



Ms Amanda Peck  
Development Control Planning Services  
London Borough of Camden  
Town Hall  
Argyle Street  
London WC1H 8ND

94 12 14

24 August 2012

Dear Ms Peck,

**CENTRE POINT TOWER, CENTRE POINT LINK and CENTRE POINT HOUSE  
101-103 NEW OXFORD STREET and 5-24 ST GILES HIGH STREET, LONDON WC1A 1DD  
PLANNING APPLICATION REF: 2012/2895/P**

Thank you for consulting the Twentieth Century Society on the above application for ground floor extension, façade replacement, other alterations. The application also includes the change of use of the tower from office B1 use to C3 residential use and various other changes of use from B1 office to A1/A3/A4 flexible retail/restaurant/bar use. The proposals were presented to the Society's recent advisory Casework Committee meeting. This letter represents the views of the committee.

While certain aspects of the proposals are to be welcomed, overall the Society has concerns relating to the proposed infill bridge, proposed facades of the tower and Centre Point House, and relocation of the external stairs. Each of these points are addressed in turn below.

**Significance**

Located at the intersection of Charing Cross Road, New Oxford Street and Tottenham Court Road,

Centre Point is one of London's most distinctive landmarks. The site comprises Centre Point Tower, Centre Point House and the connecting link bridge. The site is located within the Denmark Street Conservation Area, with Bloomsbury Conservation Area lying immediately adjacent to the site to the north of New Oxford Street. Centre. The site is also grade II listed, and identified as a designated heritage asset under the recently adopted National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

Centre Point's bravado and high level of detailing makes it one of the finest of the tower blocks built to the designs of Richard Seifert and George Marsh in the 1960s. It is widely recognised as the one of the finest most important speculative office building of its time, and was added to the statutory list in 1995 for its architectural interest and innovation. Not only is the tower itself of interest, but also its relationship with the link and rear block, each element individually expressed to identify its function. It is also the only listed building by this highly influential firm.

Centre Point was both technically and architecturally pioneering; it was the first tall building in England to use precast concrete components and also the first not to require scaffolding. Centre Point is also important for initiating the shift away from the plain glass curtain wall trend, which dominated the commercial tower block sector. Centre Point's flamboyant sculptural architectural treatment can be accredited for significantly contributing to a more imaginative language in corporate architecture.

### **Policy context**

Paragraph 132 of the NPPF states that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to its conservation. It adds that significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting. As heritage assets are irreplaceable, any harm should require clear and convincing justification.

### **The Proposals**

The Society is comfortable with the principle of the proposed change of use of Centre Point tower, the Centre Point Link and change of use of Centre Point House at first and second floor levels. Members also felt that the new public realm would be a positive addition to the setting.

However, the Society has serious concerns regarding several aspects of the proposals, each of which are addressed in turn:

#### **a) Infill unit below bridge**

Members of the committee felt that the part in-fill under the link bridge and major alteration to the plan form would be detrimental to the significance of this three part composition. This is specifically relevant to the bridge link which loses its identifiable original function and relationship to its neighbours as a 'bridge' with void beneath if part of the space beneath is in-filled. Members felt

strongly that in-filling this section would be harmful this composition that is read as three identifiable parts.

#### **b) Centre Point Tower facades**

Plans for the proposed replacement Centre Point Tower fenestration show an altered geometry in the proposed pattern (chapter 6.6.4, p142, Design and Access Statement). No supporting information has been provided to justify this change. There is also no justification regarding the loss of the form of the solid spandrel panel and alteration to clear glazing, which the Society considers will have a significant visual impact.

#### **c) Projecting Stair and external bench**

The Society views the external cantilevered staircases as expressive and sculptural features that are an essential and dramatic part of the building. The Society strongly objects to their removal and relocation within the building. We understand that the front stair is already compromised by the Crossrail proposals and thus it is of added importance that the rear stair is maintained in its current original position. The associated external bench forms part of the sculptural composition of the tower, along with the stair and should remain in-situ as public seating.

#### **Centre Point House facades**

Members felt that the proposed replacement of the façades of Centre Point House would result in the loss of almost the entire existing historic 1960s curtain walling fabric of the building. This applies not only to the alterations to the 'brise soleil', but the replacement curtain walling and balcony details such as the replacement balustrade and mosaic and tiling details. The committee felt that this was excessive, and would result in substantial harm to the designated heritage asset. It was felt that insufficient justification had been submitted to support this level of intervention and loss of historic fabric. The Society's view is that alternative options that conserve a greater level of historic fabric should be fully explored. These comments do not relate to the ground floor retail frontages which have been extensively altered, and are of much less importance.

#### **Conclusion**

Overall, members felt that many of the changes were unnecessary and detrimental to the character of the building and would result in the excessive loss of historic fabric of this important landmark building. The Society took the view that the overall effect of the proposals would result in harm to the designated asset, as a result of the extent of loss of historic fabric and alteration to the original plan form. This level of intervention is not supported with sufficient justification, as required by paragraph 132 of the NPPF. Members would also like to see further investigation of alternatives that would allow more of the original facades to be retained. As such the Twentieth Century Society strongly objects to the proposals.

I trust these comments are helpful to you in your determination of this application. I would be very grateful if you could keep us informed of the outcome of this case. Should you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Henrietta Billings'.

Henrietta Billings

Senior Caseworker

**The Twentieth Century Society**

**Remit:** The Twentieth Century Society was founded in 1979 and is the national amenity society concerned with the protection, appreciation, and study of post-1914 architecture, townscape and design. The Society is acknowledged in national planning guidance as the key organisation concerned with the modern period and is a constituent member of the Joint Committee of the National Amenity Societies. Under the procedures set out in *ODPM Circular 09/2005*, all English local planning authorities must inform the Twentieth Century Society when an application for listed building consent involving partial or total demolition is received, and they must notify us of the decisions taken on these applications.