

# Statement to Holocaust Memorial inquiry on behalf of The Westminster Society

9 October 2020

I am Nathan Silver, an architect, former Head of the Department of Architecture at the University of East London, and on the executive committee of The Westminster Society. Members of my family were killed in the Holocaust.

The Westminster Society earnestly shares the desire of this application to see built a national Holocaust Memorial and centre for study-- to quote Co-chair Ed Ball's words-- "both as a permanent record of the past, and a clear warning for the future." But we are appalled by the catastrophic choice of site, which seems profoundly misjudged to the Executive Committee.

This memorial design, inadequately inspiring as it appears to us, also severely miscalculates the public space required, it introduces unwanted turbulence in the tranquil park, and it proposes to place an inevitable attraction to terrorism alongside our principal structures of government.

Above all, we believe that approval of this unsatisfactory proposal would tragically preclude a better-considered Holocaust Memorial on an appropriate site elsewhere.

Our specific objections are these:

(a) Victoria Tower Gardens is a peaceful park highly cherished by all who live and work nearby. Parks aren't convenient sites for appropriation, even for noble projects. This proposal ignores Royal Parks protections, overrides the location's particular significance in history, and overpowers its two existing historical monuments, the Buxton Memorial and the Burghers of Calais.

(b) The sizeable demand for admission, visitor coach congestion and intensified security measures that will be added to those already required by Parliament will impair successful public access to both.

(c) The proposed design's quality as such may not be deemed a planning issue. But the size of site related to suitable use, particularly in a design intended for the public at large, requires critical consideration. Part of a well-conceived Holocaust Memorial, we believe, should be a quiet and amply-sized working library for scholars, not just an underground learning centre for schoolchildren and visitors off tour buses.

(d) The choice of site is severely shortsighted in that it ignores Parliament's own likely future requirements in 10 to 50 years. This matter has not been emphasised by others and it is a vital consideration, so we ask inspectors to think carefully about it.

The refurbishment of the Palace of Westminster now beginning, at the expenditure of billions, will include in its planning the temporary decanting of its major constituents to the Northern Estate, but it has provided no guidance for an adopted masterplan of the entire parliamentary

precinct. Every decent university and corporation undertakes a masterplan, yet it is shockingly absent as a design framework for this application. A masterplan is the vital instrument for studying needs and connections and designing for the future.

An approved masterplan should be the prior requirement for determining uses and enhancements in the entire parliamentary precinct.

Among its self-evident aims should be security measures that are properly designed, in place of ugly corralling walls and barriers; safe modern access for ministers and parliamentarians; rerouted other vehicular access to eliminate present congestion and security risks; and greatly improved pedestrianisation within an outstanding new urban design of gardens and promenades that could begin from Parliament Square, and include-- for example--Westminster Hall's becoming fully welcoming to everyone. (The Westminster Society did such a masterplan study six years ago.) Parliament's future needs would be of primary concern, and Victoria Tower Gardens would remain inviolate.

If the inspectorate was to call for an initial masterplan that was to be well considered and designed, we believe it would show with powerful clarity that the Holocaust Memorial deserves a more worthy site that uniquely affirms its importance, access, security, and uncrowded surroundings. Such a site would inspire a full design evocation, and its appropriate benefit of profound contemplation.

This very unsatisfactory application should not be accepted by the Inspectorate.