To
Helen Skinner
The Planning Inspectorate, Room 3/J
Temple Quay House
2 The Square
Bristol, BS1 6PN
helen.skinner@planninginspectorate.gov.uk

29 September 2020

PLANNING INSPECTORATE REFERENCE: APP/X5990/V/19/3240661

To the Planning Inspectorate Sub-Committee
Re: Planned National Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre at Victoria Tower Gardens

We are a group of scholars with significant expertise in the history of the Holocaust in relation to Britain, the history of British refugee policy, the memorialisation of the Holocaust in Britain and Holocaust education. We have comments on two issues at the heart of this inquiry:

1. The principle of the planned Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre.
2. The proposed location of the Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre.

1) The principle of the planned Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre.

A cross-section of scholars based at UK institutions met at the Institute of Education, UCL on 24 April 2014 to discuss the proposed Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre. A letter with 28 signatories was subsequently submitted to the Prime Minister’s Holocaust Commission in response to the formal Call for Evidence. The letter acknowledged that the planned memorial and education project “represents a tremendous opportunity to increase public historical understanding of a complex and challenging part of our history” and “the opportunity to correct widespread misconceptions about the Holocaust, not least with regard to Britain’s role”.

The letter further observes that

In a time of unprecedented pressure on the public finances it also offers the chance of securing the resources necessary for effective learning and teaching in all forms of public education. We welcome, therefore, the Commission and the accompanying cross-party commitment to provide resources for education and research into an aspect of our shared traumatic past.

Noting the possibility of relocating the existing Holocaust Memorial from Hyde Park to Whitehall, and the permanent historical exhibition on the Holocaust in the Imperial War
Museum (soon to be reopened), the letter concludes that “there is no pressing need for a further physical monument and that it would be better for resources to be deployed in more creative and potentially transformative ways.” We wish to reiterate here the suggestions for the creative and transformative use of funds we made in 2014:

1) the resourcing of educational materials should be a priority, for example
   a. through the creation of a digital repository to aid learners, teachers and researchers;
   b. greater investment in teacher development programmes; and
   c. supporting the provision of research-informed public history initiatives.

2) funding for research including doctoral scholarships to ensure the training of new generations of scholars. This could include, for example, the creation of a permanent research institute dedicated to the study of mass violence and atrocity in the modern world.

These views take seriously the existence of established and respected institutions and infrastructures which provide teaching and learning about the Holocaust in Britain. This includes talented and committed teachers at all levels who accept the importance of Holocaust education, but who lack sufficient time and resources. Such decentralised options for the large amount of government funding set aside for the Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre would demonstrate the government’s recognition of local educational initiatives, existing subject networks, and the substantial expertise of the British academic community. It would mean a commitment to raising public knowledge of British history in all parts of the United Kingdom and it would show a commitment to the education of future generations of teachers and researchers.

2) The proposed location of the Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre.

As scholars of the memory of the Holocaust especially, with wider expertise in issues of memorialisation, we share concerns about the Victoria Gardens site itself.

1) Victoria Gardens is a small space and the intended UK Holocaust Memorial will overpower all the existing important statues and memorials which reference
   a. women’s history (statue of Emmeline Pankhurst),
   b. the history of migration (Rodin’s Burghers of Calais sculpture) and
   c. slavery and its abolition in Britain (Buxton Memorial).

It is remarkable that the proposed ‘Memorial 2007’ by the Windrush Foundation for a much smaller monument to commemorate the victims of slavery and supplementing the Buxton Memorial, was turned down in July 2005 by The Royal Parks on the basis that there was not enough space for any further memorials in Victoria Gardens.

2) Situating the UK Holocaust Memorial next to the Houses of Parliament is likely to create a celebratory narrative of the British government’s responses to the Jewish catastrophe during the Nazi era and beyond. Situating it so close to parliament is almost certain to add to the mythology of ‘Britain alone’ as the ultimate saviour of the Jews which negates several decades of careful scholarship and research.

In summary, the site is deeply problematic in terms of overall memorialisation, and there is an urgent need for a decentralised and more reflexive approach. Therefore, we oppose the
current site and propose an alternative, decentralised option. This suggestion would best feed into a new open and explicit public dialogue about the form and location of a national Holocaust memorial in Britain.

Sincerely,

Dr Hannah Holtschneider (University of Edinburgh)
Professor Shirli Gilbert (UCL)
Dr James Jordan (University of Southampton)
Professor Tony Kushner (University of Southampton)
Professor Tom Lawson (Northumbria University)
Dr Andy Pearce (UCL)

ADDITIONAL SIGNATORIES (in alphabetical order)

1. Dr Larissa Allwork, The University of Derby
2. Dr Christine Berberich, University of Portsmouth
3. Professor Donald Bloxham, University of Edinburgh
4. Professor Erica Carter, King's College London
5. Professor Tim Cole, University of Bristol
6. Prof Peter Davies, University of Edinburgh
7. Professor David Feldman, Director, Pears Institute for the Study of Antisemitism, Birkbeck, University of London
8. Angela Findlay, artist, writer and accredited lecturer
9. Professor Tim Grady, University of Chester
10. Dr Anna Hájková, University of Warwick
11. Dr Paul Jackson, Associate Professor of History, University of Northampton
12. Jessica Kempner, HET/Winchester University
13. Professor Tom Kühn, University of Oxford
14. Miss Chloe Lee, Royal Holloway University of London
15. Dr Mark Levene, University of Southampton
16. Dr Louise London, Honorary Research Fellow, Pears Institute for the Study of Antisemitism, Birkbeck, University of London
17. Professor Bob Moore, University of Sheffield
18. Mr Peter Morgan, Doctoral Candidate, University of Brighton
19. Miss Isabelle Mutton, University of Exeter
20. Dr Emiliano Perra, University of Winchester
21. Dr Ellen Pilsworth, University of Reading
22. Ivan Pope, Plymouth University
23. Dr Stefanie Rauch, UCL
24. Ms Syamala Roberts, University of Cambridge
25. Miss Emily Smith, Royal Holloway, University of London
26. Ellis Spicer, Doctoral researcher, University of Kent
27. Dr Lizzie Stewart, King's College London
28. Dr Victoria Stewart, University of Leicester
29. Dr Emily-Jayne Stiles, University of Winchester
30. Dr Marcel Stoetzler, Bangor University, School of History, Philosophy and Social Sciences
31. Dr David Tollerton, University of Exeter
32. Professor Marius Turda, Oxford Brookes University
33. Professor Sue Vice, Professor of English Literature, University of Sheffield
34. Dr Alana M. Vincent, University of Chester
35. Dr George R. Wilkes, Director, Project on Religion and Ethics in the Making of War and Peace; Senior Visiting Research Fellow, Kings College London
36. Madeline White, Doctoral Researcher, Royal Holloway University of London