

PRESS RELEASE: Monday 28th January 2023

The Gardens Trust statement on Victoria Tower Gardens

The Gardens Trust is deeply disappointed by Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's declaration that his Government intends to repeal the legal protections afforded to Victoria Tower Gardens a public park adjacent to the Houses of Parliament. Five successive Conservative Governments have failed to fulfil the promise of the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, to create a permanent Holocaust Memorial for the United Kingdom. The intention was to do this within the lifetimes of survivors. The delay will mean that it is unlikely that few if any survivors will still be alive when the memorial is finished.

The determination to build the memorial on this unique public green space is a mistake. The Gardens Trust wholly supports the creation of a national Holocaust memorial, but this is the wrong site. Successive governments could at any time have sought to circumvent the planning process and proceed by legislative amendment to remove the legal protection afforded to Victoria Tower Gardens. They chose not to do so. Now having failed through the planning process, this Government seeks to achieve its end by reverting to legislation. The ultimate decision, though rests not with Government but with Parliament. It will require majority support in both Houses, with the potential risk of further delay and uncertainty. Peter Hughes KC, Chairman of the Gardens Trust says: "The history of delay and prevarication on this sensitive matter is lamentable. The urgent need now is to find a more suitable site for a national memorial to commemorate the appalling suffering of all those who lost their lives in the Holocaust. Sadly, few of those who suffered and survived will now live to see its completion."

The Grade 2 listed park provides invaluable public green space in the heart of London, serving local people and tourists since its creation in the 19th century. Its main lawns would be taken up by this huge new monument, altering the use as a public park irrevocably. Additionally, Victoria Tower Gardens unquestionably forms a key part of the setting for the Palace of Westminster and Westminster Abbey World Heritage Site. In addition, it contains various listed memorials including the Pankhurst statue (Grade II) commemorating women's fight for the vote, the Burghers of Calais sculpture by Rodin (Grade 1), and the Buxton Memorial (Grade 2*) marking the legislation that brought about the abolition of slavery, all of which would be overshadowed by the size of the proposals.

Westminster Council refused the original planning application, but this was called in by the then housing minister (Esther McVey) in November 2019. The planning inspectorate, the developer and the decision-maker all came under the auspices of the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. The first legal challenge questioning the neutrality of the decision-taker was partially successful but the subsequent planning inquiry led to a recommendation by the Planning Inspector for the project to proceed. The then Housing Minister, Christopher Pincher, supported the Planning Inspector's recommendation to give permission. Helen Monger, the Director of London Parks & Gardens, working closely with the Save Victoria Tower Gardens Campaign team, continued to campaign fiercely to protect the gardens and took this to the High Court in April 2021. The Judge quashed the Planning Permission, but the Government, undeterred, asked to Appeal against this decision in April 2022. In July the court's order came back refusing permission to appeal, based on the London County Council (Improvements) Act which "*imposes an enduring obligation to lay out and retain the... land for use as a public garden and integral part of the existing Victoria Tower Gardens*".

Join the Gardens Trust: thegardenstrust.org/join/

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Notes for editors

About the Gardens Trust

The Gardens Trust is the UK national charity dedicated to protecting and conserving our heritage of designed landscapes. We campaign on their behalf, undertake research and conservation work, and encourage public appreciation and involvement. The Gardens Trust is also a statutory consultee in the English planning system, responding to thousands of planning proposals affecting registered parks, gardens and landscapes every year. Through the national network of County and Country Garden Trusts, we have access to people and local expertise throughout the country. The Gardens Trust is also a membership organisation which relies on members and donors to support our work. thegardenstrust.org