



Paul Quayle  
Development Planning  
City of Westminster  
PO Box 732  
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16 August 2016

Dear Paul Quayle

**PLANNING APPLICATION REF.NO.: 16/06463/LBC**

**OUR REF: 07 05 03**

**SITE: US Embassy, Grosvenor Square, London, W1**

Thank you for consulting the Twentieth Century Society on the application for alterations and extensions to the above site. Designed by Eero Saarinen and constructed in 1960, the US embassy is not only a landmark listed building in Grosvenor Square, its importance extends both nationally and internationally. Saarinen was a prominent twentieth century architect, well known for his embassy buildings. The Twentieth Century Society put this building forward for inclusion on the national heritage list in 2009 as a building of national significance, resulting in its addition to the list at Grade II.

The present building is of high quality and not only should this be respected but it should also be the main driver in any redevelopment proposals. A conservation-led approach is vital to the integrity of the listed building. The Society was consulted by the applicant at pre-application stage and the proposals subsequently presented to the Society's Casework Committee on 18th April 2016. The proposals were subject to detailed discussion and careful analysis of the elements of the scheme and the opinions of the committee were reported to the applicants.

The building is adaptable and flexible in its plan form and the Society considers that the proposed change of use to a hotel is appropriate and is a good fit for achieving a beneficial use of the building, without compromising its original design intent. The Society has no objections to the rear infill extension, the rooftop pavilion or the removal of the ground floor external glacis feature, which it understands will improve the operation of the building in its new use, and does not consider that these changes will damage the significance of the heritage asset. The Society also considers the reconfiguration of the external stairs to the main entrance and addition of free standing canopy to be

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uncontroversial and to be an acceptable modification within the idiom of Saarinen's work, as evidenced by its use at the US Embassy in Oslo, in Norway.

However, The Society **objects** to the design of the new sixth floor. The concept of the extension is of lesser concern than the proportion of the façade treatment. The proposed double height 6th floor will damage the present proportions of the listed building: the rhythm of the front façade will be fundamentally changed. The Society contends that this will cause significant and substantial harm to the character of the building as listed. We are disappointed that the applicant has persisted with this damaging scheme notwithstanding the Society's suggestions at pre-application stage as to how the effect may be ameliorated. The Society considers that by adjusting the articulation of the fenestration and façade treatment of this double height element, an extension could be produced which would yield as much space whilst reducing the harm caused to the listed building.

The Society did not make particular comments on the interior of the building at pre-application stage as inspection was not possible. However the demolition of the majority of the internal spaces with the exception of the first floor diagrid cannot do otherwise than cause substantial harm to the listed building. In particular the Society **objects** to the removal of original staircases internally which understand are unaltered and are considered to be of heritage value.

The NPPF (March 2012) states:

*131. In determining planning applications, local planning authorities should take account of:*

- *the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;*
- *the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and*
- *the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.*

*132. When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. The more important the asset, the greater the weight should be. 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 or loss should require clear and convincing justification. Substantial harm to or loss of a grade II listed building, park or garden should be exceptional.*

The onus on the local authority is to conserve heritage assets and not destroy them. This proposed development contemplates irreversible detrimental alteration to a grade II listed building, contrary to paragraph 132. This application should be refused consent as it would create a situation which, according to the NPPF, should be "exceptional".

Please do not hesitate to contact me should further clarification of the Society's comments be required.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Clare Price". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a long, thin horizontal line that extends to the left and right.

Clare Price

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**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.