



*Friends of St. James's Park and The Green Park*

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Mike Gray. Esq.,  
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24th August 2011  
Dear Mr.Gray

By email southplanningteam@westminster.gov.uk

Ref 11/06643/FULL

**Palace of Westminster, St Margaret Street, London SW1P 3JX.**

**New perimeter railings to exposed boundaries of Cromwell green and Speaker's Green: alterations to railings to west of Westminster Hall (Cromwell Green)**

Thank you for forwarding a copy of the above application along with your letter dated 26th July 2011. I spoke to you regarding the timing of our response and it was agreed that we would submit it to you this week.

We found the large scale plans and their format difficult to assess and making arrangements to seek some guidance has been protracted, hence the delay in our response. I am happy to say that I met with Tessa Blundy representing the applicant, on site. She had much more helpful drawings and gave a full explanation, followed by a detailed site visit on the 22nd August.

It is appreciated that the planning application's prime concern is with increasing security and preventing unwarranted intrusive access. The 'architectural' approach has been to produce railings in the spirit of the original period railings. This approach is bound to be extremely costly.

By and large the additional railings are regarded as unfortunate, sending a message contrary to the spirit of democracy. It is unfortunate that the 'Mother of Parliaments' is now presented as a defensive fortress with a series of the most obvious and blatant barriers, where far less intrusive mechanisms of ensuring security should be employed.

Under the circumstances I have been lead into considering more than the application but also the reasoning for the form that it has taken, and the excessive costs to be incurred. It is assumed that other aspects have previously been considered and dismissed. I have attached these comments as an appendix.

The conclusion that is reached is that the proposals should be reconsidered in total. There are obvious weaknesses in the protection offered; and that by a due combination of physical barriers and electronic monitoring, a more satisfactory solution could be offered. The over emphasis on using historic style railings is in part responsible. The protection necessitated by the location of the Visitor Centre, and its flat roof have produced a most unsightly solution, verging on the 'Heath Robinson', which is unacceptable on most counts. It seems the priorities are to be questioned when it is remembered that the vehicle entrance court yard is without additional railing treatments as produced elsewhere; even though the perimeter on two sides has no additional railing protection and is equally exposed.

**The objections are as follows**

- 1 The proposed railings to Speaker's green and to Cromwell Green are a major visual intrusion to the appreciation of the setting of the adjacent parts of the Palace of Westminster.
- 2 It is concluded that the visual intrusion is more than is necessary to meet the objectives of improving security - i.e. it is a very heavy handed approach, and has a number of flaws .
- 3 It is recommended that a fresh approach is undertaken
- 4 The proposals are disproportionately expensive, as a result of the cumbersome structural support considered necessary to avoid loading the existing walls at the edges of the two Greens.

We trust our observations and comments will be of assistance and ask that our comments be made known to the Committee.

Yours Sincerely  
for and on behalf of the Thorney Island Society

**PP Tom Ball**

**June A Stubbs**

Chairman

## **APPENDIX**

### **Security principles**

There is a point at which increasing height may become counter productive, being greater cost but with no ultimate increased security. The 'thinking' was explained describing the stages - deterrence, detection, and detention (capture). If the intruder has got to the last stage surely much of the safeguards may be argued to have failed. Therefore the greatest emphasis must be placed on the first stages deterrence and detection. In an age where the technology of camera surveillance and detection are so advanced, one wonders whether the perimeter railings along Bridge Street for instance are appropriate or even essential; except for protection around the Big Ben tower.

### **Back stays tower supports**

I have considered the supporting 'back stays' Dwg 075 which I refer to as 'tower supports', which are to take the load of the new or increased railings along the perimeter stretches to both Speaker's Green and Cromwell Green. Their purpose is to avoid over loading the existing wall structure, and entail a considerable cantilever structure. One concludes that this is an ingenious solution, and very expensive, given the number of tower supports. Looking at the construction system there is to my mind a security weakness. A climber once over the railing could easily descend safely using the tower supports. Such movements would be well within the skill of an experienced climber's or gymnast's techniques.

### **Speaker's Green**

I find the proposed extensive railings along Bridge Street visually intrusive as urban design: and which mar the notion of a centre of democracy being accessible. It strengthens an image of keeping people out; as a result of the 'wrong' people attempting to get in. Its structural support system is cumbersome. I have argued also that in itself the system is vulnerable, and even inviting challenge to a would be intruder. The costs must be very great. It is arguable that a less extravagant solution, simpler in form, might be more appropriate in 2011. For example, the railings proposed along the river frontage of Speaker's Green Dwg 089.

From a visual point of view it would be preferable not to have the railings, but to retain an open aspect. A much more efficient form of security is to include the second line of deterrence which exists to an extent today, but visually could be improved. Thus the proposal which maintains the screen principle along the stair way from the Underground, is preferable to the railings along Bridge Street, and should continue to the river edge, with a return to Westminster Bridge. This in effect would create a 'dry moat' from which there is no escape other than by capture. CCTV and electronic systems being a relevant part of the security detection. The point being that as with a moat, one is deterred from making the first move since the difficulties of the second course of action required, is seen as much more difficult - and threatening.

The proposals Dwg 060 suggest that the inner screen will be replaced by a stainless steel mesh having a vertical emphasis rather than the existing horizontal emphasis. The horizontal mesh is much easier to climb and therefore the vertical is likely to be more secure. The use of stainless steel is not welcomed as it would be seen to be much more visually intrusive than the black finish. It is to be hoped that this would be changed in the final proposals.

### **Cromwell Green & Visitor Centre**

On Cromwell Green, the position of the secondary line of railing should be brought much closer to the pedestrian ramp and thereby avoiding much of the high screen along the north of the Green.

The Visitor Centre was extended to the perimeter wall, which substantially increases the problem of security. The gap between Centre and wall should be opened up and consideration given to increasing it by reconsidering the layout and disposition of the Centre: increasing the separation.

### **Footnote :**

references to climbing skills are based on my much earlier experience as a climber of sheer mountain rock faces as well as ice walls. Modern equipment will have facilitated climbing achievements.