

## Citroen Site Mayor's Hearing

As requested, I attended the Mayor's Call-in hearing at City Hall on 20 July, to present the BCC views as objectors to the application. As expected, this hearing was purely performance art, rather than an impartial examination, although it has to be acknowledged that we were given 5 minutes each for the 4 of us, instead of the 15 minutes for all to which we were originally limited.

The 'Senior Strategic Planner' for City Hall droned on interminably to start the hearing off, reading through her analysis of why the scheme was so beneficial for the community. Sarah Scannell for Hounslow was given 5 minutes to present the Council's reasons for refusal, then the objectors spoke, in turn: Mike Dunn for Historic England; Keith Garner of Kew Gardens; myself for the BCC, and John Ricketts for the Kew Society.

The developer was then given 5 minutes to say how intransigent and unhelpful Hounslow Council were, and how amenable to the Mayor's suggestions they had been. They had had quite a few meetings with the Mayor both before and after refusal, and modifications to the scheme included adding an extra 2 stories to increase provisions for affordable housing.

It was during the subsequent questions from the Mayor that the full extent of his fixed agenda was revealed; The Council were chastised for refusing without seeking more meetings [although the evidence was – as with the BCC – that the developers refrained from any such meetings], and for allowing officer decision instead of referral to the planning committee of councillors.

Historic England's appraisal of the scheme as involving 'substantial harm' was contrasted with Hounslow's differing assessment; Kew Gardens were challenged as to why they had not objected at an earlier stage, and asked where tall buildings should be built if not within sight of Kew; I was told [in response to my confirmation that the BCC sought for more family units of 3-4 bedrooms within affordable housing provision] that the Mayor had subsequently achieved this through negotiating post refusal, and I can't recall off-hand what the Kew Society were queried over.

The developer was asked how amenable they found the Mayor's office when engaging with them, to which the answer was the expected toadying agreement that the Mayor had been most helpful in assisting them to improve and expand the scheme, in distinct contrast with the nasty Council officers.

No 'decision' is to be announced until after the present scaffolding on one of the Kew Gardens buildings has been removed, following which the Mayor will make a site visit to satisfy himself that the view will not be harmed, in order that he can fully justify agreement with his own recommendation for approval [subsequent to rubber-stamping by the Secretary of State], to be announced within 5 days of that visit.

Nigel Moore