

THE REGENTS NETWORK

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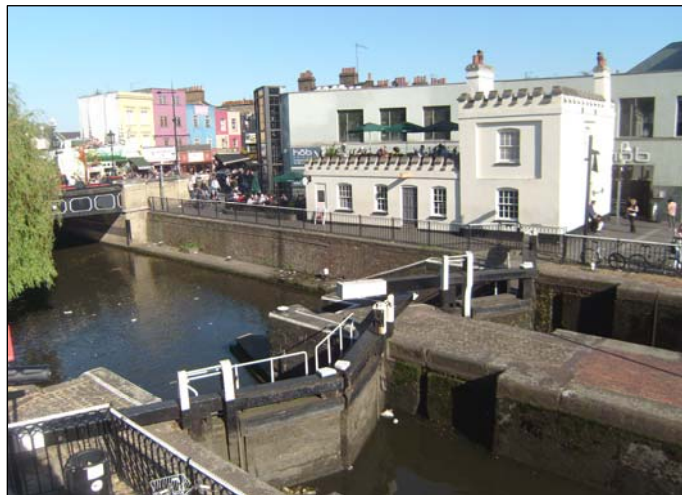
11th May 2012

Dear Neil Zaayman,

LOCK KEEPERS COTTAGE Grade II Listed
289 Camden High Street London NW1 7BX
Planning Application 2012/1674/P
Regents Canal Conservation Area

I object to an attempt by Starbucks to carry out a take-over of our historic Regents Canal Lock Keepers Cottage and Information Centre with their planning application for change of use to a themed coffee shop.

The Grade II Listed Lock Keepers Cottage is a significant canal building and should be celebrated as an historic asset to the Regents Canal and the London Borough of Camden. The important and appropriate Canal Information Centre established in the building is a very valuable asset that should be improved and operated in a businesslike manner, rather than be pushed aside in order to sell a few more cups of coffee.



The outstanding canal building is located in the Regents Canal Conservation Area that is of special interest, and the area features no fewer than seven major Grade II Listed canal structures and buildings around the much valued waterway and picturesque basin.

It is also in a high profile location that is one of the busiest and most visited honeypot sites on the canal network in the country, as well as a key visitor attraction in the centre of the leading tourist destination of Camden Town and its markets.

Not an ideal tenant

It is not fitting that such an important focal point such as the historic Lock Keepers Cottage should be managed by a commercial company such as Starbucks. As tenants they are not in the position to control the character of the premises nor steer its future to suit their own limited purposes. The administration and use of the buildings was decided in 1999 and set out in a signed and sealed s106 legal agreement, and no provision was made for any tenant to do anything different of their own accord. This is what Starbucks signed up to in 2002.

With regular planning applications for the branding as a Starbucks building rather than an Information Centre, the coffee company has not turned out to be an ideal tenant.

Camden not an ideal authority

Of course, Starbucks have taken the opportunity to do a takeover of the Lock Keepers Cottage by the lack of interest and involvement of the council, and in fact they have been left to their own devices. No wonder they have taken the opportunity to exploit the situation.

In spite of the fact that warnings were given and attempts were made to attract the council's attention to their responsibilities for the demise of the Information Centre, no action has been taken by LB Camden for years. In fact, it seems that they did not even take an interest. A legal responsibility was just swept aside as if it did not matter.

An official response is required from LB Camden for the outcome of this sad situation where a commercial firm is allowed to do as they like and flaunt a legal requirement. Why has it only been a fuss and objection from the community and individuals that has finally drawn some attention from the council who are charged to uphold community requirements and interests, apart from the legal imperatives. We have been seriously let down.

A year ago a planning application lodged by Starbucks for illuminated signs that would increase the Starbucks branding of the Lock Keepers Cottage, was advertised by Camden as a 'Starbucks Coffee Shop' application! Our local authority themselves did not even care that they had handed over our heritage to a commercial firm - that sells cups of coffee.

Absentee landlord?

The presence on the scene by British Waterways has been sadly lacking. Over the years at canal User Group meetings BW have been reminded of their duties and responsibilities as landlords of the Lock Keepers Cottage to carry out the Management Agreement (required by the s106) which includes the supply of leaflets and information, and to train the coffee shop staff to provide some sort of information service. After each reminder British Waterways seem to have had some involvement, but too little and only for a token period.

British Waterways are the navigation authority first and foremost of our canals (before any property management and business activities, and the like), and 'stewards' of our waterways according to the parliamentary legislation (DEFRA Framework Document 1999). It states:

In order to secure and conserve the waterway's heritage and environment for the future British Waterways should work in partnership with local authorities and other public sector organisations . . . and the voluntary sector including local groups to maximise the quality of the waterways and the surrounding amenities. It should seek ways to enable the maximum public enjoyment of its facilities and to increase income without damaging the environment and heritage (Ibid, Para 1.2).

As we have witnessed, British Waterways have gone far astray over the past few years and fail to carry out their responsibilities, including the legal requirements for the Canal Information Centre. Mostly they are nowhere to be seen. There is so much neglect of London's canals as shown by the state of the leaking lock gates at Camden Town. You would have thought that at this showcase location for the canals with tens of thousands of visitors every weekend, BW would make an effort to upgrade the locks and facilities. The Regents Canal - and Information Centre - at Camden Town needs more attention from BW, and perhaps some of the £70,000 rent that they get from Starbucks.



Change of direction

A change of the mindset from the authorities is well overdue, and the provision of information and assistance for the thousands of visitors to Camden Town and the Regents Canal should be made a priority. That's what the authorities are there for - serving the public, and what we pay them for (LB Camden and British Waterways).

Apart for providing some sort of service, the authorities have to see that the statutory policies and requirements are carried out. Again, that's their job, and they cannot pick and choose whether they bother, as has been the case with the Information Centre for the last decade.

As far as this unwelcome planning application is concerned, there are a number of policies and legal requirements that should be considered. The key imperative is the

s106 Legal Agreement

signed and sealed on 15th March 1999 in connection with the redevelopment of the area and planning application ref: PE 9700702/R3. Setting up the Information Centre in the Lock Keepers Cottage was considered such an important facility that there was a condition in the planning consent that the rest of the development of the area could not be occupied until the Information Centre had been set up and provided for. That very much sounds like the local authority of the time doing a good job.

Extracts of the s106 Legal Agreement with details relating to the Information Centre can be found in APPENDIX 1. It includes the requirement for the Information Centre to be "retained in operation permanently" (Para 6.7).

A subsequent important document is the

Information Centre Management Plan

set up by the s106 Legal Agreement which stipulated that the Information Centre should be "managed in strict accordance" with the management plan (Para 6.7). The main parties involved, British Waterways and Starbucks, have copies, and so should the Council who are responsible for seeing that the management plan is fully operated as required.

Of course, the management plan is not being carried out to the letter, otherwise the Information Centre would be up and running rather than sidelined. Among other responsibilities, British Waterways is required to supply regular and up-to-date information, and to train staff on the premises (Starbucks at the moment) to provide information services to the public and visitors. Why has this not happened over the years? In response to this training, Starbucks should be requiring their staff to provide the information services.

In connection to this neglected Management Plan, the Regents Canal Conservation Area

Appraisal and Management Statement 2008

produced by LB Camden deals with information and facilities that the conservation area needs for the "interest of recreational and leisure enjoyment of the canal" with provision of promotion and signage and the like (Page 42). It adds that "the Council will seek to secure the reopening of a Canal Information Centre, preferably at Camden Lock".

There are a number of policies and guidelines in the

LB Camden Core Strategy 2010

which the planning department will need to refer to in order to check the conformity of the planning application for change of use.

The Camden Core Strategy itself has to be in conformity with the

London Plan 2011

which has a number of policies which uphold the establishment of the Information Centre on our local section of the Blue Ribbon Network (London's rivers and canals).

Policy 7.4 LOCAL CHARACTER

Boroughs should identify the character of the Blue Ribbon Network, and where that character "should be sustained, protected and enhanced" (Para C).

It is quite clear that domination by a commercial company that does not recognise the heritage and environmental benefits of the Regents Canal, its conservation area and the provision of a community involvement, is not protecting nor enhancing the character of the Blue Ribbon Network, the Regents Canal at this location in Camden Town.

Policy 7.24 BLUE RIBBON NETWORK

The Blue Ribbon Network is of 'strategic' importance for London.

It should contribute to the overall quality and sustainability of London by prioritising uses of the land alongside it "for water related purposes" (Para A).

According to Starbucks the Regents Canal may as well not exist for all the attention and importance it gives to it, let alone recognising that it is of strategic importance. Their planning application further sidelines the Canal Information Centre and any attention on the waterway. Also the selling of more cups of coffee cannot be considered to be a water related purpose. The application goes exactly in the opposite direction to this important policy.

The London Plan also makes the leading comment that "the starting point for consideration of development and use of the Blue Ribbon Network and the land alongside it must be the water" (Para 7.71). In other words at Camden Town when dealing with the use of the land alongside the Regents Canal, any plans and designs should have the water in mind. Promoting coffee in this application at the expense of the waterway's character and presence directly contravenes this requirement.

Planning decision

The attempt to use the planning system to directly overturn the s106 legal agreement for the operation and management of the Information Centre should be strongly opposed. A higher level of legal mechanism would be required to deal with quashing a legal contract such as this.

In any event, the promotion of the use of the historic canal premises for a non-canal related use is not acceptable, especially as it would be at the expense of the character and involvement with the Regents Canal and conservation area. It would be in direct contravention with planning policies as outlined above. In that location the considerations for the heritage and environmental assets far outweigh the desire for selling more cups of coffee.

This planning application should be recommended for refusal.

Yours sincerely



Del Brenner
Regents Network and
a member of the London Waterways Commission

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c.c. Cllr Chris Naylor; Cllr Patricia Callaghan; Cllr Lazzaro Pietragnoli; Cllr Matthew Sanders
Chair, Regents Canal CAAC; LB Camden Conservation Area Team; Camden Town Unlimited

APPENDIX 1 Extract from s106 Agreement to Planning Ref: PE 9700702/R3
15 Mach 1999
With a few comments
Supplied to Regents Canal CAAC and others, for information

APPENDIX 2 Recovery of the Canal Information Centre
In draft
Miscellaneous comments and subjects
To be developed as more information and comments are gathered
More of a starting point rather than a comprehensive report

APPENDIX 3 Response to consultation on a previous application a year ago
Copy of a long letter which was circulated at the time, but not widely read
It is worth reading as it contains a lot of background information
It also reveals the issue of the sidelining of the Information Centre



NO ENTRY. The entrance to the Information Centre is permanently locked.



A canal themed coffee shop is what the Canal Information Centre has ended up as. Very pleasant surroundings, but it would be a great improvement if these visitors from Germany were welcomed to the Regents Canal and introduced to its features and pleasures. To many it could be one of the highlights of their visit to Camden Town.