

SENT BY EMAIL

Mr David Dorward  
Area Planning Officer  
Planning Department  
Westminster City Council  
64 Victoria Street  
London  
SW1E 6QP

26<sup>TH</sup> November 2021

Dear Mr Dorward

**Re: 19/00114/FULL VICTORIA TOWER GARDENS, SW1, SPECIAL CONDITIONS**

As you will be aware the London Historic Parks and Gardens Trust has leave for a s.288 Appeal at the High Court which is not due to be heard until the end of February 2022. We note that a series of documents have been sent to WCC by the Applicant and validated, with an indicative date for decision of 24 December 2021 on the planning portal.

I realise the Applicant is eager to proceed at the earliest opportunity. I acknowledge that some of the conditions could be agreed in principle, in advance of Court proceedings to avoid future delays. However, there are several submissions which propose works starting in the park sooner than the conclusion of the Court proceedings. Approval by WCC would therefore enable works to take place in the park inappropriately and we advise against any such decision. In particular, the Trust believe that WCC should reject the following:

- 21/05587/ADFULL - Construction Logistics Plan - Condition 31

This suggests that work should start in January 2022 including dismantling elements of the playground and moving the Spicer Monument. These would be wholly inappropriate and detrimental to the historic landscape if the Court ruled against the proposed development.

- 21/07454/ADFUL - Tree protection method statement - Condition 8 and 9

This suggests root cutting to enable secant piling for the underground area envisaged as part of the proposals. The health of the trees should not be put in jeopardy unless the building works are definitively to go ahead - a matter that will not be clear until the court process is over.

Continued/...

The Trust has raised additional points with The Royal Parks about the method statement, in relation to their role and responsibilities and is awaiting their comment. However, one point to note is that the AMS says that 10-20 cm is the distance required between the outer edge of the secant piling and the location of root cutting; this is a relevant figure as VTG is filled ground, albeit a long time ago, which implies that there will be some space needed to avoid root tearing. What is unclear is the extent of 'associated infrastructure' where root cutting will also go on. There is also the question of the 3 large fins outside the Basement Box which will need to have deep foundations.

Further, tree roots are going to be compressed across most of the area shown on the Logistics Plan which is highly undesirable for the health of the trees already being put under stress. It would be helpful for future reference to know what measures WCC would expect to see to reduce the compression and preserve the health of the trees should the project go ahead.

The Trust urges WCC to postpone consideration of the Conditions discussed above until the Court process is over so that there is a better overview of the whole delivery of the project.

The Trust also has grave reservations about other aspects of the proposals as currently presented as follows and recommends these are rejected as presented:

- 21/05892/ADFULL - Condition 26, the Flood Risk Evacuation Plan linked to 21/06052/ADFULL - Monitoring Action Plan - Condition 25

The Trust would not ordinarily comment on this but is concerned by the seriousness of the risks that have been brought to its attention by a professional engineering advisor.

VTG is on a stretch of the river at risk of a breach flood. The site is also at risk from surface water flooding having insufficient drainage during sudden and heavy downpours made more likely by climate change. With the proposed building in the park and extending of hardstanding, the Trust foresees that the area is likely to be at even greater risk from flooding than it is at present. The Plan only considers a flood emergency response during design and construction. It should also address the longer-term prospects of flooding whilst the Learning Centre is in operation with visitors present. This links with the Monitoring Action Plan - Condition 25 which TTIS and SVTG comment on.

The speed of inundation in the event of a breach, or due to sudden downpours with the wide shallow entrance slope, its highest point already below ultra-high tide level and heading down to an underground display area, is likely to lead to very dangerous rapid and forceful water flows through funnelling, making it almost impossible for occupants to leave safely. It is the reason why London borough policy prevents bedrooms in residential properties being placed below ground in this area.

Continued/...

The plan suggests Green Park as an appropriate designated evacuation point - this is unrealistic and unviable, and risks lives at any phase during the scheme.

- 21/06410/ADFUL - Strategy for Maintaining Flood defences - Condition 22

In view of the gravity of the flooding risks discussed above, the possible vulnerability of the wall collapsing should not be left to chance, it seems inadvisable for work to repair the wall to be postponed and should take place at the outset of the project as part of the enabling works.

The Trust notes the following applications, and has no comment to make at this stage, though queries the necessity to agree these now when other matters have yet to be resolved:

- 21/06255/ADFULL- Archaeological Remains - Condition 36
- 21/05769/ADFULL- Land Contamination - Condition 16
- 21/05659/ADFULL - Profile and Condition of Substrate - Condition 10
- 21/05666/ADFULL - Air Quality Assessment - Condition 15
- 21/05482/ADFULL - Fire Escape - Condition 34

The Trust is working alongside TTIS and SVTG and supports their comments. We would be grateful for confirmation that WCC will postpone any further consideration of the works proposed at Victoria Tower Gardens until after the Court proceedings are concluded.

Yours sincerely



Helen Monger  
**Director**

cc. The Gardens Trust  
The Thorney Island Society  
Save Victoria Tower Gardens