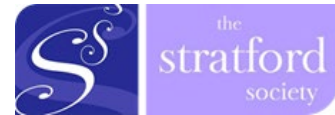


Planning Application: 21/02322/LBC

Contributor: The Stratford Society

Date of Submission: 25/09/2021

Case Officer: Louise Koelman



Nature of Submission: Object to the application for the following planning reasons

In the present economic climate, it is clear that there is no demand to retain the Debenhams building as a department store. The Stratford Society welcomes the intention to regenerate the site as a contribution to the economic well-being of the town. However, it objects to this application on the grounds that the site is entirely unsuitable for a hotel. The only access to the proposed entrance in Tasker's Walk would be on foot. There is no provision for drop-off or pick-up in the High Street which, it is expected, will be closed to all traffic for several hours around the middle of each day to improve the environment for shoppers and other pedestrians. Outside those hours, any vehicles, including coaches, stopping near the hotel would cause traffic chaos.

The application fails to acknowledge the scope for converting the existing building into smaller retail units and residential accommodation. The building was designed in the 1950s by the notable firm of Healing & Overbury, meriting a reference in Pevsner's *The Buildings of Warwickshire*. In terms of vertical scale, it sits satisfactorily in the townscape. The Archaeological Assessment is seriously deficient in making no reference either to this or to the fact that the site forms part of Stratford's Historic Spine, and thus warrants special consideration within its historical context. The SDC has an obligation to protect heritage assets, as set out in both the Core Strategy and Neighbourhood Development Plan. Policy TC10 of the latter requires the façade of buildings in the High Street to conform to the guidelines laid down there. Furthermore, conversion rather than demolition would avoid the danger of any further archaeological damage to the site.

A report by the Royal Academy of Engineering (published in September 2021) also urges developers to seek alternatives to demolition. It argues that conversion is preferable as it avoids the emission of thousands of tonnes of carbon dioxide. The UK construction sector needs to decarbonise more urgently in order to play its part in achieving national emission reduction targets. Measures such as reusing building materials and using non-fossil powered machinery can make a contribution to this. All of this supports conversion rather than demolition of the Debenhams building, but nowhere in the application as it stands is there any acknowledgement of this principle.