

**Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre in Victoria Tower Gardens
Planning Appeal
Statement for the Cathedral Area Residents Group**

- Good morning Inspector and everyone. I am Peter Roberts speaking on behalf of the Cathedral Area Residents Group, commonly known by the acronym CARG.
- CARG is a local Westminster Amenity Society which comprises over 950 residential flats. Many of our members have lived in this neighbourhood for decades.
- I am a Chartered Engineer and planner now retired and presently the Chair of CARG. Like many of my neighbours I have lived in this area for many years.
- Our members recognise the importance of not only remembering the tragedy of the holocaust but also of informing about it and, indeed, about all acts of genocide. We do not detract from the very important objectives of the proposed HM+LC. However, we do need to bear in mind physical constraints. For the many reasons already set out during this inquiry the great majority of CARG members consider that the Victoria Tower Gardens do not constitute an adequate site for this purpose.
- Therefore, CARG opposed this planning application on the grounds that the resulting loss of the precious park facility could not be justified by the intended benefit. We welcomed the WCC decision that the proposed Holocaust Memorial + Learning Centre would be unacceptable in the VTG on planning grounds. The VTG is a small river side park which is an essential facility in this neighbourhood where most residences have no outside space.
- This is a very special space: in the shadow of Parliament providing a rare escape from the grandeur of the World Heritage Site; from the hectic traffic the daily flow of commuting office workers and the throng of tourists.
- If the proposed memorial and learning centre were built in VTG the park amenities would be lost or severely diminished in many respects. The applicant has claimed that, once construction was completed, the proposed memorial would occupy less than one third of the park. This loss of green space would be serious enough but inevitably the expected daily average of 10,000 visitors for whom the development is intended and the necessary associated activities which I shall summarise as follows would have far more extensive negative impacts on this small park.

- First there would be the years of construction during which the children's playground and much of the park would have to be closed to the public.
 - Once the memorial and centre were completed the expected additional 10,000 visitors a day would constitute an increase by some five fold over the current average daily use of the park. Not only would they overload the reduced park space - but in arriving at and departing from the VTG they would heavily congest Millbank and the surrounding streets.
 - For example, a well marshalled stream of coaches might be able to deliver and collect 2,500 of the daily visitors with timed tickets but this would disrupt passing vehicular traffic and pedestrians along Millbank as well as the further 7 to 8,000 visitors to the Memorial and gardens.
 - In addition there will be many unticketed sightseers passing through the gardens to see the memorial without visiting the Learning Centre.
 - Moreover the particular significance of the Holocaust Memorial would require extensive full-time security arrangements which would have to be heightened to cope with the many visitors.
 - Also, the proposed location of the memorial and learning centre would require that the existing Horseferry Playground for children be reduced in size and effectively cut off from the remaining grassed area of the park.
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- Before closing, let me give a snapshot of current activity in Victoria Tower Gardens to remind us of what could be lost.
 - If you pass through the park, say during the late afternoon on a typical weekday you will see:
 - adults of all ages, individually, in couples or in small groups:
 - some also passing through - strolling, walking the dog or more energetically jogging;
 - others relaxing on the grass to enjoy the respite this provides, shielded by the mature plain trees from the traffic of Millbank and Parliament Square and appreciating the iconic view of the Victoria Tower;
 - yet others contemplating the river from benches under the trees or leaning on the embankment wall.
 - there are children playing in the recently upgraded Horseferry playground with their family or carers;
 - a few older siblings venturing from the playground to run about on the grassed area of the park and beginning to explore the three memorials which are already there;
 - Here it is that young and old can relax and become aware of not only a manifestation of our democracy but also of some

very important events of social development which are symbolised by the three memorials which compliment but do not dominate the park.

- How would this change if WCC's decision not to permit the application to build the Holocaust Memorial + Learning Centre here were overturned? That memorial would physically dominate the space and the associated activity throughout every day would change its character to the extent that it would no longer be a park for physical and mental rejuvenation but rather an annex to the new memorial absorbing the flow of scheduled and unscheduled visitors, arriving and departing.
- The clear losers would be local families and other residents for most of whom there is no ready alternative. Many employees from parliament, the civil service and other nearby offices would also lose an important place to relax and rejuvenate, during or at the end of the working day.
- If I may conclude with a personal professional observation. The unfortunate reality is that the aspiration for the proposed memorial and centre to benefit from being set in the calm tranquility of this park will be thwarted by the development itself and by the the large increment of people and activity which it is designed to attract and which will simply overload the reduced space and the surrounding streets.
- I thank you, Inspector, for this opportunity to summarise the concerns of the Cathedral Area Residents Group regarding this proposed development, to stress our opposition to it and to urge you to endorse the soundness of the WCC's decision not to permit this application.

Peter Roberts
10 Nov 2020