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Our reference: 22019

7<sup>th</sup> April 2022

Dear Mr Sanctuary,

**Planning Application P2022/0871/FUL: Partial demolition of the existing building, construction of two new floors, reconfiguration of floorspace and renewal of the existing facades to provide new office floorspace (Use Class E), retail floorspace (Use Class E), a replacement public house (Sui Generis), plus new access arrangements, landscaping improvements, new public realm and other associated works - 1 Torrens Street, London, EC1V 1NY.**

SAVE Britain's Heritage objects to the above planning application for the partial demolition and reconstruction of 1 Torrens St, Islington, on grounds that the proposal involves the loss of a landmark post-modernist building which we consider to be a non-designated heritage asset of high architectural value and significance. Angel Square contributes positively to the varied and historic character of Angel and Islington High Street and its loss, together with the bland and increased scale of redevelopment proposed in its place, will cause unjustified harm to the area if approved. The application therefore fails to comply with national and local policy for preserving Islington's historic environment, and we call on the Local Planning Authority to refuse planning permission.

### Proposals

This application seeks permission to demolish all but the core frame of the existing 5-storey office building at 1 Torrens St, Islington, known as Angel Square, to redevelop the site with a larger office building of 8-storeys. The proposals would see the existing building's substantial and high-quality brick and stone facades demolished, and replaced with a new glass and steel façade. The plans would see the existing lightwell at the heart of Angel Square infilled and the existing public access route from Islington High Street through to Torrens Street, replaced with a new one.

### Significance

Angel Square is a prominent post-modernist building completed in 1991 by architects Rock Townsend. Its unusual design of essentially three interconnected buildings around a traditional inner courtyard and distinctive curved corner was a direct and deliberate response to the more standardised style of slab office development at the time such as the RBS bank building immediately to the north of the site. Despite being only 30 years old, Angel Square has become a distinctive and recognisable landmark building at the gateway to Angel and the historic heart of Islington.

As with many such post-modernist buildings, Angel Square also represents a concerted break from the predominant trend for modernist architecture at the time. Relatively few examples of post-modernist architecture of this scale, design and landmark quality remain in London today, making this building an important and significant historic survivor in architectural terms.

The building's rusticated facades were deliberately designed to showcase a rich pallet of materials, decoration and silhouette at the behest of the council's then Chief Planner Dennis Brown, to reflect its prominent location. Intricate polychromatic brick work and distinctive cream and terracotta bands make this a striking building, with the unusual Italianate campanile referencing a more classical language of civic architecture. Use of these traditional

materials and a mixture of modernist and classical forms allows the building to act as a respectful neighbour to the more traditional civic architecture opposite, including the grade II listed Co-Op building on the corner of the High Street and Pentonville Road.

### **Our Assessment**

We object to this application on the following heritage grounds:

Firstly, the demolition of all existing facades will lead to the total vitiating of the building's post-modernist architectural character and historic significance. At the behest of the Council, the existing building was the product of careful and detailed architectural and historical considerations at the time of construction and has since become a landmark in Angel which contributes positively to the varied and rich architectural townscape of this important urban intersection in the borough. As such it must be considered a non-designated heritage asset (NDHA) in planning terms. We therefore consider its total loss to be harmful and unjustified in architectural and heritage terms.

In weighing applications that directly affect NDHAs, Paragraph 203 of the National Planning Policy Framework (July 2021) states that "*a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset*". In heritage terms, the scale of harm here is the total loss of a NDHA with clear architectural and townscape significance. Considering that the existing building has not been proven to be structurally unsound and currently has a sustainable use, we do not consider its total redevelopment to be justified.

This site marks a highly prominent position on the junction of City Road and Islington High Street and the existing building forms a key civic gateway to historic Angel, with the use of traditional materials and architectural forms designed to harmonise with the varied character of existing designated and undesignated historic buildings on Islington High Street. In contrast, the monochrome colour and single slab footprint of the building proposed appears alien in this context, dominating rather than harmonising with existing historic buildings.

The addition of two additional storeys (taking the building plot from 5/6 to 8-storeys in height) will further alter the prevailing scale and varied plot character of the area. The impact of these abrupt changes in character would diminish the rich townscape and varied architectural character which makes much of Islington so special.

London Borough of Islington (LBI) Development Management Policies (June 2013) Policy DM2.1(vii) states that new development must "*respect and respond positively to existing buildings, the streetscape and the wider context.*" When considered against this policy we fail to see how the design and increased height of the proposed block responds to either the scale or character of its context.

The site also lies in a highly sensitive heritage context, being immediately adjacent to, and therefore affecting the setting of three designated conservation areas: the Angel Conservation Area located to the north-west, the New River Conservation Area to the south and the Duncan Terrace/Colebrooke Row Conservation Area to the east. LBI Development Management Policies (June 2013) Policy DM2.3 states that development within the setting of a conservation area must conserve or enhance its significance. For the reasons stated above regarding the loss of the existing post-modernist landmark and the single office block building proposed in its place, we do not consider the application meets this policy test for the protection and enhancement of Islington's conservation areas, as is also required under Section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

### **Conclusion**

For these reasons we object to this planning application and call on the Local Planning Authority to refuse planning permission, in favour of requiring the applicant to retain the existing building fabric in a meaningful and architecturally comprehensive way, as opposed to the extensive demolition currently proposed.

I trust these comments are useful to you and I ask that you keep me informed of further decisions regarding this application.

Yours sincerely,



**Benedict Oakley**

Conservation Officer, SAVE Britain's Heritage