
THE VICTORIAN SOCIETY
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(Haringey); P2014/5019/LBC (Islington)
Our reference: 2015/01/001

2 February 2015

Dear Aaron and Kristian

RE: Archway Bridge, Hornsey Lane N8 (Grade II, *Sir Alexander Binnie*, 1897-1900, Highgate Conservation Area); application for proposed anti-suicide measures by installation of fencing to bridge parapet

Thank you for consulting the Victorian Society on this application, which was recently considered by the Society's Southern Buildings Committee. The Victorian Society **objects** to the application because the detailed design of the proposal is poor, meaning that the harm to the significance of the listed bridge caused by it is more than is necessary.

Archway Bridge is an elegantly designed structure with a grand and impressive setting. We acknowledge that there have regularly been suicides from the bridge, which has a sad reputation. Because of this we accept in principle the need for anti-suicide measures, despite the fact that any conceivable measures will cause some harm to the setting of the bridge.

The current proposal is for a 2.540m high stainless steel fence of stretched cabling with uprights covering the full length of the bridge, to be placed above the existing guard rail. While the total height above the pavement does not seem to be stated in the drawings, it would appear to be around 4.5 metres. In addition, a stainless steel welded wire mesh cage 3.230m high will be installed around the central torchere. The detailing of this fence is crude; it has the appearance of a security perimeter fence. The cages to the torcheres would greatly obscure them. The height of the proposed fence is enormous, and consequently the damage done to views of the bridge from

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both Hornsey Lane and Archway Road would be great, causing substantial harm to the setting of the listed bridge.

While an old options study from 2001 is appended to the application, there is no explanation of why this option has been chosen as opposed to the many other possible options. For example, *prima facie* it would appear that the option of an independent fence placed at ground level just inside the parapet would be much better; it would be about half of the height of the proposed option, would have virtually no impact on views from Archway Road, and would enable the mesh panels to be removed from within the existing parapet. This would be similar to the option chosen at the Clifton Suspension Bridge, which is also much more elegantly detailed than the proposals here. That such a damaging proposal has been selected without explanation or appraisal of alternatives is unacceptable.

Paragraph 132 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that 'any harm or loss [to heritage assets] should require clear and convincing justification' and that substantial harm to a grade II listed building should be exceptional. There has been no attempt to justify the extra harm caused by the choice of a 4.5 metre high barrier rather than an independent 2.5 metre high barrier. Nor has there been any attempt to justify why such a crudely detailed design has been chosen, causing further harm.

Paragraph 133 of the NPPF states that 'where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm to or total loss of significance of a designated heritage asset, local planning authorities should refuse consent, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss'. In this case all of the benefits of the proposal could be achieved by a more sensitive, better detailed design, while avoiding most of the harm of this proposal.

The heritage assessment attempts to justify the proposals on several grounds. It states that the fence would be reversible, which is true, but it should not weigh heavily in the balance given that it is inconceivable that, having been installed, Haringey Council would ever permit its removal and the possible consequent recurrence of the suicide problem.

The conclusion of the heritage assessment states that "*there is a simple question to be answered when asking if it is appropriate to undertake the proposed changes to the Archway Road Bridge and that is: overall would it be acceptable to effect changes to the historic bridge of a reversible nature even if they caused harm to the structure's setting if they resulted in the saving of life and the societal trauma that follows suicide? The answer to that question has to be yes, it is worth it.*" In reality this is entirely the wrong question. Given that this proposal would cause substantial harm to the setting of the bridge, the question that should be asked is '*is there another option that would achieve similar benefits while avoiding much of the harm to the listed building?*' It is this question that needs to be answered if a decision is to be made in accordance with the NPPF and the special regard for the desirability of preserving listed buildings and their setting that the 1990 Act mandates.

For all of the above reasons, we recommend that this application is **refused**. We suggest that your Councils appoint an experienced conservation architect to draw up proposals for anti-suicide measures with a bespoke design that will minimise impact on the significance of the listed bridge. In particular, the option of an independent fence inside the parapet should be given careful consideration. I would be grateful if you could inform me of your decision in due course.

Yours sincerely

Sarah L. Caradec

Conservation Adviser