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PRESS RELEASE: PUBLIC INQUIRY CALLED OVER PLANS TO DEMOLISH 154-158 AND FAÇADE 152-153 STRAND

SAVE welcomes Greg Clark's decision to call in Kings College's planning application to demolish 154-158 and façade 152-153 the Strand. They plan to replace this group of late Georgian and Victorian buildings with a single block. Following a campaign led by SAVE, the Secretary of State has decided to hold a public inquiry to determine the fate of the buildings. As the body leading the call for a public inquiry, SAVE has automatically been made a Rule 6 Party and is presently gathering its team of legal experts and witnesses. The central grounds for the call in are those matters affecting the historic environment.

In the letter from the DCLG to SAVE today, it is stated:

“On the information so far available to the Secretary of State, the following are matters which he particularly wishes to be informed about for the purposes of his consideration of the applications: the extent to which the applications are consistent with Section 12 of the NPPF – ‘Conserving and Enhancing the Historic Environment’ and any other matters the Inspector considers relevant.”

This follows the issuing of a holding directive on May 13th by the Secretary of State that suspended the issue of planning permission by Westminster Council.

At a meeting on 21st April, Westminster planning committee resolved to grant King's College planning permission to demolish 154-158 and façade 152-153 the Strand. SAVE submitted strong objections to the planning application, along with the Victorian Society, The Ancient Monument Society, LAMAS, the Courtauld Institute and the Somerset House Trust, as well as many individuals. SAVE then launched a petition directed at King's College, that has since garnered over 10,000 signatures.

The case has been followed closely by The Times and the Evening Standard. The threat touched a nerve with Londoners and alumni of the university who were outspoken in defense of these buildings. The campaign has been supported by a series of letters in The Times, including from Michael Palin, Susan Hill, Ptolemy Dean, and many others.

In addition, Historic England revised their advice: they had originally concluded that the proposals did not constitute substantial harm to the conservation area.

However, following the public outcry, they reviewed their advice and concluded that the proposals did cause substantial harm. This decision was welcomed by SAVE.

The entire group of threatened buildings are in the Strand Conservation Area, while one of them is listed Grade II. The ones condemned for demolition are singled out in the Conservation Area Audit as Unlisted Buildings of Merit, which contribute to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. This should, according to local planning policy, safeguard them from this kind of proposal.

Clementine Cecil, SAVE Director says: “We are delighted with this decision. SAVE considers that there is no need to demolish this charming group of historic buildings. With sensitive and imaginative treatment, these buildings will be an asset to both the university and the streetscape, that is shared with all Londoners. SAVE is working on an alternative scheme that illustrates the potential of these buildings. These are quintessential London buildings that Londoners love and identify strongly with.”

For more information and images, please contact the SAVE Office on 0207 253 3500 or office@savebritainsheritage.org, or Clem Cecil on 07968 003 595

Background

152 - 158 Strand are buildings of great charm on one of London’s most historic and central thoroughfares: the procession route from St Paul’s Cathedral to Buckingham Palace. The existing buildings also provide the setting for the Grade I listed Somerset House and St Mary Le Strand.

They were originally part of a late-seventeenth/early-eighteenth century terrace, and are sited on their original narrow medieval burgage plots. The building frontages have been partially or fully re-fronted during the mid-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, but the majority of interior and rear walls relate to the eighteenth century.

The Strand has been the principal route between the economic centre of the City of London and the royal and political centre of Westminster for centuries. As these centres grew in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Strand became a commercial strip and significant landmark buildings and churches were established.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the Strand was renowned as an area for restaurants, public houses, music halls and theatres. As a result, the Strand has developed a variety of building and architectural styles, with its grand landmark buildings on the one hand, and an assortment of commercial building on narrow medieval plots on the other.

The buildings at 152-158 Strand are tangible memories of the commercial businesses and occupiers of the buildings that were on the Strand for over 200 years. A variety of businesses occupied the buildings, including tailors, locksmiths, watch-makers, button-makers, umbrella-makers, architects, booksellers, tobacconists, photographers, shoe-sellers, confectioners, lamp manufacturers, estate agents and dentists. This variety and number are typical of these kinds of buildings on the Strand.



Although there was a high turnover of owners and leases of the buildings, some notable businesses occupied the buildings for decades – including Firman & Sons (military button-makers founded in 1656, one of the top 25 oldest companies in the world), Thresher & Glenny (founded in 1755 and one of the world’s oldest surviving tailors), George & Walter Yonge (watchmakers, notable as being watchmakers for the King and the Lord High Admiral 1820-28), and Lyons café (a successful teashop chain, particularly in the 1930s).

The buildings at 152-158 not only typify the physical and historical character of the Strand Conservation Area, but also have significance for their association with the Grade I listed Somerset House and St Mary-le-Strand. The row of buildings, which is mirrored on the southwest side of Somerset House by a similar row, provides an authentic sense of how Somerset House and St Mary le Strand church fitted into an eighteenth century streetscape. Historical paintings and photographs of these

features include the buildings at 152-158 Strand, illustrating the importance of these buildings to the eighteenth and nineteenth century context of the Strand.

Notes to editors:

SAVE Britain's Heritage has been campaigning for historic buildings since its formation in 1975 by a group of architects, journalists and planners. It is a strong, independent voice in conservation, free to respond rapidly to emergencies and to speak out loud for the historic built environment.

SAVE Britain's Heritage, 70 Cowcross Street, London EC1M 6EJ

Registered Charity 269129

Tel. 020 7253 3500 Email office@savebritainsheritage.org

www.savebritainsheritage.org

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