

15 June 2010

Dear Russell

**Haggerston School for Girls, Weymouth Terrace (Listed building consent 2010/1070 and Planning Application 2010/1068)**

Haggerston School for Girls was designed in 1962 and built between 1964-7 to the designs of Ernö Goldfinger (1902-1987). The building is Goldfinger's only secondary school, and is a good and rare example of his mature style from the finest decade of his career. The school is one of only 12 statutorily listed post-war secondary schools in England<sup>1</sup>, and is therefore of seminal importance in the history of post-war school architecture and design. It is listed at Grade II.

The Hackney Society is generally in support of the planning application and believes that 'Option 2' in the *Design and Access Statement* offers the best overall solution to the refurbishment and upgrade of the school. We also support the demolition of the non-original buildings, inc. the dining room extension. We would very much like to see the drama classrooms, which are wholly unsympathetic to the original building, demolished too. Avanti Architects have obviously done a lot of research and development work in the creation of this proposal and the Hackney Society welcomes this conservation-led approach and the clear benefits to the proposed scheme it brings. We think it is very important that the refurbishment has a positive outcome, and the project becomes a model for the refurbishment of other post-war secondary schools (listed or otherwise) to high environmental, teaching and aesthetic standards. We very much hope for the project to be successful.

The Hackney Society would like to make the following comments:

**BLOCK A: ASSEMBLY/ENTRANCE BLOCK**

The entrance and assembly hall block (Block A) is one of the architectural highlights of the Goldfinger campus and we believe no external alteration or addition should be made to the building. We support the proposed internal changes to accommodate a reception, meeting room, general office and waiting area. This will result in the original music and recital rooms being dismantled. We would like to see the stepped tiered section of flooring from the recital room recorded before it is dismantled, and ideally we would like to see it relocated within the building. Overall, the Hackney Society are happy with the proposed changes to the Assembly/Entrance block as we feel it will reinstate the original bold entrance that at present is lacking in the school. Hopefully, it will contribute to improved perceptions of the school among its students, parents, teaching staff and general visitors.

## **BLOCK B: MAIN TEACHING BLOCK**

### **Windows and fenestration**

The main classroom block, at four-storeys, dominates the site and acts as a spine for the two satellite buildings that project outwards from this building. The elevation of the main teaching block is characteristic of Goldfinger's approach to the hierarchy of the facade, with the horizontal floor slabs being the primary framing element, the columns slightly recessed as the secondary element, with the 'photobolic' screens as the tertiary, followed by the windows as the most recessed element. The juxtaposition of the solid annexe blocks to the intricate filigree of the fenestration of the main block forms a dramatic contrast and illustrates Goldfinger's use of the Planar approach and the Golden Section in his designs. The intricacy of the glazed elevation is primary to the design of the school. The east façade has three main window types: (1) large fixed steel windows with opening glass louvres either side (located on the cantilevered north eastern end); (2) aluminium patent glazing (on the two stairwells); and (3) glazed units sub-divided into four vertical units consisting of two glazed panes and a grey spandrel at the bottom with vertical white mullions separating each of the four units (classrooms). The third window type has four (I thought it was just the outer two, but may be wrong) opening windows and four fixed windows, which are characterised by the glazing bars being painted either black (fixed) or white (opening).

The windows are a critical element of the building's character, as well as evidence for Goldfinger's deftness in creating pattern and texture in a very simple way. Replacing the original windows in anything less than an exact visual match will impact on the building's character; this is undeniable. The Hackney Society believes that repair is preferable to wholesale replacement and a conservation-led approach to the building, which its Grade II listing warrants, should be taken. If replacement is deemed the only solution and is accepted by English Heritage and Hackney Council's Urban Design and Conservation Team, however, we recommend that as close a match as possible to the originals in materials, colour, glazing bar arrangement and profile is made. We would like to see replacement windows echo the black and white finishes of the fixed and openable windows. We would also like to see the photobolic screen retained. Replacement should only be considered on a like-for-like basis.

Overall, we are very concerned about the proposed replacement aluminium windows for the main teaching block, as we do not believe that the existing fenestration and profile of the windows can be matched. Whilst replacing the windows with a Crittall double-glazed system (for example the 'Slimlite' W20 units) would result in bigger sightlines – from 20mm to 40mm – we feel the bigger issue is the further increase in profile width, which will result due to the increase in the number of windows that will open. This will increase the window profile in certain areas from 20mm to 90mm and will have a significant impact on the character of the building, with the proportions of the façade severely compromised. Overall

the 'Golden Section' effect will be lost and the elegance of main teaching block will be greatly diminished.

We also feel consideration should be given as to whether all of the opening window frames are to be white or whether only the windows that replace the existing opening windows should be white. The specification of glazing coatings and glass should not tint the glass i.e. the glazing should not have a blue, green/black or blue hue to it, but be as neutral as possible.

Overall we are not convinced that the Crittall 'Slimlite' W20 units are completely inadequate for the job in question. Perhaps a decision has been made due to lack of funding and lack of public support for this strong-flavoured, dynamic building. In trying to address the shortcomings of the building, Avanti Architects have had to compromise on the windows, which is a huge shame. We are sympathetic to the dilemma faced by the architects, and recognise the careful thought that has gone into this decision. The Hackney Society feels, however, that once the windows have been replaced it will be irreversible and so it is worth investing money in getting the right solution. The windows are crucial to the overall appearance of the building, hence our strength of feeling on this point.

### **Library**

We fully support the creation of a double-height library on the south west side of the main teaching block.

### **Dining room extension**

We fully support the demolition of the dining room extension on the ground floor of the main teaching block.

### **Corridors**

We fully support the formation of break out areas on the ground floor and first floor, and the widening of areas around staircases. We believe this will improve circulation in the main teaching block.

### **Classrooms**

We are unsure about the grey shelf designed to conceal the electrics and other services in the classroom. We would like to see this and the coloured panels on the ceiling of the classrooms redesigned.

### **BLOCK C: INDOOR SPORTS HALL (GYMNASIA)**

No comment.

### **BLOCK D: DRAMA STUDIOS**

The Hackney Society is disappointed that the school want to retain this building, as it is completely out-of-keeping with Goldfinger's original design. We would like to see this non-original building demolished and the drama studios moved to another place in the school. Perhaps the indoor sports hall or assembly hall would be able to accommodate this activity.

### **BLOCK G: TECHNOLOGY ANNEXE (NEW BUILD)**

The Hackney Society supports the construction of a new block to accommodate ICT, Design and Technology, and Art. The existing satellite buildings (Assembly/Entrance block and Caretaker's house) use a blue multi brick with Flemish bond, expressed as a non-load bearing construction. Whereas later additions use red and blue brick in stretcher bond, which are expressed as traditional load bearing construction with pitched roofs.

Overall we think that the location and massing of the proposed new block fits in well with Goldfinger's original plan. While its placement on the site of the existing staff car park is carefully considered and appropriate, we are concerned that the architectural expression of the proposed building appears to reflect a more traditional load bearing skin wrapped around the perimeter of the building; as opposed to a series of brickwork plains acting as a skin with a structural frame to support the floors and roof. The addition of the concrete balcony does help to break the form down, however we feel that this is a little incoherent and currently looks like a late addition rather than an integral part of the design.

We would like the brickwork of the proposed new building to be Flemish bond rather than stretcher bond to match the existing brickwork of Blocks A and C. We also feel that hydraulic lime mortar should be used to remove the necessity for expansion joints.

The coloured glazing on the balconies is currently a common feature of contemporary architecture. We feel it is slightly clichéd, however. . We are concerned that the coloured glazing will look tired in a few years and will quickly date the building.

We feel the additional accommodation, designed by Hodder and Partners, at St Catharine's College, Oxford is a successful example of extending a 20th-century modernist building by Arne Jacobson. (<http://www.hodderandpartners.com/projects/st-catherine-s-college-phase-ii-oxford>)

## **COVERED WALKWAYS AND ENTRANCES**

The covered walkways forms an integral part of the original school plan. They all radiate out from the main teaching block at right angles to the block, thus not obstructing views of the building. The proposed new covered walkway starts by running parallel to the school, but then turns diagonally towards the new block. Whilst this is the shortest route and the line of desire for pedestrians, it is out of keeping with the original scheme and obstructs views of the elevation. We would like the new covered walkway to be designed so it turns a right angle towards the new block, rather than on a diagonal, and is as slim and lightweight as possible. Presently we feel the covered walkway is too heavy and obtrusive.

The Hackney Society supports a second entrance on Queensbridge Road.

## **COLOUR PALETTE AND TYPOGRAPHY**

The original building's colour scheme is very monochromatic and neutral with the concrete frame of the main teaching block originally unpainted. The Hackney Society would like a well-designed new colour scheme to be made a condition of the listed building consent. We understand that the teaching staff would like colour to be introduced into the building, and do not object to this, but we would prefer to see a muted palette (rather than bold primary colours) that is sympathetic to this largely monochromatic building. Also, the proposed use of typography throughout the building is something of departure from the original design and would prefer a typography that is sympathetic to the original type illustrated in the *Heritage Statement*.

## **CONCLUSION**

The proposed refurbishment and upgrade of Haggerston School for Girls is well overdue and we are pleased that Avanti Architects have been commissioned to undertake this important work. They have much expertise in restoring iconic 20th-century buildings from the 1930s to 1960s, including the work of Goldfinger (his house in Willow Road, Hampstead). The Hackney Society believes that Avanti Architects have the building's best interests at heart, but perhaps not the budget to really unlock the building's radical and unique design. The Hackney Society has deep concerns about the replacement windows and would like to be reassured that there is really no other option for this building. We would also like to make the point that this refurbishment will be significantly cheaper to deliver than a new build school so we feel it is worth the Learning Trust and Hackney Council investing in this very special building. If aluminium frames are used we would like to see if the profile could be reduced and improved. We would also like to know if it is necessary for all the windows to be openable, as this will increase the negative impact of the replacement windows on the building.

Post-war modernist buildings are not very popular in England. Post-war modernist school buildings are even less popular. Therefore this refurbishment feels like a very important

project in terms of proving to teachers, parents, politicians and BSF programme bureaucrats that these buildings are worth retaining and are indeed well suited to modern-day teaching practices. Other listed buildings that have been refurbished from the Modernist period (with generous glazed façades made from steel Crittall windows) have been given steel replacement Crittall windows. De La Warr Pavilion (Bexhill) and the Boots Factory (Nottingham) are a couple of examples. It would be interesting to know if they have serious condensation or problems with overheating in summer. Goldfinger's Trellick Tower in West London is being fitted with new timber windows with a good match of the existing frames. These three buildings have been successfully refurbished for continued use and vitality, without an adverse impact on the architecture that made them worth the special care in the first place. The Hackney Society believes that Goldfinger's only secondary school, one of only twelve post-war secondary schools in the country to be listed, deserves the same treatment.

Please confirm receipt of these comments.

Best wishes

Lisa Rigg  
On behalf of the Planning Sub-group

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<sup>1</sup> Listed post-war secondary schools in London: Elliott School, Pullman Gardens, 1954-6 by LCC (George Trevett), Grade II; Geoffrey Chauœr School (Globe Academy), New Kent Road; Chamberlin, Powell & Bon, 1958, Grade II; Lilian Baylis, Lollard Street, 1962-4 by Architects' Co-Partnership (Kenneth Capon), Grade II; North Westminster Community School, formerly Rutherford School, now King Solomon Academy, 1960-1, Leonard Manasseh and Partners. Grade II; and Haggerston School for Girls, 1962 designed, built 1964-7, Ernö Goldfinger. Grade II.

Listed post-war secondary schools in the provinces: St Crispin's School, Wokingham, Berkshire, 1951-3 by the Ministry of Education Development Group, Grade II; Rhodesway Secondary School, Bradford, 1959 by Scherrer and Hicks, Grade II; Oldbury Wells School, Bridgnorth, Shropshire, 1958, Lyons, Israel and Ellis, Grade II; Woodlands School, Coventry, 1952-7, City Architects Department and Ministry of Education Development Group, Grade II; Hunstanton School, Norfolk, 1950-4, Alison and Peter Smithson, Grade II\*; Upholland School, West Lancashire, 1962, Lyons, Israel and Ellis, Grade II; and Barclay School, Stevenage, 1950-1, Yorke, Rosenberg and Mardall. Grade II.