



PRESS RELEASE 16TH JULY

City grants itself permission to gut Smithfield General Market – SAVE asks the Secretary of State for a Call In.

Today in London's Guildhall the Planning and Transportation Committee voted 19 to 2 to give planning permission to a controversial proposal from Henderson Global Investors to gut the handsome market halls of the Smithfield General Market and replace them with office blocks, matched by an even higher new block behind the Red House.

Members of the Planning Committee ignored the 250 and more objections, and the almost 3,000 strong petition to Ed Vaizey MP to stop the gutting of the market.

City Planning Officer Peter Rees side-stepped accusations that the buildings, that are owned by the City of London Corporation, had been deliberately neglected by the City.

What was harder to defend was why the City had ignored the conclusions of the 2007-2008 Public Inquiry, which had clearly concluded that the site should be put on the open market in order to allow conservation-led schemes to come forward.

Peter Rees was asked why the City had not done this, he replied: "the whole issue is whether the scheme causes substantial harm. This one does not, therefore there was no requirement to put the scheme out to tender." SAVE believes that this is an incorrect application of the conclusions of the Inspector's Report.

SAVE also challenges the claim that the McAslan scheme does not cause substantial harm to the conservation area. And we are not alone: the scheme has been called 'Butchery', by the Victorian Society and criticised by the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, Islington Council, the Charterhouse, the Council for British Archaeology, the Twentieth Century Society, the Ancient Monuments Society, the Heritage of London Trust, many local residents and businesses. Fergus Henderson of St John, the most pioneering restaurant in the area, situated in a former bakery, has registered an objection.

Islington Council has identified the adjoining conservation area – Charterhouse Square conservation area, as being at risk and are seeking to place it on the English Heritage at Risk Register, an indication of the immediate and corrosive effect that it is perceived the scheme will have.

However the City Planning and Transport Committee were impervious to these concerns. Member Brian Mooney said, "I warmly welcome this. Ultimately we're going to have to get rid of the whole meat market. This is a good start."

Committee Member Tom Sleight called it "a fudge in the great British tradition of fudges."

Patrick Streeter, one of the two who voted against the scheme said: "this pays mere lip service to conservation," and asked why the site had not been put out to competitive tender. Streeter also accused the City of behaving like a property developer and said that it was their duty to "conserve buildings of lasting merit."

Ann Pembroke, the only other member voting against said, "the new building too obviously intrudes on the existing one. The new building must be discreet and not overshadow the buildings that we love."

The application was passed on the condition that the applicant would revise their scheme for Hart's Corner. The Reverend Martin Dudley, who voted for the scheme, suggested rebuilding the original turret that had been destroyed by a bomb in 1945.

Peter Rees confirmed that English Heritage are happy to allow the City to approve the scheme, even though they have said to SAVE that 'at no time do we offer explicit support in principle'.

Another committee member quoted English Heritage's letter of response to the scheme "the current proposals represent a realistic long term proposal to bring the redundant Victorian buildings back into a viable use."

Chris Smith of Urban Space Management, promoters of an alternative, conservation-led scheme, made the point that, "No detail, evidence or financial analysis has been submitted by the applicant to back up its assertion that a full retention scheme is unviable."

SAVE argues that there is no overriding need to demolish Horace Jones's still largely intact market halls. Eric Reynolds of Urban Space Management, the entrepreneur behind Camden Lock, Greenwich and Spitalfields Markets, has made an offer to transform the General Market into a retail market on the lines of flourishing Borough Market. This scheme could begin immediately with the market halls opening in stages. Public access and permeability would increase substantially. No new engineering work or foundations are needed as the scheme simply reuses the existing structures. Chris Smith said today: "The approach outlined in our assessment is not unique and could be undertaken by the applicant or another developer." This would be in line with the conclusions of the 2007/8 Public Inquiry.

Clem Cecil SAVE Director said in her objection today: "English Heritage are cited as

supporting the Henderson scheme – to us they have denied that they give explicit support to any scheme. What is happening is an elaborate form of passing the buck between the City and English Heritage which effectively bypasses correct application of National Planning Policy.”

Marcus Binney President of SAVE said: “In SAVE's view there is once again a clear case for a call-in and public inquiry. This application concerns an important London landmark. It is contested by substantial parties on both sides and there are many important issues which can only be properly examined, tested and weighed in the open forum of a public inquiry.”



Smithfield General Market – interior

For more information and images, please contact the office on 0207 253 3500 or office@savebritainsheritage.org

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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