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Dear Piotr,

PA/14/02366  
CONVERSION OF PUBLIC SHELTER TO CAFE  
BETHNAL GREEN GARDENS

I object to this planning application for the following reasons:

- the insertion of steel shutter boxes for external security shutters on both sides of the open-sided part of the building (and other proposed alterations) would cause substantial harm to the architectural and historic significance of the unique Art Deco public shelter, which makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Bethnal Green Gardens Conservation Area
- the c. 1939 public shelter is in Bethnal Green Gardens, which was opened by the London County Council in 1895 as a permanent "recreation ground accessible to the inhabitants" of Bethnal Green; the proposed conversion to a private café would therefore deny local residents and visitors the right to freely access a public shelter in Bethnal Green Gardens
- a very small private café with one disabled WC is not needed in Bethnal Green Gardens as a much larger private café with one disabled WC, four ordinary WCs and two urinals is likely to open in nearby Museum Gardens, when the closed toilet block (with electricity, water and drainage services already laid on) reopens following conversion by a leaseholder using Council plans given planning permission in October 2013
- should both private cafés open, the café in Museum Gardens (next to the northern entrance to the tube station) is likely to be more commercially successful than the café in Bethnal Green Gardens, and the latter may have to close or be extended; leading to further degradation of an iconic and beautiful building and further unacceptable loss of public open space in Bethnal Green Gardens
- the iconic and beautiful public shelter was designed by the renowned London Passenger Transport Board architect Charles Holden and his assistant (and successor) Stanley Heaps; it symbolises the London County Council's ongoing commitment to the preservation of Bethnal Green Gardens as a vitally important free public open space for the people of Bethnal Green; Tower Hamlets Council has a duty to properly care for and maintain the building as a public shelter permanently "accessible to the inhabitants" of Bethnal Green
- change of use and conversion to a private café is not necessary to restore the public shelter, the Council can and should use section 106 money to repair and refurbish the building; and reinstate the York stone paving removed (without planning permission) from the west-east path to the public shelter.

The planning application is a slightly amended version of a previous planning application which was withdrawn 23 July 2014. The drawings are not sufficiently detailed and clearly labelled, and there is far too much conflicting information. Also a serious lack of sufficient textual and drawn information about the proposed shutter boxes, kitchen windows, insulation and refurbishment; and no information whatsoever about the necessary provision of electricity, water and drainage services.

The two long steel shutter boxes would not be “concealed within the structure” and would be clearly seen from both sides of the building, and from inside the main or open-sided part of the building: where they would be suspended from the underside of the flat roof immediately behind the upper parts of the metal posts, which appear to support the outer sides of the flat roof. The obtrusive bulk of the highly visible shutter boxes, together with the fact that the elegant black metal posts would be visually shortened by the boxes, would completely destroy the carefully designed proportional relationship between the metal posts and the 'see-through' open-sided space under the thin flat concrete roof.

The two shutter boxes are shown and labelled on the true cross-section but probably not drawn to scale. The western of the two boxes has been omitted from the proposed site image and the proposed visual (which also shows the reinforced concrete beam, under the central part of the flat roof, as a brick structure).

The drawings fail to show what the building would look like when the café is closed and the external security shutters have been rolled down on both sides of the 'see-through' space. Obviously, the building would suffer the indignity of looking like back-to-back shops with the shutters rolled down. The open character and appearance of this beautiful little building would be utterly destroyed by the negative and disfiguring impact of the external security shutters. So much so that it could no longer be said that the building makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Bethnal Green Gardens Conservation Area.

The application document states that the existing windows and doors are to be retained and refurbished. However, the metal doors to be permanently closed are not shown on the proposed plan; and there is nothing about the “new high level timber framed windows to kitchen area” and how they would relate to the retained metal window frames.

The symmetry and integrity of the carefully designed curved metal window frames (on either side of the metal doors at the southern end of the building) would be destroyed by a high level window opening in or behind the western of the two retained metal window frames. All the proposals relating to the southern end of the building would cause further substantial harm to the architectural and historic significance of the unique Art Deco public shelter. Given this significance and the smallness of the proposed café, there is no justification whatsoever for the proposed change of use, which represents the privatisation of an important ancillary building in Bethnal Green Gardens. Nor is there any justification for the proposed alterations and loss of historic fabric; and the estimated expenditure, which may or may not include the fully costed provision of necessary services.

According to the National Planning Policy Framework, only less than substantial harm to a building's significance can be outweighed by public benefits. As this building's significance would be substantially harmed by the proposed change of use and alterations, the substantial harm can not be outweighed by the alleged public benefits.

Yours sincerely

Tom Ridge