

THE FORMER SYON GATE SERVICE STATION (SYON HILL GARAGE) SITE TO THE SOUTH OF GILLETTE CORNER, FRONTING GREAT WEST ROAD AND SYON LANE, ISLEWORTH, MIDDLESEX

PROPOSED REDEVELOPMENT OF THE SITE TO PROVIDE A MIXED USE DEVELOPMENT WITH HEIGHTS BETWEEN FOUR AND ELEVEN STOREYS AND INCLUDING THREE BASEMENT LEVELS, COMPRISING UP TO 102, RESIDENTIAL UNITS (USE CLASS C3), OFFICES (B1) AND SELF-STORAGE (B8), CAR AND BICYCLE PARKING, HARD AND SOFT LANDSCAPING WITH ALL NECESSARY ANCILLARY AND ENABLING WORKS

LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITY REFERENCE P/2017/0053

A STATEMENT SUPPORTING THE REPRESENTATIONS OF THE BRENTFORD COMMUNITY COUNCIL IN RESPECT OF THE POTENTIAL IMPACT OF THE DEVELOPMENT ON THE SETTING OF THE LISTED GILLETTE BUILDING

I am writing as a local-based chartered architect, who was a member of the professional team directly involved in securing Planning Permission and Listed Building Consent twice over from the Hounslow Council for the conservation-based retention, refurbishment and extension of the grade II listed Gillette Building immediately to the north of the application site, and as a former Assistant Regional Director for English Heritage London, who had responsibility for the organisation's interest in the conservation and development of the Borough of Hounslow amongst other Central and West London Boroughs between 1991 and 2004. I am writing to convey my support for the representations submitted to the Council by the Brentford Community Council against the current application, specifically in relation to the potential impact of the proposed development on the setting of the nearby Gillette Building fronting Syon Lane, as a listed building of major architectural and townscape significance in this part of West London – visible for miles around, and on the setting of the similarly listed NatWest Bank at the corner of Syon Lane and Great West Road, close by.

Based on my long-established familiarity with the application site and the surrounding area dating back to the 1950s and my inspection of the extensive drawings and other documentation submitted in support of the application, I consider that the height and bulk of key parts of the proposed development, will result in substantial harm to the settings and significance of the listed Gillette Building and the presently vacant National Provincial Bank building as 'designated heritage assets' and that such harm is neither outweighed by substantial public benefits nor justified by other factors, contrary to paragraph 133 of the *National Planning Policy Framework* of March, 2012.

In addition, as presently constituted, the proposals would be contrary to other relevant policies set out in the *National Planning Policy Framework*, in particular those in Sections 7 and 12; in the *London Plan: The spatial development strategy for London consolidated with alterations since 2011* of March, 2016, in particular Policies 7.4, 7.6, 7.7, 7.8 and 7.9; and in the

Hounslow Local Plan of 2015, in particular Policies CC1, CC2, CC3 and CC4; and inconsistent with the formal guidance of Historic England set out in *Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets*; *Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning 2: Managing Significance in Decision-Taking in the Historic Environment*; and *Historic England Advice Note 4: Tall Buildings*.

Having inspected Collado Collins Architects' drawings and other, extensive documentation submitted in support of the application, including Montague Evans' *Gillette South: Heritage, Townscape and Visual Assessment*, of December, 2016, I consider that the heritage significance of the statutorily listed Gillette Building and the presently vacant National Provincial Bank building and their setting and the potential effects on their significance and setting have been substantially understated.

As rightly observed in the 'Executive summary and findings' in the *Heritage, Townscape and Visual Impact Assessment*, 'the application site is located at a point of topographical importance, on an eminence defining the ridge of the Great West Road'. Indeed, both the application site and the two, nearby listed buildings occupy sites considerably higher than most of the land to the south-west, south and south-east; the predominantly open or low density land sloping away beyond the line of the railway that stretches south-westwards and north-eastwards from Syon Lane Station. Such a topography, brings the Gillette Building, and in particular its clock-tower, into considerable prominence in views from the south-west, south and south-east from the areas to the north-west of the London Road, and also, to a varying degree, in views from further away – from the grade I registered Syon Park and the higher ground of Richmond Hill, some lies distant.

Mindful of the formal guidance of Historic England set out in *Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning: 3 – The Setting of Heritage Assets*, it is clear that the setting of the Gillette Building, and to a lesser extent, the setting of the NatWest Bank, not only include the areas contained within their respective curtilages, but also a wider area beyond their respective site-boundaries. Taken together, the settings of the two listed building embrace areas to each side of Syon Lane both north and south of the junction with the Great West Road, and to each side of the Great West Road to east and west of the junction with Syon Lane, and the respective public highways. There can be little question that the application site on the south-western corner of the junction and the *Homebase* site on the south-eastern corner of the junction fall within that part of the setting of the respective listed buildings to their south.

Both individually and cumulatively, the generally modest height of the buildings presently occupying and formerly occupying the respective sites to the south of the junction (the application site has been cleared of buildings), avoid or have avoided competing with the scale of the two, listed buildings to the north. Indeed, the presence of two-storey, inter-War, suburban housing in the areas to the west, south-west and south of the junction reinforces the predominantly low, urban scale of the immediate setting the application site and the two listed buildings. Importantly, it is this prevailing, low, urban scale which enables the Gillette Building

and its clock-tower to maintain its pre-eminence in the immediate area of the junction and in views from the east, the west and the south-east despite its fronting Syon Lane rather than the Great West Road, and enable the presently vacant National Provincial Bank building, to maintain its presence despite its modest scale. It is the comparatively low scale of the sites on the south-west and south-east corners of the junction of the Great West Road with Syon Lane (South) which is the essential element of that part of the setting of the listed buildings to their south which contributes to their significance. Whilst it is acknowledged that the slender, structural mast which supports the roof of Nicholas Grimshaw's award-winning Homebase Building rises to a considerable height, its modest cross-section on plan and light and delicate, open, steelwork structure, obviates any adverse effect on the settings of the listed buildings to the north.

This low, urban scale of the setting of the listed Gillette Building and presently vacant National Provincial Bank building survives in part to the east and west of the junction of the Great West Road with Syon Lane, where it provides the essential context to the few, surviving *Art Deco* factories of 'The Golden Mile' and other significant, inter-War buildings. The buildings include Stanley Heaps and Charles Holden's listed Osterley Underground Station and E.C. Shearman's listed Church of St Francis of Assisi to the west of the junction, and F.E. Simkins' listed, former Curry's Building (now J.C. Decaux) at no. 991, Wallis Gilbert and Partners' listed, former Coty Building (now Syon Clinic) at no. 941, and the same firm's listed, former Pyrene Building (now Westlink House) at no. 981, to the east of the junction. Regrettably, the setting of the same firm's listed, former Simmonds Aero-accessories Building (now Wallis House) on the south side of the Great West Road just west of the junction with Clayponds Lane is now massively compromised by the elevated section of the M.4.

Tragically, the loss of many, very fine, inter-War buildings along 'The Golden Mile' over the last twenty-five years and their replacement with a number of substantially over-scaled new buildings of no or very limited architectural quality, have demonstrated the serious risks of damaging the settings and the significance of those few inter-War listed buildings that survive, and emphasize the need to ensure that their settings are not compromised by over-scaled and poorly designed new development.

Despite the extensive text and the extent and technical sophistication of the material submitted in support of the application, anomalously and extraordinarily, no material has been submitted to justify the view that the application-site plays no part in shaping an appreciation of the settings of either the Gillette Building or the presently vacant National Provincial Bank (*Gillette South: Heritage, Townscape and Visual Assessment* of December, 2016, paragraphs 5.30 and 5.33) nor any material submitted demonstrating that the higher parts of the proposed development will not have a material and substantially harmful impact on the settings of the two, listed buildings to the immediate north of the junction of the Great West Road and Syon Lane and thereby substantially harm their significance. The absence of such highly relevant material must surely bring into question any recommendation to approve the proposals as presently constituted.

As rightly stated in paragraph 7.16 of the *Heritage, Townscape and Visual Assessment* ‘... the former Gillette Factory experiences a noticeable change to its setting...’.

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