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Dear Ms Sage,

Trafalgar Park

I have been asked by the owner of Trafalgar Park, Mr Barry Jones, to examine Trafalgar Park as a work of architecture and to give an opinion on the proposal to remove two nineteenth century chimney stacks on the side elevations.

I have been asked in view of my knowledge of classical architecture, as evidenced by, inter alia: my book, *Classical Architecture : A Comprehensive Handbook*; my teaching of classical architecture at the University of Oxford and elsewhere; and by my award-winning designs for major modern classical buildings. I also have relevant experience in conservation: six years on the London Advisory Committee of English Heritage; a book, *Heritage and Culture*; and numerous papers and articles.

Trafalgar Park is a rare example of a little-altered 18th century classical house and is of the highest quality. What survives is the work of three major architects: John James, John Wood and Nicholas Revett.

John James is an important figure in the change from English Baroque to Palladianism, having worked for Wren and Hawksmoor, the latter a target for the New Palladians, James *became* a Palladian architect. He is maligned by a remark from the historian Howard Colvin, saying he 'lacked inventive fancy'. This is not reasonable; the English Palladian movement was precisely a turn to more orthodox design against Baroque fancy. His catalogue of buildings remains significant.

John Wood is acknowledged as a major figure in the New Palladian revival.

Nicholas Revett is important in the Greek Revival, publishing Greek architecture with James Stuart, that brought in Neo-Classicism, the major stylistic shift that supplanted Palladianism. His work here is remarkable on three counts: it is a very rare example of his work as he designed very little; the originality of the detail; and the way that his portico sits comfortably with the main Palladian body of the house, demonstrating the compatibility of classical architecture of all styles.

In their objection to the removal of the chimneys, Historic England stresses that "the Victorian phase of alteration of the building does hold intrinsic heritage interest and therefore it also contributes to (the) overall significance". But very little of significance was undertaken in the nineteenth century, when many country houses were radically altered or extended to accommodate new styles of living, tastes and the expansion of the servant economy. William Butterfield, who was engaged at this time, a major figure in the Oxford Movement and the Gothic revival which eschewed the classical as pagan, was surprisingly respectful of the classical original, altering little. This was not, as has been claimed, "a moment of considerable change", in a time of great change in all other aspects of society and architecture.

The consequence of this history is a building that can be appreciated as a major and largely consistent work of architecture expressive of the 18th century, with later alterations of little significance. Any appreciation of the building as architecture is for this reason. In what follows, I put emphasis on the building as an important work of architecture, not a significant expression of social change, a palimpsest of architectural style or functional evolution. I believe that this must be the reason for its listing and its architectural importance.

When viewing the chimneys in question, it is wrong to give them secondary importance because they are on side elevations. This is not a building which presents facades in isolation. The house is a cubic form, with this rational geometry intended to be appreciated from all positions. Indeed, the main approach to the house, as well as many distant views from the gardens, give prominence to these chimneys. While not actively unpleasant, they are surprisingly obtrusive with their extremely narrow proportions and peripheral location. They look out of place in an otherwise constrained and carefully calculated composition, with massive collected flues in the centre of the built mass. There is no doubt that these chimneys compromise the geometric simplicity of the 18th-century architecture. The extent to which they do so is a matter of opinion but it seems strange to seek conserve these isolated out-of-keeping additions only to adhere to a theory about the retention of all changes in the history of a place.

Considering Historic England's concern that the removal of the chimneys "would instead compromise evidence and legibility of the Victorian phase of the building", it is highly doubtful that anyone seeking to view the classical and architectural significance of this building would seek out, try to 'read', or even understand that these odd chimneys were a deliberate attempt to make minimal nineteenth-century change legible or evidentiary. Conservation is for the public and the remarkable survival of an almost complete representation of Georgian architecture is not only how the building is universally described ('one of the most architecturally authentic 18th century country houses in England', *Country Life*) but will be the primary, if not only, point of interest to any member of the public. I doubt very much visitors or interested observers will visit to see 'the most architecturally authentic 18th country house *with some Victorian remnants on the roof*'. If evidence is required, surely only for historians, it is well recorded and it is possible to retain, behind the parapet, clear evidence of chimneys in this location.

Other reasons given by Historic England for their preservation are: ventilation and the possible re-use of the fireplaces. If there ever were to be an intention to use fireplaces again in these rooms, better to join them to the original flues, from which they were undoubtedly removed. This would be more likely to preserve the condition of the original flues than leaving them closed and capped. Ventilation is a simple technical matter that can be solved inconspicuously by this and many other means.

There are also good practical reasons for their removal. Built across valley gutters they create blockages that have already caused internal damage. Their high slenderness ratio requires regular maintenance as any decay in the condition of the mortar would make them vulnerable to collapse in high winds. Both problems can be avoided by active management but, as anyone dealing with historic buildings will know, this cannot be guaranteed into the future, however responsible the current owner may be. Better to avoid the problems unless there is a compelling reason for conservation – which as above I do not believe there to be.

Finally, although this is not a reason in planning law and formal evaluation, I would be remiss not ask that the intention and actions of the current owner and applicant be put into the balance of consideration.

The house has been threatened since 1992 by alternative uses. It is generally acknowledged that the use of an historic building is an important, if intangible, aspect of its conservation. However accurate a restoration may be, use as an hotel, club, office, auditorium, or wedding party venue would change the character of the building significantly. With Mr Jones personally in residence with ambitions to restore a great deal of the Georgian interior, while, as in the 19th century, make some small adaptations (mostly on the upper floors) for modern living, is unquestionably very positive for the future of the house. With historic buildings, regrettable compromises, poor execution and financial insecurity are common. Dedication to high quality restoration through personal commitment with substantial personal funding is rare and should be viewed positively and supported.

Yours sincerely,

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Professor Robert Adam, PhD Dip Arch RIBA FRSA FRIAS