

**Date:** 30 January 2025

**Your Reference:**

**Our Reference:**

**Enquiries to:** Fiona Davies



Post only:  
Planning Policy and Implementation,  
Economy, Regeneration & Investment,  
London Borough of Camden  
Town Hall  
Judd Street  
London WC1H 9JE.

Phone: 020 7974 4034

E-mail:  
[communityrighttobid@camden.gov.uk](mailto:communityrighttobid@camden.gov.uk)  
[www.camden.gov.uk](http://www.camden.gov.uk)

Central London Investments Limited and Zedwell North Oxford  
Street Limited  
c/o Ronald Baker Fletcher solicitors (sent via email)

Dear Sir / Madam

**Central YMCA Club, 112 Great Russell Street, London, WC1B 3NQ**

Following our previous correspondence on 23rd December 2024, I am writing to inform you that the nomination for **the Central YMCA Club** as an Asset of Community Value has been successful. The listing relates to the premises as currently occupied by the Central YMCA Club for the purposes of operating the leisure club on the ground floor to the lower levels of 112 Great Russell Street.

The legislation (also known as the "community right to bid") allows defined community groups to ask the council to list certain assets as being of "community value". The Council must accept the nomination if the property has been nominated by an eligible community group and if it meets the criteria for community value as set out in the legislation. The legislation imposes certain restrictions on the sale of a property which has been listed as an asset of community value. These are summarised in this letter.

The nomination was made by an unincorporated community body, the Charlotte Street Association, which is an eligible group that meets the statutory requirements for making nominations in accordance with section 5 of the Asset of Community Value (England) Regulations 2012. Further comments on the eligibility of the nominating body are set out below in response to correspondence received from Ronald Fletcher Baker solicitors.

Based on the information provided as part of the nomination and our own investigations, we are satisfied that The Central YMCA Club meets the criteria in the legislation for an asset of community value. The first part of this letter sets out the reasons why the Council considers that the Central YMCA Club meets the criteria for designation as an Asset of Community Value. Following this we address the points raised by Central London Investments Limited and Zedwell North Oxford Street Limited.

Executive Director -  
Supporting Communities  
Gillian Marston

In the opinion of the local authority:

- The Central YMCA Club supports the social and physical wellbeing of the local community, providing a nurturing environment for a wide range of individuals and community groups.

### **Support for the Central YMCA Club**

- The ACV nomination for the Central YMCA Club has received widespread support. There have been 90 testimonials detailing the importance of the club to people's lives. Separate to this is an ongoing petition in support of the club's retention which at the time of writing had attracted in excess of 7,000 signatures. The Central YMCA is believed to have in excess of 3,500 members and supports a rich and diverse range of classes and activities across sports, leisure and cultural interests. The testimonials include letters from course providers and volunteers that have been involved in the planning and delivery of activities and classes.
- There is an evident concern in the testimonials that people will lose access to a facility that they consider forms a vital part of their lives due to the contribution it makes to their physical and psychological wellbeing. The Central YMCA offers a unique and rich blend of community, sports and educational benefits. It has endured for decades, in part to the highly accessible Central London location, but also due to the size and layout of the facility resulting in something described by one respondent as unparalleled in terms of "the extent and depth of range – from the basic infrastructure, rooms, classes and coaches/trainers etc."

### **Supporting mental health and wellbeing and preventing social isolation**

- Numerous letters point to the club being an inclusive and affordable hub for fitness and friendship and arts and culture, offering what for many is an unpretentious, safe and welcoming space. The Central YMCA club has built up over many years its own dedicated community (many having been members since the premises was opened in the mid-1970s). It is described as an environment where the local community can meet up and socialise and a setting where mutual support and encouragement are plentiful. One testimonial describes the club as a "space where people of all ages, backgrounds" can "connect, learn and grow". For another respondent, the "camaraderie, care and variety of classes are unparalleled". Another commented that the Central YMCA is "a kind of surrogate workplace to go and meet friends and colleagues for social and general banter which is so important to retain when you retire and grow older". The Central YMCA is evidently used by people of all ages and walks of life, with a number of testimonials pointing to the opportunities to meet people outside of one's own age group. Another respondent remarked on the cultural richness of Central YMCA, bringing people of different backgrounds together from all over the world.
- Many local community groups meet and interact at the club. However, for some people it has gone beyond this and is described as a lifeline that has helped with rehabilitation after serious illness. It is evidently a resource helping people of all ages to maintain their physical fitness and mental wellbeing and has a role in preventing or delaying the onset of health challenges. The responses show that the

Central YMCA is a place for human connection that helps to counteract the anonymity and isolation that can be associated with city life. For the elderly, the vulnerable, excluded or people living with health conditions, the Central YMCA club is described as offering “society, fellowship and a sense of purpose and belonging”. Numerous respondents echo these concerns commenting on a pervasive sense of loneliness in the London Borough of Camden, a role which the Central YMCA club is seen as helping to challenge. LB Camden’s ‘We Make Camden’ strategy seeks to ensure that “no one in Camden is socially isolated without the means to connect to their community”, responding to the identification in 2019/20 that over one third of all adults in the Borough were experiencing feeling lonely. For some of the respondents, the Central YMCA club provides a sense of purpose and connection; friendships have been forged and in some cases users of the facility, including members of the local community, will have benefitted socially from the facility’s presence over the decades it has been open.

- Many respondents reported on their impressions of the Central YMCA being a safe and convivial space providing a service and general atmosphere quite distinct from many ‘standard’ standalone gyms in Central London, which were seen as being geared almost entirely to competitive fitness and a younger age cohort. It is apparent that other community spaces in the wider Central London area are simply too small or unable to support the range of activities provided from the Central YMCA club.

### **Supporting rehabilitation and promoting wellbeing**

- Local hospitals, such as University Hospital London, GPs and physiotherapists have referred people to the health and wellbeing programmes at the Central YMCA as part of their recovery from cancers, strokes, cardiac arrest and muscle and bone injuries.
- The Positive health program at the Central YMCA started in 1997 and provides exercise programmes and support for people living with HIV. A testimonial from the organiser of ‘Different Strokes’ comments on the services provided at the club for stroke survivors, enabling people to rebuild confidence and regain independence, while improving their quality of life through peer support / shared experience.
- A testimonial from ‘Transformation Partners in Health and Care’ describes how the club has facilitated career choices around fitness, while other respondents comment on how service users have gone on to become volunteers/trainers. Programmes such as ‘Sports Leaders of the Future’ are based upon breaking down barriers and increasing accessibility for young people, building independence and confidence.
- The Central YMCA is able to support a range of sports including badminton and basketball, circuit training and high intensity fitness classes. The size of the pool means more than one group activity can be supported at any one time. There is also a wide range of other classes and activities which bring people together including aerobics, dance workshops, foreign language courses, yoga, pilates, meditation, sports massage, tai-chi, martial arts, and arts and crafts classes (ceramics/pottery and photography). There are also weight management courses and first aid classes.

- The Club has developed links with a range of local schools, facilitating PE classes and swimming lessons.

### **A vibrant place for interaction and family-friendly**

- The Central YMCA is a long-standing sports, leisure and social centre that is used by thousands of people. It provides a health and well-being and social function for its members, catering for the very young to the very old and its membership is open to all.
- Many people explain that the breadth of activities that take place at the centre provides an opportunity to interact with a range of user groups. It is the integration of so many services that makes Central YMCA “a rare space” where “programmes, activities, equipment, brilliant/empathetic people and resources” come together. Described as being ‘more than just a gym’, the Central YMCA is an unusual hybrid combining elements of both a sports and community centre.
- The breadth of the ‘offer’ means that families are welcome and are able to do the same activities or separate activities in the same place. Respondents have commented that the club provides a safe and non-threatening environment for women.
- There are several after school club activities that take place at the Central YMCA and holiday clubs are arranged. The Central YMCA is able to offer childcare for members of the local community during the day.
- The Central YMCA’s offer includes The Older Adults Programme which helps many hundreds of users, including members of the local community, to maintain their fitness and to live independently. A number of testimonials state that other leisure facilities are not able to offer such a supportive environment. Exercise classes are offered promoting strength and conditioning but tailored around the needs of users.

A number of LB Camden Councillors representing the Bloomsbury and Holborn & Covent Garden wards have written in support of the Central YMCA club being designated as an ACV.

The Council has also received a representation on behalf of Central London Investments Ltd and Zedwell North Oxford Street Ltd. We deal with the substantive points raised by this under the sub-headings below for ease of reference.

### ***Notification of relevant parties***

The Council considers that a robust approach has been followed. Regulation 8 of the Asset of Community Value Regulations 2012 states that the local authority should “*take all practicable steps to give information that it is considering listing the land to (amongst others): (b) the owner of the land; (c) where the owner is not the freeholder – (i) the holder of the freehold estate and (ii) the holder of any leasehold estate in the land other than the owner; and (iii) any lawful occupant of the land*”.

In this case, the Council consulted Land Registry to identify the land interests applicable. At the time of consulting the Land Registry titles, no reference/contact details were available for Zedwell North Oxford Street Ltd. As well as sending notification letters to all the parties listed on the associated Land Registry titles, the Council sent a notification direct to the property. We assume this was received by the Central YMCA club, although they have not made a representation regarding the nomination. We would in any case expect the Central YMCA to pass the correspondence onto other parties with a relevant land interest. We note that Zedwell North Oxford Street Ltd has received the notification since they have instructed solicitors to make representations on the nomination. Therefore, we consider that the notification arrangements have been effective and were sufficient in this case and the Council did what was reasonably necessary to ensure parties with land interests were made aware of the nomination.

### ***Eligibility/qualifications of the nominating body***

The letter raises a number of issues about the nominating body's eligibility for submitting the nomination to Camden Council. Para. 3.7 states that the nomination form does not indicate whether the Charlotte Street Association (CSA) considers itself to be an unincorporated body: it is asserted that the applicable box was not ticked. The Council has referred back to the completed nomination form supplied by CSA which appears to show that the relevant box was 'blacked out' rather than ticked. In the Council's opinion, this is sufficient for anyone reading the nomination form to establish that the CSA has provided the Council with the relevant information regarding the type of organisation it considers itself to be.

The letter also draws attention to the fact that no constitution or rules have been submitted to demonstrate that the Charlotte Street Association is an unincorporated body. The Council agrees that these can be potential means of ascertaining whether a group is an unincorporated body but there is no express requirement in the legislation or regulations for these documents to be submitted as part of the nomination. The Council also considers that there is a sufficient degree of formality in the structure of this group consistent with its description as a "body". The Council has been aware of the existence of the Charlotte Street Association for many years in terms of their status as a stakeholder in the local area. The organisation has previously successfully submitted a nomination for a property in LB Camden to be designated as an asset of community value. The CSA has an established local role in responding to licensing and planning applications, mostly concerning schemes in LB Camden (and also in some instances in LB Westminster which is unsurprising given the community group operates in an area close to the Camden/Westminster boundary). We are therefore aware of their responses to public consultations relating to matters in this area and their general activities as a key local stakeholder in the Borough.

We also understand that the CSA holds Annual General Meetings at which matters concerning the governance and running of the organisation can be raised by local residents. We consider that the structure and purpose of the organisation is similar to many other community organisations operating in Camden which are about place-based matters and maintaining the quality of life and wellbeing of residents through acting as a 'voice' on their behalf.

It is worth considering where the term 'unincorporated body' has been considered in previous cases brought to the First-Tier Tribunal. For example, in Hawthorn Leisure

Acquisitions Ltd v Northumberland County Council, the Tribunal held that the unincorporated body did not need a formal constitution or even a name. The Tribunal commented: “...[A] local action group, forming itself perhaps for the specific purpose of making a community nomination, is not expected to turn its mind immediately to the drawing up of a formal constitution or set of rules or even to give itself a name before making a nomination. The requirement for 21 local individuals is sufficient to indicate strength of feeling”. We also note that in the case of Mendoza Ltd v London Borough of Camden that “The legislation does not require the group to be an unincorporated association, involving contractual obligations as between its members, or to be an unincorporated body whose membership is capable of being comprehensively identified. The nomination in the present case was made by 21 identified individuals, who had organised themselves into a group with the common purpose of nominating the Carpenters Arms as an asset of community value”.

The letter also queries the absence of accounts. While the Council considers this may be relevant to establishing the credentials of an unincorporated body in some cases, this is again not an express requirement in the Act or regulations. The CSA confirms it does not take financial subscriptions from members, whether at its annual general meeting or from any other source. As a consequence, there is no surplus to distribute. The Council therefore consider provision of accounts is not relevant in this instance. For avoidance of doubt, we also do not believe it is necessary for Articles of Association to be provided in order to establish the group’s eligibility to nominate, though organisations may wish to provide these to the local authority where they exist.

### ***Whether there are 21 members with a local connection***

The letter queried whether the CSA has 21 members and asserts that the owners have been denied access to this information to properly establish whether they have a local connection. We have previously made you aware in writing that the Council has been provided with a list of 21 individuals by the CSA and that officers have engaged with our Electoral Services team for the purposes of establishing that the 21 individuals live in LB Camden and that each person is eligible to vote in local government elections. We consider that the approach taken is robust.

Given this information has been supplied to us by a third party (the CSA) on behalf of the 21 individuals, the Council cannot be certain whether the individuals concerned have given their consent/been made aware of the possibility that their data might be shared. Had such a request been made earlier for this specific information, the Council could have investigated what advice the nominator had given to the 21 individuals regarding the use of their data. As an alternative remedy, we would be able to supply a statement from our Electoral Services colleagues that the verification has been robustly undertaken. The officers in that service are not in any way involved in the wider assessment of ACV nominations.

### ***The club use ancillary to the primary use of the land as a hostel***

The Council does not agree with the contention that the Central YMCA is an exempt property on the basis of a historic use of the land. In the Council’s view, the club cannot be subservient or subordinate to a use that no longer exists (and has not existed at the site for many years). The Council considers that the Central YMCA is sufficiently independent

of any other uses located within the wider building/block in which the club is situated. Based on the testimonials, users of the facility visit the Central YMCA for the health, leisure and community benefits it provides - there is no mention of people using any other services that might be provided more widely by the YMCA.

The Central YMCA is a significant community, sports and leisure facility in Central London which serves as a destination in its own right. The local community visits the Central YMCA primarily for the recreational, health, sports and community activities provided (e.g. ceramics classes, socialising etc.). There is no evidence that users of the facility are accessing overnight accommodation even on the most occasional basis. The nomination form refers to the extent of the club [which in the Council's view would reasonably be expected to include back of house areas such as equipment stores or small office spaces for managers/trainers]. We consider that the Central YMCA club is physically and functionally separate from the wider building. Further, the Central YMCA club has operated in its current layout/form over a number of years. References to hostel accommodation are not relevant and therefore the property is not exempt from listing as an ACV on the basis it has a residential use.

### ***Current and future lack of viability***

The letter refers to the financial pressures experienced by the Central YMCA and argues that based upon the recent financial performance of the club that alternative facilities of a similar nature, including a more commercial-based facility, would be unable to operate from the premises in the next five years in a financially sustainable way. It is further argued that the condition of the premises and its equipment, the accessibility standards of the property and challenges around reducing energy use are likely barriers for any alternative operators coming forward to run a club at this site. Without significant improvements, it is alleged that the facility will fail to attract sufficient users/members to cover its operating costs.

As part of our assessment, the Council is not required to assess the effect of the listing on viability. We consider that there is a possibility that the club could potentially be run in a different way commensurate with it being financially viable. It is appreciated that Central YMCA has operated at the site for many years and an experienced operator in their own right but the evidence submitted is not conclusive that another operator would be unable to operate the facility successfully. The letter does not feature any evidence from other leisure providers or consider in any detail other operating models.

The Council accepts that there could be future viability challenges, particularly if the premises continued to operate in exactly the same way it has done recently, and that theoretically, the premises may be unable to attract another operator. We also accept that there may be a need to upgrade plant and equipment at the premises and deal with the shortcomings of the premises in terms of accessibility and sustainability and that rectifying these matters may be highly expensive. However, these are matters that need to be tested through the planning process. However, the degree of interest of alternative operators and/or the ability of such operators to invest in the premises (and address the shortcomings) is uncertain. Therefore, we conclude it remains at the present time realistic to think that a similar or alternative use could operate from the premises in the next 5 years. We also note from the testimonials provided that some existing users of the Central YMCA club believe different management / a operating model may be commensurate with improving the facility's financial performance.

For the reasons set out above, the Council considers there is substantial evidence to demonstrate that the Central YMCA furthers the social wellbeing and the social interests of the local community.

**The Central YMCA Club, 112 Great Russell Street**, will therefore be added to the list of assets of community value on the Council's website at [www.camden.gov.uk/acv](http://www.camden.gov.uk/acv) and it will stay on the list for up to five years starting from the date shown on this decision letter. In addition we will also place this asset on the local land charges register and will apply for a restriction on the Land Register.

In accordance with statutory requirements, if you intend to sell the asset, you must inform the Council in writing. Once you have informed us, you must not sell the asset for 6 weeks. If within 6 weeks of our receipt of your notification of intent to sell, the Council receives a written request to be treated as a potential bidder from the nominating organisation or any other Community Interest Group, then a full moratorium comes into effect: a period of six months from the original notification to us of your intent to sell. If we do not receive a written request from a potential bidder, then the asset is no longer subject to restrictions on its sale.

The purpose of the six month moratorium is to allow the community time to raise funds to purchase the asset at market value. Please note that the legislation does not prevent you from selling the asset to whoever you choose at the end of the six month moratorium period.

You have the right to appeal against the decision to list the asset within eight weeks of the date of this letter. Further details are available on our website at [www.camden.gov.uk/acv](http://www.camden.gov.uk/acv).

If the appeal is successful, the asset will be moved to the list of unsuccessful nominations. The intention of this is to ensure transparency and to avoid multiple nominations of an asset that does not meet the definition.

Please do not hesitate to contact the Planning Policy Team if you wish to discuss this further or if we can be of any assistance with this process. If you require further information on assets of community value in Camden please visit the website: [www.camden.gov.uk/acv](http://www.camden.gov.uk/acv).

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dan Pope', written in a cursive style.

Dan Pope  
Chief Planning Officer  
Supporting Communities