16th September 2020

**REBUTTAL STATEMENT ADDRESSING THE PROOF OF EVIDENCE OF MR ROWAN MOORE (CD 8.52), RELATING TO THE PROPOSED CONSTRUCTION OF THE UNITED KINGDOM HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL AND LEARNING CENTRE, AT VICTORIA TOWER GARDENS, MILLBANK, WESTMINSTER, LONDON, SW1 3JA.**

1. This rebuttal statement has been prepared by Asa Bruno in response to the Proof of Evidence prepared by Mr Rowan Moore (CD 8.52) on behalf of the Save Victoria Tower Gardens (SVTG), and should be read in conjunction with the Proof of Evidence prepared by Asa Bruno (CD 8.05) and submitted to the Planning Inspector.
2. The objector’s statement covers a range of topics, some of which shall be addressed by others, in relation to project brief and conception, programme, townscape, heritage and landscape matters. The following will concentrate on responses to several of the objector’s statements on design matters.
3. On page 7, *4.2.2.2 – Objects*, the objector writes: *“I do not believe, in general, that old work is best respected by new work that copies it. There should however be some reciprocity between new and old, some way in which form, proportion or material acknowledge and complement each other. The relationship of different elements should be cohesive.”*
4. I would respond by saying that a key architectural decision, the ‘pulling upwards’ of the landform as an extension of the gardens atop the Memorial, encourages a sense of cohesion with the park. The Memorial is physically embedded in and supported by the gardens themselves, rather than resting, object-like, on a plinth. This cohesion is balanced by retaining most the gardens in its existing planar arrangement, with the Memorial being the sole area in which the grass is lifted upwards. Importantly, the Memorial is placed as far south as possible within the gardens in order to retain as much of the gardens unchanged in use and appearance, while simultaneously augmenting them with a new, raised vantage point from which to admire the Houses of Parliament, and enjoy wide-reaching views of the gardens and the River Thames.
5. Similarly, a reciprocal relationship is introduced between the Memorial and other existing memorials within the gardens, both in form and material. In form, the relationship between the Holocaust Memorial and the Buxton Memorial – at 8m away, its closest neighbour – has, since competition stage, been of utmost importance and careful thought was given to immediate context of the latter within the new proposed scheme. The Buxton Memorial’s colourful spire, taller than the Holocaust Memorial’s highest fin, will remain on axis and in view from Dean Stanley Street and St John Smith Square, but would be given new significance within the park and a setting augmented by perimeter seating and lighting.
6. In relation to material, the Memorial is predominantly made of bronze, echoing both the Burghers of Calais and the Emmeline Pankhurst sculptures further north.
7. The objector concedes (page 8) that “the bronze fins do in some ways echo the vertical rhythms of the Palace of Westminster” and later (page 16) “The bronze fins and stainless steel soffits of the memorial could well be beautiful and powerful in themselves”.
8. On page 12, *4.2.3 – Designs Are Generic*, the objector writes: *“How does the memorial speak to this country’s role at that time in history, and to people in this country, whether those who arrived as refugees or were already here, or to their children and grandchildren? How does this memorial fulfil its role of remembering LGBT, Roma and other victims, as well as the Jewish Shoah? In the absence of profound thinking on such questions the designs resort to more generalised expressions of anguish or solemnity, whether Arad’s jagged shapes or Adjaye’s more muted form. Both are valid approaches, but neither are particular to this situation.”*
9. In response, I would argue that the very siting of the Memorial by the Houses of Parliament is of utmost significance, and is instrumental in placing an overriding emphasis on this country’s role at the time, and the complex relationship between people, their democratically-elected government and its actions or inactions. When conceiving of our architectural response to the competition brief, we applauded the brave and sensitive choice of this optimal site within which to address the British story of the Holocaust.
10. The design of the Memorial does not necessarily intend to express anguish or solemnity as the objector suggests. Instead, the raised landform physically interprets the notion of the slow and gradual creep of hatred and intolerance, the gradual societal upheaval these can cause if left unchecked, and the ultimate fracture and cataclysm that could come about, even within a democracy.
11. It is exactly because of the wish to remember the Jewish victims of the Holocaust as well as all other victims of Nazi persecution, that the Memorial was conceived to be experiential first and foremost – by being impactful, dynamic in form, inclusive and universal in reach. Its underlying symbolic layers need not be immediately perceived by a particular visitor or group in order for it to be impactful and moving. The Memorial endeavors to become an entry point, an experiential gateway to a place where visitors can expand their knowledge and understanding.
12. The objector suggests that the design for the Memorial is somehow generic or unspecific to the subject matter. In response I would reiterate that the proposed Memorial is deeply rooted in subject-specific references and themes, yet they are not overtly expressed in its appearance. I would give the example of the Cenotaph in Whitehall - it is a fairly simple, austere block of stone in the middle of a busy road, yet it captures the collective grief and the attention of a whole nation, beyond living age of those who experienced the war. It does so without overt symbolism, or ornamentation in the form of tanks, soldiers or other figurative elements people might associate with the war. It is rather a much more abstract container for those memories.
13. On page 12, and objector writes: *“As some people have pointed out, there are similarities with the London proposals: it too was based on narrow passageways between 23 irregular vertical fins. I don’t in principle oppose architects’ and artists’ practice of taking an idea from one project to another. However, a strong design would meaningfully transform such an idea in response to the different cultural and symbolic aspirations of another project. I don’t see such a transformation happening in this case, although there are some modifications between the Ottawa and London schemes in response to changes in the different physical conditions. This lack of transformation or reinterpretation reinforces the impression that the design of the UK Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre is a generalised response to the horrors of the Holocaust, rather than one that responds to its time and place.”*
14. In response I would argue that there seems to be an impression that projects are born at or for a location in a vacuum, meaning every project is unique. The truth is that projects are based on an accumulation of thematic, architectural and material references from the creative stable of the architect, tempered by local site constraints.
15. In this context, while Ron Arad Architects (RAA) designed both the Ottawa memorial and the London proposal, the two proposals are substantially different from each other in material and form, yet share the same thematic underpinning. In designing a memorial to the Holocaust, the overriding challenge is similar. RAA have, from inception, sought to devise an architectural symbolism that is both experiential, and of wider, universal reach, which would somehow capture the horror of the scale of the Holocaust, without dressing it in a pictographic symbol. Hence the choice of the vast number of countries in which Jewish communities were decimated, represented through paths visitors could experience.
16. RAA conceived of the 22 paths as an architectural motif of choice, a motif which is present in the UKHM proposal. This motif was favoured by us over using other, perhaps more familiar motifs, such as the Star of David or a mound of stones. The use of culturally exclusive pictographic symbols such the Star of David, in fact led to Daniel Libeskind winning the Ottawa competition, with an extruded Star of David as the memorial’s structure. While this is a very recognisable symbol, it is a well-trodden motif in his work, and has served the plans of several of his buildings including the Jewish Museum in Berlin. These symbols, even for many in the Jewish community, carry limited emotional or transportative weight, and is certainly neither exclusive to the Holocaust as a symbol, nor inclusive of non-Jewish victims of Nazi persecution.
17. Yet, the two memorials differ substantially in their local reinterpretation. They not only differ in material - the Ottawa memorial was designed to be built as undulating concrete skins, while the UKHM is articulated as rigid angular bronze fins, and form – Ottawa evoking the rectangular leaves of a book, while the UKHM expressing a cliff-like topography. One of the most marked differences between the two memorials relates to the visitor’s experience. The Ottawa site offered a flat, destination-less array of corridors for free visitor meandering, whereas the UKHM is intended as gateways on a journey below ground, descending into a threshold space, and beyond into the Learning Centre.
18. The UKHM, is intended to combine the architectural motif of the paths, with those of the particular topographic landscape designed for Victoria Tower Gardens, and the particular use of bronze, in order to encourage an empathic response in visitors to the park. The Memorial is a vehicle for facilitating a meaningful shift, a means of placing oneself as a visitor outside of your own and into another’s frame of reference.
19. On page 13, the objector writes: *“At different points in the Design and Access Statement reference is made to, for example, the Covenant of the Pieces, the tunnels at the Wailing Wall (DAS 4.1), the number of countries in which Jewish communities were destroyed, the religious significance of the colour blue (DAS 4.4.5), the use of stones to memorialise (DAS 4.2), and the use of dark and light to symbolise the “dark realities of the Holocaust” and to give “a stark and powerful reminder of hope through the darkness.” (DAS 4.7.3) Any one or two of these themes, if developed with commitment, might be a strong basis for a memorial project. In this case none of them seems to be explored or followed-through in depth before moving on to another symbol or reference. This multiplicity weakens rather than strengthens the project.”*
20. In response I would argue that the objector seems to have combined the wider group of symbolic references embodied in the bigger project, into a uniformly weighted group of influences, which they were not. The paths of the Memorial were profoundly inspired by two thematic biblical references (The Covenant of the Pieces, and the ‘Kottel’ tunnels), both of which encompass a deep relationship to linear passages and the symbolism they embody. This singular path was enriched by the numerical reference to the number of countries in which Jewish communities were destroyed, as a marker of near incomprehensible scale. The other references the objector mentions (e.g. light and dark, the colour blue) relate to other elements of the larger scheme outside of the Memorial itself.
21. On page 13, the objector refers to a multitude of materials being used (stone, bronze, stainless steel, glass, and grass/planting), and makes comparison to Memorials being more coherent when using a smaller palette of materials, such as the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington (VVM).
22. It is worth emphasising that the materials chosen for UKHM are not given the same weight or presence. The grass and planting are dominant by virtue of the UKHM being sited within the gardens. This is not dissimilar to the context in which the VVM is situated. The predominant material for the Holocaust Memorial is bronze, and that is the overriding material impressed upon those experiencing it above and below ground, in a similar manner to the use of polished granite at the VVM. Both memorials make use of coarser stone and stone panels in paths, courtyard paving and stairs, and both memorials relay on steel balustrades for safety and demarcation.
23. Within the UKHM, stainless steel is used in a mirror-polished form, and acts as a facilitator of reflections rather than as a material on its own right. This goes back to the notion of cohesion, as in these distorted reflections, the immediate context of Victoria Tower Gardens is blended in with the patina of bronze, the grass, the changing light conditions and the colours and textures of visitors’ clothing.

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