

A N T H O N Y D E L A R U E A S S O C I A T E S
• C H A R T E R E D A R C H I T E C T S •

AD/

3 November 2016

Sir Edward Leigh MP
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

Dear Sir Edward,

It was a great pleasure to see you again last Wednesday, and to have a most fascinating tour of the basement services of the Palace. As requested, I outline below my various thoughts upon the current proposals for the Restoration and Renewal of the Palace of Westminster.

I must say, despite the dire warnings of decay, I was most impressed by the competence and technical professionalism of our guides, and the general good order and maintenance of the services, which do credit to the engineering and maintenance staff.

I am an architect in private practice, with experience of mid-19th century buildings, including churches, which in a much more compact scale share many of the problem the Palace now faces, including the frequent need to maintain safe public access during building works and renewal of mechanical services. I am acting in this context pro-bono, through my interest in this project and long-standing appreciation of the buildings, and have no financial involvement beyond that of a taxpayer.

1. Current situation

- 1.1. Notwithstanding the evident excellence of the maintenance referred to above, there is no doubt, as has been expressed in the various reports, that the whole M&E installation is a disaster waiting to happen, a ticking bomb in which one can have no idea of its eventual victim; it could be a complete failure of electrical power to one of the Houses, or an explosion in the steam heating system. However well built an installation may be, it only has a certain life-span, and this has already been long exceeded in most fields in the Palace.
- 1.2. In recent years essential replacement and maintenance works have been carried out to the tune of about £73M. Much of this will be capable of reuse in the renewal programme.

2. The way forward

- 2.1. There are three broad approaches to the way forward, identified in the reports as 'Scenarios E1, 2 and 3'. Within the second and third of these are subdivisions of detail, which need not concern this broad overview.
- 2.2. The first, 'Scenario E1' foresees the work being carried out in much the manner in which ongoing maintenance has been carried out to date, over a long period, namely the division of the Palace into 12 zones, to be carried out piecemeal while the building remains in use. These works would take 40 to 50 years. The objection must be that it is not so much a bad idea as that it will not in fact work at all. The life-cycle of most of the new plant is around 25 to 30 years, so the first phases would need renewing long before all the planned work was complete, the dog biting his tail. As a technical level it would necessarily leave in place most of the haphazard and antiquated design arrangement of the services, leading to loss of flexibility and safety in maintenance, inefficiency and increased running costs. I must advise strongly against any consideration of this approach.
- 2.3. The second approach, 'Scenario 2', is to divide the Palace into two halves, more or less the Lords and Commons. One half would then be used by the Commons while the other was being worked upon. This approach would be likely to take ten or twelve years, very probably running on for longer as unforeseen problems arose. While this approach is workable, it has many disadvantages, the most significant being that the need to maintain the half which remains functioning during the first part of the works will seriously limit the scope for a wholesale technical redesign, and will build into the completed new services many of the inefficiencies of the present haphazard installation. This will impact upon efficiency, and the ease and safety of ongoing maintenance. There will be a very high investment in temporary services, and, even to the most experienced engineer, the overall scope will remain an unknown quantity until it becomes possible to open up after works begin. This is exactly the sort of approach which leads to spiralling costs and timescale. At an administrative level it means that half-way through the project there would be a second round of musical chairs within the Palace, into newly refurbished but temporarily fitted-out rooms. In my view future generations would look back on this as a regrettable compromise and a missed opportunity.
- 2.4. The third option, 'Scenario 3', looks to remove all the services at one go, and renew them wholesale. Ostensibly this closes the entire Palace, and strips the building back to the condition in which Sir Charles Barry left it. This approach allows the mechanical, electrical and technological systems to be redesigned to suit precisely the needs of the modern Parliament, maximizing efficiency in fuel use, and ensuring, as much as is possible within the existing structure, an installation which will allow ease of future maintenance and space to provide flexibility for future servicing requirements.
- 2.5. There is no doubt at all that this represents the most mature approach, and properly executed, the one for which future generations will be grateful. Nevertheless, this is still a duration longer than a single parliament and thus if all the functions of the House were removed from the Palace it would result in some Members never actually sitting in the Commons chamber, and the returning Parliament containing a sizeable proportion

of Members who had never known the building, nor those customs of the House which are inextricably attached to the building.

- 2.6. Nevertheless, while the building is complex, the services are by their nature behind the scenes, and there are important areas which would remain relatively untouched by the works going on around them. I address below (in paragraph 5) certain wider observations about how it this approach to the works may be put into effect without a complete evacuation of both Houses from the building.

3. Impact of the works

- 3.1. Whichever approach is adopted, as with any such project, the works will involve substantial removal of fabric to gain access to the services: panelling, ceilings, panel paintings (canvases as opposed to murals) etc. These will need to be carefully removed and recorded, and it is important that they are replaced using traditional techniques and skills, to avoid any long-term damage to the integrity of the historic structure. The works will also allow later unfortunate accretions to be removed, as identified in the various reports, and also permit improvements in less sensitive areas, such as the upper level offices. New work should ideally be executed within the spirit of Pugin and Barry's design, to leave the Palace with the dignity and harmony it merits.
- 3.2. It must be accepted that the recent restoration of the Pugin wallpapers in many committee rooms and elsewhere will suffer, and it is to be hoped that these will again be reproduced by the traditional hand-printed methods and restored. Thankfully such skills exist.
- 3.3. The various reports foresee a renewal of the external stonework where it is decayed, and it is good that this opportunity be taken to carry out as much conservation work as possible when disruption to the normal workings of Parliament will be minimal. It is not necessary to renew all areas at once, but ideally this fabric renewal would be built into a long-term rolling programme of continued maintenance (see my paragraph 7).
- 3.4. This restoration work will have the additional benefit of necessitating the training of specialist building crafts, much as happened after the Windsor fire, which will be to the future benefit of the building industry and the wider economy.

4. Cultural perspective

- 4.1. Motivated as it has been by the more mundane considerations of maintenance and mechanical services, this project of major works of renewal differs greatly from its two predecessors, namely Barry's rebuilding of the Palace after the fire of 1834 and the rebuilding of the Commons after the Second World War. Both of those were periods of great pride in the traditions of Parliament, attacked by outside events, accompanied by a desire on the part of everyone involved to preserve and enhance those traditions.
- 4.2. This is not the case today, where various voices within and beyond Parliament may call for a new approach, the abandonment of those things held of value in the past, and for solutions which may relegate the Palace of Westminster to a museum of things past, a

mere tourist destination, divorced from the legislative life of the country. One would argue that this would have a dramatic and deleterious effect upon the continuity and character of Parliament and of the whole of the government of this country. The likelihood of this argument gaining ground will increase with the length of time the Houses are absent from the building.

5. Temporary Accommodation within the Palace

- 5.1. To this end, one would propose a solution, which seems perfectly workable if all are willing to collaborate, whereby both Houses remain on site within the Palace in those areas which by their constructional nature (mostly stone walls full height, the grander public spaces) are significantly devoid of services. This is alluded to, but not specified, in 'Scenario 3C'. These areas are: Westminster Hall, St Stephen's Hall, the Central Lobby, the Lords Corridor, the Lords Chamber and the Royal Gallery (and occasionally the Robing Room and the steps of the Victoria Tower entrance). All the services in these areas, apart from electricity, are run externally to them, and thus they will be but little affected during construction.
- 5.2. These areas may readily be securely separated from the rest of the building, allowing linear safe access for members from Portcullis House via the cloister of New Palace Yard. The contractors would retain unimpeded access to all other areas. It is imperative that the internal courts are left within the contractors' realm, any impinging upon them would seriously compromise the efficiency of the works.
- 5.3. One would suggest that the Commons under this arrangement would use the Lords Chamber, and the Lords the Royal Gallery, suitably fitted out with temporary raked bench seating, in much the way as it is prepared for the State Opening. I append a photomontage illustrating this.
- 5.4. This arrangement would further permit the State Opening to continue with the minimal necessary disruption to its customs.
- 5.5. Temporary canteens, lavatories, and if needed some office or committee space could be erected in temporary buildings in Old Palace Yard and possibly even Abingdon Street Gardens. Indeed even a secure tunnel under Abingdon Street would be vastly more economical than the proposals for removing to the Department of Health or the QEII Conference Centre.

6. Means of delivery of the contract

- 6.1. Having witnessed the excellent nature of the Engineering Department, I would caution against giving complete oversight of this engineering project to external consultants reporting directly to a Committee. A building of this age and nature is extremely complex and takes a lifetime to understand. To remove those who through long experience have developed this understanding from feeding into the design would be very foolish. The nature of large engineering consulting firms, however excellent and qualified, is to bring the standard methods of the age to bear across all project, thereby missing the opportunity for a subtler approach geared directly to a building's strengths

and weaknesses. This suggested more in-house method is likely to bring many economies, both in execution and ongoing running costs, as well as minimizing disruption to the historic fabric.

7. Ongoing maintenance

- 7.1. It is to be hoped that the opportunity would be taken on this occasion, to avoid a repetition of the present situation in fifty years time, to make a serious financial commitment to a programme of ongoing maintenance, the Forth Rail Bridge principle. Notwithstanding the amusing sense of *déjà-vu* in looking at previous reports of committee discussions on the fabric of the Palace since the 1830s, it is essential to break away from the very British problem of committing to large capital expenditure without identifying long-term funding for continued maintenance. While we can take great pride in our ability to muddle along in the face of adversity, modern technological services are far less tolerant of this approach.

8. New uses with the Palace

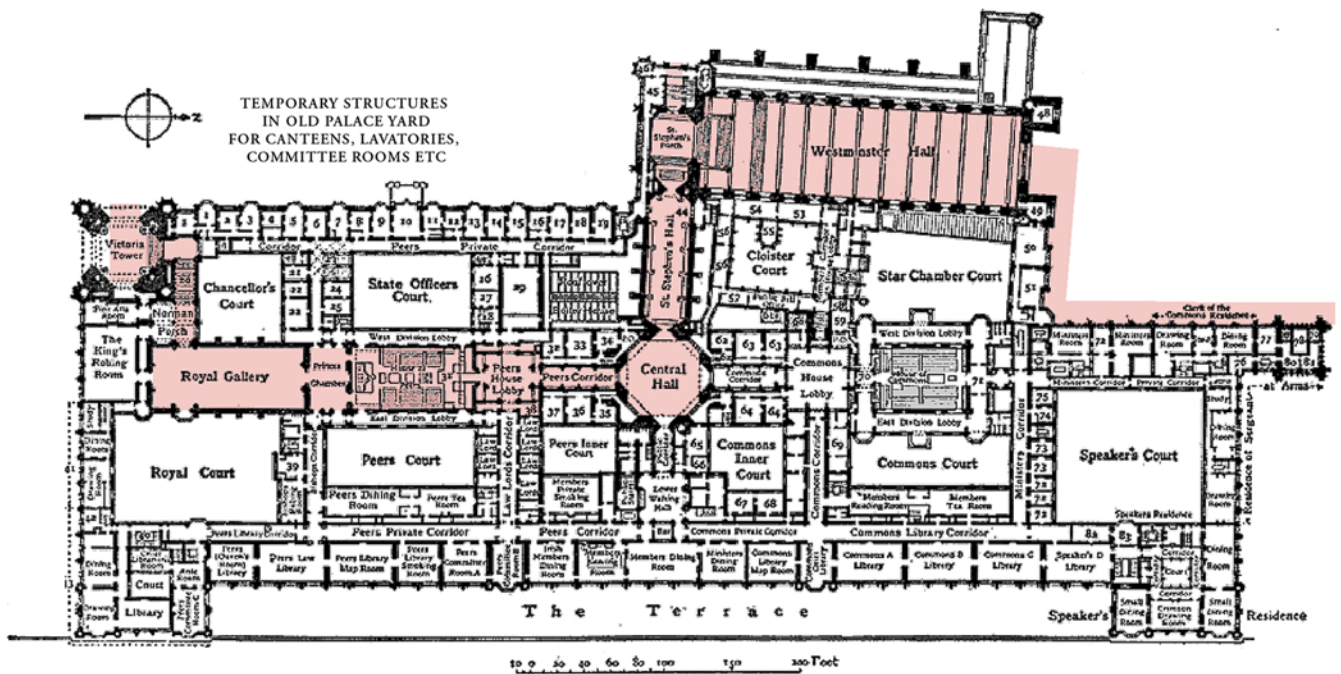
- 8.1. As part of the various opportunities which a single-project approach offers, 'Scenario 3C' proposes new and enhanced facilities with the refurbished Palace. Whilst it would be desirable on historical grounds, for instance, to open up access to Cloister Court, I believe care should be taken about wider applications of roofing-in the various courts. It often seems good sense to make full use of all the space, but the negative impact upon those rooms which look into these courts, both from considerations of amenity and ventilation, should be considered, as well as the impact upon surrounding service areas of admitting much larger numbers of people. A roofed in courtyard become an 'atrium', and those rooms with windows opening into these courts become effectively internal spaces. Such seemingly efficient use of 'backland space' is rarely without its major drawbacks.

I trust these notes are of use, and should be very happy to discuss them further.

Yours sincerely,



A M J L Delarue



PLAN OF PALACE OF WESTMINSTER SHOWING THE PROPOSED AREAS TO BE KEPT IN USE
BY BOTH HOUSES DURING THE RESTORATION AND RENEWAL PROGRAMME



PHOTOMONTAGE OF ROYAL GALLERY SET UP TEMPORARILY
FOR USE AS THE LORDS CHAMBER