

SAVE condemns plans by Tracey Emin to demolish a locally listed building in Spitalfields, London and calls on Tower Hamlets to refuse consent at the planning committee meeting next week.

On February 10th Tower Hamlets Planning Committee meeting will gather to determine planning for a proposal by artist Tracey Emin to demolish 66-68 Bell Lane, a locally listed building in the Artillery Passage Conservation Area. She wishes to replace it with a below-par design by architect David Chipperfield. The replacement will provide a live-work space and a viewing space to show dealers her art.



The structure in question is a charming building with a chamfered corner. The building presents a cheerful and open aspect to two streets: it has neat and well-articulated window bays on both street fronts, with expressive, though restrained architectural detailing. It was built in 1927 by the former Stepney Borough Council as a block of three flats, built to help address the area's housing shortage.

Tower Hamlets officers have concluded that the building has both historic significance and aesthetic and townscape merit. They conclude that, “the proposals would fail to meet the statutory requirement to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and would not comply with National or Local Planning Policies relating to conservation of the built environment.”

SAVE is heartened by this and urges the councillors to refuse permission. In addition there is a previously consented scheme for the site, that allows an additional storey. This was secured by the previous owner. While not ideal, it is more welcome than the total demolition presently proposed by Emin.

The Gentle Author, of the celebrated Spitalfields Life blog, says: “It’s a fine example of early social housing and the only building left in that run which is a signpost to the past, standing witness to the many communities that have come through this neighbourhood.”

SAVE Director Clem Cecil says: “SAVE is horrified by these proposals. This part of London is under siege. Following the demolition of the Fruit and Wool Exchange just next to Bell Lane, we have to treasure all historic buildings in the area. We hope that Tower Hamlets will do the right thing. Neither National nor Local Planning Policy support this proposal – it is a locally listed building in a conservation area – both significant measures of protection. In addition, the proposed new design is grim, presenting an imposing frontage to both streets. It does not provide public benefits – after all the new proposed picture window is above head height, effectively cutting the building off from the street. We urge Tracey Emin to desist from these destructive plans, and to work with the grain of the existing building, in this historically important and highly threatened part of London.”

For more information please contact SAVE on 0207 253 3500 or office@savebritainsheritage.org

Notes to Editors:

SAVE Britain’s Heritage has been campaigning for historic buildings since its formation in 1975 by a group of architectural historians, writers, 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 campaigned for the London Fruit and Wool exchange in 2012-13, applying to Historic England (then English Heritage) to have the building listed, but the application was refused. Demolition plans were approved by the Mayor Boris Johnson, who stepped in to overrule Tower Hamlets' decision to refuse planning permission. The Fruit and Wool Exchange was demolished in 2015, save for one facade.

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