

**FOR THE ATTENTION OF THE PLANNING INSPECTORATE, BS1 6PN**

**PROPOSED HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL & LEARNING CENTRE,  
VICTORIA TOWER GARDENS**

**Statement of Objection by Professor Geoffrey Alderman**

**Introduction**

1. I am a practising Orthodox Jew, born in the UK and educated at the University of Oxford. I have pursued an academic career, initially as a university teacher but more recently as a senior manager and institutional head. I am the author of several monographs on the history of the Jewish people in Great Britain, and many peer-reviewed and journalistic articles focused broadly on this theme. In 2006 the University of Oxford awarded me the advanced degree of Doctor of Letters in respect of my work in this field. More information about me may be found at: [www.geoffreyalderman.com](http://www.geoffreyalderman.com).
2. I make this submission exclusively in a personal capacity.
3. My own immediate ancestors immigrated to Great Britain between *circa* 1896 and 1904. But genealogical research has led me to conclude that the larger family circles from which my grandparents originated, and who remained in Eastern Europe, were murdered by the Nazis and their allies in 1941.
4. I have in my career taught at undergraduate and postgraduate levels the history of the Nazi Holocaust of the Jews, more especially from British and British-Jewish perspectives.
5. I am strongly opposed to the present plan for a Holocaust Memorial & Learning Centre to be located in Victoria Tower Gardens. My objections are both to the proposal in principle and to the planned location of this edifice.

**Background**

6. In September 2013 the then Prime Minister David Cameron announced that he was establishing a "Holocaust Commission," whose purpose it was to "investigate what more needs to be done to ensure Britain has a permanent and fitting [Holocaust] memorial and the educational resources needed for generations to come." Out of this Commission there came a Holocaust Memorial Foundation, and out of this Foundation there issued forth a breathtaking proposal: to construct, within Victoria Tower Gardens (VTG), deliberately close to the Houses of Parliament, a gigantic edifice, incorporating a learning resource centre, to honour Jewish and other victims of the Nazi Holocaust, such as Roma, disabled and LGBT people, and to place these genocides in the context of what are termed 'British Values,' as set out in the Prevent Duty.

## Objections

7. Whilst the sincerity of those who support the project is not in doubt, it needs to be remembered that both in London and in numerous provincial centres there are already a number of imposing Holocaust memorials. For example, there's Frank Meisler's moving *Kindertransport* sculpture at London's Liverpool Street station. There's the memorial in Highbridge, Somerset, to British secret agent Frank Foley, through whose efforts (which included defying his British bosses in the Foreign Office) more than 10,000 Jews were able to escape from Nazi Germany. There's already a Holocaust memorial (opened 1983) in London's Hyde Park. There's a permanent Holocaust exhibition within the Imperial War Museum. And, in London's Russell Square, there's the world-class Wiener Library for the Study of the Holocaust & Genocide.
8. I feel bound to ask, therefore, what justification there can possibly be for the erection of yet another Holocaust memorial & learning centre crowding the nation's capital.
9. I must also draw attention to the cost. I understand the British government originally pledged £50 millions of taxpayers' money, but later increased this pledge by another £25 millions. More recently it was announced that two Jewish members of the Foundation's management team had agreed to establish an independent charity to raise another £25 millions.
10. So that's a £100 millions in total, for a Holocaust memorial in a city that already has several and yet another Holocaust educational centre for which there is absolutely no real need. With the NHS short of funds, rough sleepers on the streets and thousands of families in genuine poverty {to say nothing of the economic impact of Covid-19 on London}, what justification can there possibly be for spending £100 millions on this project?

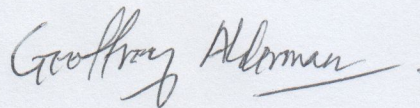
## The proposed site for the proposed edifice

11. I can think of few sites less appropriate for the proposed edifice than Victoria Tower Gardens.
12. Victoria Tower Gardens is a small public park within a Conservation Area. It is already designated as a zone of "Monument Saturation." The Gardens are also home to a small children's playground. Unsurprisingly, amongst the objectors to the current proposal are the official adviser to UNESCO on World Heritage Sites, the Royal Parks and even the Environment Agency, which has pointed out that the building of the Memorial within VTG could adversely affect flood defences on which local businesses and homes rely. Official drawings show that the Memorial will take up no less than 26.9 per cent of the green space currently in the park. It is little wonder that local residents are up in arms.
13. It has been made clear by the promoters of this Memorial that the appropriateness of the proposed location lies in its proximity to the Palace of Westminster and the Houses of Parliament, and that this juxtaposition symbolises (as it were) the antithesis between the Holocaust and British Values, making the argument that democracy (and specifically British democracy) is somehow a protection against genocide.
14. It isn't.

15. Whilst it is true that the United Kingdom had no direct responsibility for the Holocaust, it bore much indirect responsibility. Successive British governments deliberately, in stages culminating in the enforcement without League of Nations' approval of the infamous White Paper of 1939, shut off Mandate Palestine as a haven for Jews fleeing Nazi-occupied Europe. With parliamentary approval, the least possible number of Jews were permitted to enter the UK. Many, many more might have been afforded at least temporary refuge here. And it is well known that the wartime British government refused to bomb the railway lines to Auschwitz and other camps, even though these became easily accessible by aircraft of Bomber Command as the war progressed.
16. Indeed I have sometimes thought that a fitting memorial might be a monument simply listing those Jews who were specifically denied entry into this country (and even, in some cases, forcibly evicted once they had reached British shores), and who perished as a result!
17. At all events, the conduct of successive British governments, supported it must be stressed by the Westminster Parliament, was hardly, therefore, reflective of 'British Values.'
18. It has been argued that the very existence of the proposed memorial in Victoria Tower Gardens would somehow act as a deterrent against resurgent antisemitism and that bringing coachloads of children to see it would somehow challenge Holocaust Denial. This argument strikes me as foolish and ignorant in the extreme. A much better plan would be to digitise the entire Holocaust story and make that grim story accessible nationwide.
19. I should add that although some prominent Jews support the current proposal, within the wider set of Anglo-Jewish communities I have failed to detect any great enthusiasm for the gigantic Memorial that is being proposed. But what I have detected is incredulity, embarrassment and cynicism.

**"Public Benefit"**

20. The argument has been put to me that "public benefit" can – and should in this case - outweigh admitted planning drawbacks (flooding, security and so on). I must therefore stress my view that there is no public benefit whatsoever to be derived from this memorial that could possibly outweigh the many drawbacks of the proposed location, to which I have drawn attention in this submission.
21. I hope, therefore, that the present planning application will be refused.



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