

1st December 2019 – The Thorney Island Society’s response to WCC

The Victoria Tower Gardens Millbank London SW1P 3YB  
19/00114/FULL

## **UNITED KINGDOM HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL AND LEARNING CENTRE PLANNING PROCESS**

### **The Thorney Island Society’s response to the new Environmental Statement documents, submitted by MHCLG/UKHMF in October 2019:**

**Environmental Statement (Volume 5) Revised Appendix F Archaeological Desk Based Assessment - Environmental Statement (Volume 5) Addendum to Revised Appendix K Flood Risk Assessment - Environmental Statement (Volume 5) Appendix M Transport Assessment Addendum - Response to Review of Environmental Statement October 2019, also the Review of the Environmental Statement for the UKHMLC of October 2019**

We have looked through these new documents and have noted that there are many areas in which the application remains unsatisfactory, or more information is needed. We would like, in particular, to make the following observations:

#### **Review of the Environmental Statement for the UKHMLC of October 2019 by LUC**

General comment: In Table 16.1 we note several instances, highlighted in yellow, where WCC are advised to draw their own judgement on matters that the applicant considers sufficiently established.

##### **6.42 states:**

Section 18(3)(d) of the EIA regulations states that an ES must include “a description of the reasonable alternatives studied by the developer, which are relevant to the proposed development and its specific characteristics, and an indication of the main reasons for the option chosen, taking into account the effects of the development on the environment”. Chapter 4 of the Environmental Statement (Volume 2) Main Text contains details on alternative schemes that were considered as part of the process. It details why other locations were discounted; these relate primarily to financial and practical reasons, but also that the other sites did not fulfil the brief for the UKHMLC of the location being ‘sufficiently prominent’. Neither this chapter nor Chapter 7.0: Potential Impacts and Mitigation Measures of the HTVIA volume explain how environmental factors informed the decision for the location, including how the potential significant effects on heritage assets were taken into consideration.

We note that the important information on Alternatives, ‘taking into account the effects of the development on the environment’, is missing.

##### **8.13 states:**

Paragraph 9.7.7 of ES states that “During operation, there is likely to be a moderate (significant) effect on use of the green space as a result of the projected increase in footfall”. In addition “there is expected to be a reduction of around 7% in green space, however the Scheme will retain all activities that are currently undertaken in the Garden and provide further enhancements across the site.” Clarification is sought from the Applicant as to whether this has been considered in terms of the impact of a small loss on a project scale but viewed as a larger loss by receptors in terms of the wider picture with the reduction in total green space available in the surrounding area.

We have maintained throughout that what is critical is the percentage of the grass area lost (27%). Additional is the fact that it will be divided by a wide path bordered by a ‘bench’ on one side, and that the grass mound will be less useful than flat lawn for most uses – such as office colleagues who like to sit in circles to eat lunch and talk.

**11.14 states:**

Section 1.6 of the FRA outlines the scope of the FRA and discusses the proximity of the development to the River Thames, consultation with the EA and the river wall (flood defence) visual condition survey. The Applicant has indicated that the development will be setback a minimum of 16m from the flood defence wall and where this isn’t the case, arrangements have been built into the design i.e. café requiring no pilings and placed on a raft circa 300 to 350mm thick. The Applicant should clarify that consultation with the EA on this solution has occurred and that it is deemed appropriate, therefore not requiring a flood risk activity permit. In terms of the flood defence survey, conclusions and recommendations have been drawn that propose patch concrete repairs to be undertaken to existing assets. If possible, the reparation of these points should be secured via a planning condition.

We note that one of the issues that worried the Environment Agency was the future difficulty of repairing the river wall if there is an underground structure so close to it.

**12.10 states:**

A peak of 76 HGV movements through the site access is expected during construction, which would result in a number of one minute closures of the Millbank footway. As footfall is reasonably low, the impact on pedestrian and cycle delay is expected to be negligible. This is accepted, but it is noted that the impact on safety has not been considered and this should be clarified.

Safety is very important. One quarter of road users on this stretch of Millbank are bicyclists and they are exceptionally vulnerable to traffic turning across the bus and cycle lane.

The R&R in the Palace of Westminster will be starting during or soon after operation begins. The vast majority of visitors will be arriving from the Underground station – directly across the path of all deliveries to the Palace work sites, one of which is expected to be the northern part of VTG.

**13.21 states:**

There will be an extra contribution to London’s emissions of <0.01% due to this development.

Surely no extra emissions should be acceptable.

## **Response to Review of Environment Statement**

We note in particular on p.5 of Appendix A ‘Montague Evans response to LUC review of the Heritage, Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment (ES Vol 3, December 2018 and

addendum, April 2019)' that there is a list of 'the changes to the design to address potential impacts on built heritage receptors that were made during the pre-application design development stage and as part of the subsequent post submission amendment', which are listed. We quote some of these listed changes (indented) with our comments below:

- To ensure the retention of the existing mature plane trees that line the perimeter of the park and help frame views towards Victoria Tower and the Palace of Westminster, which are integral to the significance of the Grade II registered landscape of Victoria Tower Gardens, the built footprint of the proposals has been altered and informed by tree root protection areas, tree surveys and arboricultural factors.

Since roots were not found in the places they were expected to be, it seems likely that they will be encountered lower in the ground and perhaps extending further into the construction area than might be expected. We are informed that tree root growth is not predictable in made up ground and in this case the natural direction of growth on both sides of the park will have been into the garden, away from the river wall and the impermeable road surface.

- The design of the entrance pavilion design has been altered to address pre-application feedback and post submission feedback from Historic England and other consultees with a reduction in scale, footprint and a more transparent appearance as detailed in the relevant Addendum (April 2019) documents.

The design of the entrance pavilion is not substantially better or more suitable than the original design. It still prevents non-ticket holders from seeing the Memorial Fins.

- The design has considered in detail potential impacts on the Buxton Memorial and seeks to improve its setting with new seating and landscaping and to provide new interpretation material. The memorial fins were moved so that the Buxton Memorial could stand in front of the memorial to allow the retention of the axial view of the memorial along Dean Stanley Street. The height of the fins were reduced to ensure that they are deferential to that of the Buxton Memorial and enable views of the Palaces of Westminster from the new courtyard.

The distant views of the Buxton Memorial will be blocked from most parts of the park by the mound to the north and the entrance pavilion to the south. The reduction in height of the fins is an insignificant 24.8 cm.

- The option to move the Buxton Memorial was considered but following design alterations (reduction of the memorial fin heights, positioning of the fins, landscaping improvements to its immediate setting, new interpretation, scope for reviving its function as a water fountain and the resonance of co-location), consultation with WCC and potential risks associated with moving the structure it was decided it was more appropriate to retain the Buxton Memorial in situ.

The Buxton Memorial will still be much less visible from the rest of the gardens, partially hidden by the mound from the north and less visible from the south.

- The appearance, scale and form of the above ground elements of the memorial (including the learning centre, courtyard and entrance pavilion) have been designed to respond, and remain subservient to, the Houses of Parliament/Palace of Westminster.

We still do not understand what this design (compared by many to a toast rack or rib cage) has to do with the Palace of Westminster. If one of the purposes of the Memorial is to be a 'permanent reminder' to Members of Parliament that 'political decisions have far-reaching consequences', then it is a pity that, in the words of the open letter written by the joint chairs of the UKHMLC on 15<sup>th</sup> February 2019, it will be 'barely visible from Parliament'.

- The proposed raised landscaping on top of the memorial has been modified to ensure it is accessible to the public and that new views of the Houses of Parliament/Palace of Westminster can be appreciated.
- The proposed footpath network has been designed to improve links between the listed statues, which will remain in their current positions.
- Hard and soft landscaping improvements and associated management regimes to facilitate visitor movement around the park and maintenance of the gardens and UKHMLC.

These alterations do not materially improve the gardens. By restricting the amount of green open space they diminish its utility.

- Retention of playground use and improved provision, which is a positive feature of Victoria Tower Gardens and the Westminster Abbey and Parliament Square Conservation Area.

There can be no doubt that the area of the playground is being reduced. The claim that the size remains the same can only be justified if areas previously not counted, such as part of the footpath and part of the shrubbery on Millbank, are included in the calculation. The reduced area will also have to accommodate a new café building, which will in itself reduce the quality of the playground.

- Retention of the Spicer Memorial, which is a positive feature of the Victoria Tower Gardens and Westminster Abbey and Parliament Square Conservation Area.
- The design has been informed by a Visitor Management Strategy to manage impact of new visitors on the park and associated built heritage receptors.
- The design has been informed by a Construction Management Plan to manage construction impacts on the park and associated built heritage receptors.

None of these 'changes' can be claimed as improvements because they should have been part of the original scheme.

## **Vol 5 Appendix M – Addendum Transport Assessment**

There is no discussion of the Mayor of London's plans to pedestrianise Abingdon St/Millbank from Old Palace Yard to Lambeth Bridge.

Throughout the document there are references to there being minimal effect on bicyclists (eg 5.2.8). This cannot be correct if vehicles (coaches and servicing vehicles) are allowed to stop in the southbound bus/cycle lane.

### **4.2.10. states:**

As shown in Figure 6, on double yellow lines in Westminster coaches are permitted to wait for up to ten minutes, *plus* the time required for loading / unloading to take place. This would be sufficient for the needs of the proposed development's coach groups.

This would mean that there would be a coach parked in the bus lane most if not all of the time. We note that Transport for London's letter of 25<sup>th</sup> September further restricts coach parking but does not rule it out.

### **Vol 5 Appendix K – Addendum Flood risk Assessment**

There is no discussion of the Environment Agency's concern about future repairs to the river wall.

### **Vol 5 Appendix F Revised Part 1 Archaeological**

'Full reporting expected by October 2019' is mentioned several times – where is it?

#### **7.2. states:**

Impacts on designated assets Although it is outside the scope of this assessment to examine built heritage issues, the Site is a Registered Park and Garden, and as such the Proposed Development would constitute a physical impact to the designated asset. However, the impact would overall be temporary resulting from the construction phase of the Proposed Development. Following the completion of the Proposed Development, the gardens would be returned to public use, resulting in less than substantial harm to the asset.

This is misleading, as the public use would be very different from today's use, not only because so many people will be using the park simply as access to the Memorial, but because the atmosphere will be utterly altered, from a place of casual enjoyment to one freighted with connection to an utterly horrific part of the world's history.

#### **8.3 states:**

It is evident that all archaeology of any significance within the footprint of the proposed scheme lies below the c. 1.2m depth of topsoil imported during creation of the current park. Further archaeological intervention (beyond boreholes) to depth into the underlying post medieval development of the site and alluvium below that would require very significant engineering solutions to achieve'

We are concerned that there will be no investigation of the significant archaeology that may well exist in the undisturbed ground.

1/12/19