Save former Booth Hall Children’s Hospital administration building from demolition

Boggart Hole Clough Community Action Trust (BHCCAT), a democratic organization of volunteers founded in 2000, works in partnership with, among others, Manchester City Council (MCC), the landowner of Boggart Hole Clough. BHCCAT carries out an Equal Opportunities Policy ensuring everyone can participate in its activities. BHCCAT is dedicated to protecting Boggart Hole Clough Local Nature Reserve (status awarded 2008).

1. As Boggart Hole Clough was formerly part of the Booth Hall estate (becoming a Municipal Park in 1894) & it is adjacent to the site of the former Children’s Hospital, BHCCAT is naturally interested in the future of this site to ensure it does not damage but rather enhances Boggart Hole Clough Local Nature Reserve.

2. Booth Hall Children’s Hospital, despite prolonged protests, was closed 11.6.2009. A year later the buildings were demolished, to make way for a housing development, except for the administration building which was to be converted into apartments.

3. Notices were attached 17.6.2013 to the site’s perimeter railings stating that demolition of the former administration building is to begin 5.7.2013 & that “If you wish to make comments please send them in writing before 28.6.2013 to: Planning, Chief Executive’s Department, PO Box 532, Town Hall, Manchester ..” (see reference A below). Jeni Regan (MCC Development Management North, Senior Planner), the case officer, said comments could be emailed to her – j.regan@manchester.gov.uk This document, BHCCAT’s representation, is being emailed to her today, 27.6.2013.

4. The hospital was designed by Manchester-based architect Thomas Worthington (1826-1909) who also designed hospitals in Crumpsall, Withington, Wigan & Halifax, as well as the Albert Memorial monument in Manchester’s Albert Square.

5. Booth Hall Infirmary was opened 1908 by Humphrey Booth who owned the land & commissioned its building. Initially a workhouse infirmary for destitute adults & children, it exemplified the repudiation of punitive regimes for the ‘undeserving poor’ in favour of health care for all. During the First World War it became a hospital for wounded soldiers & afterwards a hospital for sick children.

6. The former administration building, as can be seen from the photo above, is bold, compelling, distinguished, restrained. It is a valuable example of Manchester’s architectural heritage, one of very few examples remaining in North Manchester, & the only large-scale building of historical interest in Charlestown.

7. In 2004, years before the hospital closed in 2009, MCC was already promoting a change of use of the site “for high value family accommodation” (see reference B below).
8. BHCCAT submitted 4.2.2008 a proposal to MCC, as a better alternative to the above (item 7), suggesting that if the hospital were to close then the whole hospital building complex should be converted into the Booth Hall Academy of Ecology & School of Forestry, thereby retaining its use as a facility for young people and diversifying the range of specialisms provided by academies/schools thus increasing the range of educational opportunities. Existing buildings converted into an Academy would have contrasted with the several new-build Academies that have opened in North Manchester. BHCCAT also suggested planting the grounds with native trees to connect two Ancient Semi-Natural Woodlands (Bailey’s Wood to the north of the site & Boggart Hole Clough to the south) thus fulfilling the recommendation of English Nature (forerunner of Natural England, government advisor on the natural environment) that “New woodland of native trees and shrubs should be created next to ancient woods to increase their size ..” (see reference C below). Under present circumstances, the former administration building could house the academy & the grounds now cleared of other buildings could be planted as suggested above thereby maximizing biodiversity.

9. MCC chose to ignore the above proposal (item 8) & instead 23.10.2008 approved a “Proposal .. for the principle of a residential development .. This 10.1 hectare site is currently used as the Booth Hall Children’s Hospital .. works to include the demolition of built structures .. permission is sought for the erection of a maximum of 300 residential units. These would be a mix of two and three storey family houses and some apartments within the retained administration building .. S106 Agreement. The applicants have agreed .. to the following matters: 1. Provision of 20% intermediate affordable housing; 2. Contribution towards: a. the provision of a new 5-12’s play area within the Boggart Hole Clough area; and/or b. the provision of or contribution to a new visitors centre at Boggart Hole Clough; and/or c. the overall upgrade, improvement, maintenance and management of Baileys Wood ..” (see reference D below).

10. After most of the hospital buildings were demolished, MCC approved 24.11.2011 a revision of the above (item 9) approved planning application: “.. it was proposed to retain the administration building .. to be converted into residential use .. However .. residential developers would only submit bids for a totally cleared site rather than with the retention of the former administration building .. due to both the prohibitive costs associated with the conversion .. & the fundamental lack of market demand for apartments within the area. Therefore .. it is no longer viable to convert the retained administration building to residential use .. seeking a revision to the previously submitted planning application to enable the demolition of the administration building .. it was not deemed necessary for a full re-consultation & re-notification of residents to be carried out .. because the impact of the proposed changes was considered to be minimal .. It is acknowledged that it was previously considered important to retain the former administration building on this site, due to its key presence in the centre & entrance of the site, its reflection of the history of the former hospital use & its architectural merit & design by a noted architect .. Since the demolition of the surrounding hospital buildings & the loss of the administration building’s historic setting, it is considered that the significance of the structure has diminished visually ..” (see reference E below).

11. Thus, part of the above argument runs (item 10), the developers demolish the administration building’s historic setting (the extensive surrounding hospital buildings) & then use the loss of the administration building’s historic setting as a reason for demolishing the administration building itself!

12. Boggart Hole Clough, an Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland, is also part of the administration building’s historic setting. This is reciprocal - the administration building is likewise part of Boggart Hole Clough’s historic setting, so demolishing the building would degrade Boggart Hole Clough by destroying this important element of its historic setting.

13. MCC proposed using S106 Agreement money (Planning obligation under Section 6 of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990 as amended: monies paid by developers to planning authorities to offset costs of mitigating external impact of developments) for “a new replacement visitors centre at Boggart Hole Clough” (see item 9 above) thus wasting the money on a new-build Visitor Centre whilst allowing the demolition of an existing building perfectly suited for the purpose. The S106 money could be used to convert the former Booth Hall administration building into a visitor centre or apartments or both combined.

14. A perfunctory consultation took place 20.2.2013 (see reference F below) re the housing developer’s revised plan, to demolish the former administration building, for which “it was not deemed necessary for a full re-consultation & re-notification of residents to be carried out” (see item 10 above). Nor was BHCCAT notified of the consultation. This so-called ‘consultation’ was designed it would seem to cause the least amount of public stir or opposition.
15. Re proposed demolition of the former administration building, comments of several attendees at the consultation (see item 14 above & reference F below) included the following: “I note with interest, and some concern, that the original Hall part of the Booth Hall building is missing from your plan – there is a cross roads there instead. When the hospital was demolished I thought it was a condition of any planning permission that this building would remain standing. has a deal already done with the City Council? .. The old administration offices could be utilised for general or social reasons in the new estate as well as locally. .. perhaps a nature wildlife centre would [be] use [of] the admin block. The building needs saving it is impressive. Convertible into flats an advantage. .. I think its atrocious that no provision has been made to keep what was Booth Hall itself. What was the point of demolishing the hospital leaving the Hall and now not leaving it as a lasting memorial to what Booth Hall was – disgraceful! .. The Character of the area must be retained on some of the history of the hospital. I cannot see these on your plans. The history cannot and must not be obliterated. .. The only problem with this plan is that as the old hall was originally given as a hospital. .. [for] war veterans and then as a children’s hospital. .. I think that this hall should be kept and turned into flats or a nice community centre for the new development. .. Could use not be made of the iconic Booth Hall building or are you demolishing that? Do you care whether some heritage is retained? ..”

16. Re housing provision in the proposed development, comments of some attendees at the consultation (see item 14 above & reference F below) included the following: “.. Could do with bungalows for elderly / disabled. .. Please define what is meant by ‘affordable house’. Will the 20% be .. affordable to those on average N. Manchester earnings? .. There appears to be no provision for single storey accessible houses / bungalows for the over 50s in the 20% affordable housing & other housing stock [for] who may have mobility issues.”

17. MCC has approved, indeed promoted (see item 7 above), the site’s change of use from being a place where the infirm poor, wounded soldiers & sick children were cared for, to being an up-market housing enclave for the rich. How can a Labour controlled City Council endorse such a change of use? In 1896, the Independent Labour Party held mass meetings in Boggart Hole Clough. Keir Hardie, the first Labour Party leader, was one of the speakers. He would surely have opposed such a change of use.

18. Booth Hall was a much loved, treasured & respected hospital not only in the immediate local community but throughout Manchester & the North West. Sick children in North Manchester must now travel several miles to the Royal Manchester Children’s Hospital on Oxford Road for treatment. The former administration building could be converted into a Children’s Cottage Hospital / Clinic. Its conversion into a much needed Hospice is another option – this was under consideration quite recently. There is no shortage of ideas for the building’s re-use (see also items 2, 8, 15 above) & many more could be forthcoming.

19. Demolishing this building is an act of wanton vandalism. You simply cannot compare this beautiful & historic building with the very run of the mill & ordinary new housing that would replace it. Such buildings together with their history are irreplaceable. It would seem that the easy option is being taken & also the most profitable one for the developer. MCC continues to disregard & fails to protect the city’s architectural heritage, supinely allowing developers to profit from its destruction, creating an increasingly bland city with no visible history, its rich history wiped off the map, a cultural desert.

20. Last week BHCCAT received the following email from a local resident: “.. the housing plans looks pretty bog standard new development sprawl to me - and why is it only 20% of the housing is to be ‘affordable’ - shouldn’t all of it be ‘affordable’. The admin building will be a very sad loss, unfortunately not everybody can see through the ‘company speak’ of ‘prohibitive cost’ - means they cannot be bothered, and don’t care and its cheaper, less trouble, and a lot more profit to knock it down and build new. No demand for apartments? Rubbish - there is a demand for all types of affordable housing, and turning it into apartments would have been a very creative use of the building ..” (see reference G below).

21. BHCCAT urges MCC to reconsider this matter. Prohibiting the demolition & saving this historic building, saturated with memories, doing what is in Manchester’s long-term interest, leaving a valuable architectural legacy to future generations, will be respected by Mancunians as a far-seeing, rational, responsible decision.
REFERENCES:

A. ‘Site Notice: Application to demolish a building .. Administration Building, Former Booth Hall Children’s Hospital .. Has been submitted to MCC by CBRE Ltd (on behalf of Taylor Wimpey Manchester) ..’ (CBRE Ltd, 7.6.2013).


C. Suggestion 9 of ‘Twelve suggestions for Site Specific Allocations in the Irk Valley’ (BHCCAT, 4.2.2008). This document can be seen on our website. Submitted 4.2.2008 via email to planningstrategy@manchester.gov.uk re MCC Local Development Framework, Core Strategy Issues & Options Consultation 4.12.2007 to 4.2.2008 - Suggestions for Site Specific Allocations.

D. ‘Outline planning application .. Application number 086932/OO/2008/N1 .. Charlestown Ward .. Proposal: Outline application for .. a residential development .. Booth Hall Children’s Hospital ..’ (MCC Planning & Highways Committee, 23.10.2008).

E. ‘Outline planning application .. Addendum Report .. Application number 086932/00/2008/N1 .. Charlestown Ward .. Proposal: Outline application for .. a residential development .. Booth Hall Children’s Hospital ..’ (MCC Planning & Highways Committee, 24.11.2011).


G. Email to Peter Milner (BHCCAT Secretary) from Mildred Willner, 21.6.2013.

Copies of the above documents etc available upon request from Peter Milner (BHCCAT Secretary) – 01612035009 – peterfmilner@hotmail.com

Still standing - former Booth Hall Children’s Hospital administration building; photo taken 21.6.2013 from across Charlestown Road in Boggart Hole Clough.

Peter F. Milner, 27.6.2013: BHCCAT Save former Booth Hall Children’s Hospital administration building from demolition

Page 4 of 4