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Open letter

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Southwark Underground Station, listing debate

It is disappointing to read of the plans to change the ticket hall at Southwark Station. Details of the proposed development are not yet available and we do not know the extent of demolition that may be proposed or what form the replacement ticket hall may take. However, I would make the following observations;

The chain of new stations on the Jubilee Line extension were an extraordinary achievement. It was a massive challenge, both technically and architecturally, to create complex new public buildings of this quality. They set a benchmark for tube station design far higher than any other post-war examples.

At Southwark Station, the ticket hall is an integral part of a spatial journey through the station, from the street to the platforms. The architectural quality of the station is as much about this sequence of spaces as it is about the detail.

Cities will always be changing, but there are plenty of examples of new developments which incorporate and preserve the integrity of existing buildings. Otherwise we end up with incoherent buildings and urban development.

Our design was for an eleven storey building over the station and the existing foundations are designed for this. At thirty storeys, new foundations are clearly required and getting in the piling rig can be the only real reason for demolition of the ticket hall. However, a new ticket hall will need to be built, and there is no reason why the simple circular form and detailing of the original ticket hall could not be rebuilt within the new building, even if it needs to be at grade and if 'back of house' areas need to be reconfigured. The spans between columns could be short and not structurally challenging.

This would be sufficient to preserve the sequence of spaces as originally conceived, without imposing unreasonable constraints on the 30 storey building above. For a building which has been recognised for its high architectural quality, rebuilding the ticket hall to match the existing design would not be an unreasonable planning condition, even if not listed.

Jeremy Estop

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