late 17th century red brick buildings set off the splendour of St Paul’s Cathedral when it was first built.

Perks’s buildings have all the flourishes – keystones to the window heads and quoins emphasizing the corners. The rear of the Exchange is also an impressive composition with the characteristic arch-headed windows found in early 18th century Spitalfields. It looks out over a late 17th century alley - Dorset Street - which will be entirely extinguished by the new development.

The proposals by Exemplar Properties are strongly opposed by the Spitalfields Community Group and the Spitalfields Trust. John Nicolson says, “there are over 800 objections to the plans – one of the strongest ever expressions of public feeling in Tower Hamlets. Both Tory and Labour councillors were unanimous in rejecting the scheme.” Historian Dan Cruickshank a trustee of SAVE will present the case against gutting on Wednesday to the Mayor.

Note1. Following a fire in the building a few years ago Community Groups say that access to the building has been heavily restricted and that there has been no recent assessment of the interiors.

Note2. The London Fruit and Wool Exchange, a fine Art Deco Portland stone building, was designed in 1928 by the City Architect Sydney Perks. It contains what was once the largest auction hall in the British Isles, with acres of mahogany and Deco glass, brass handrails, and fine parquet flooring. It sheltered East Enders during the Blitz, and its basement walls are covered with wartime graffiti.

The Gun, a much loved local pub, built of brick and Portland. Also designed in 1928 by Sydney Perks, the pub is lined with high quality oak paneling.

Barclays Bank Spitalfields, designed in 1928 by Edward Monson, Borough Architect of Bethnal Green. Monson also designed the Bethnal

Green Town Hall, now an award winning Art Deco hotel, restaurant and bar.

Dorset Street, laid out in 1682, once home to Georgian silk weavers' houses, the home and first London showroom of Thomas Wedgwood, and in Victorian times the 'most dangerous street in London', scene of Jack the Ripper's final murder.



For more photos see <http://spitalfieldslife.com/2012/02/15/at-the-fruit-wool-exchange/>

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NOTES TO EDITORS: SAVE Britain's Heritage has been campaigning for historic buildings since its formation in 1975 by a group of architects, 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.

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