

From: Ian Hayes

Sent: 31 August 2023 12:34

To: Camden Council

Cc: David Fowler

Subject: Planning Applications 2023/2510P and 2023/2653L 1. Museum Street

I object to these applications for the following reasons:-

1. The major part of this site contains Selkirk House a substantial former office tower built for Trust House Forte as their office HQ, it is out of scale with its surroundings being substantially taller than the majority of nearby buildings and towering over the smaller scale adjacent 19th Century buildings of the Bloomsbury Conservation area.

A replacement which is even taller should be unthinkable but the actual proposal is not only substantially taller but much more bulky, it fails to achieve the 'elegant' approach which might have mitigated its impact.

2. The site lies between important conservation area, Bloomsbury to the North, Covent Garden and Seven Dials to the South. The Bloomsbury Conservation Area is one of the most important in the UK and contains buildings of international importance such as the British Museum, St Georges Church and Bedford Square.

The impact of an excessively tall and bulbous new building which will loom over the mansion blocks which line Great Russell Street when viewed from the steps of the British Museum portico will detract from the experience of countless visitors from around the world.

3. Part of the site bounded by West Central Street, Museum Street and New Oxford Street lies within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. It also contains a number of listed buildings. The detailed proposals for altering the listed buildings are insensitive and fail to follow good conservation practice which would minimise alterations and internal reorganisation, the positioning of a new deck behind the listed West Central Street buildings is particularly unfortunate.

The corner building 16/16a West Central Street which makes a positive contribution to the conservation area is to be demolished and replaced with a much taller structure which is out of scale with the much lower adjacent buildings and will have a damaging impact, the loss of this building with its interesting working equestrian history should be resisted.

The most egregious impact on the neighbouring listed buildings will be the grossly overbearing impact of the new office tower.

4. The proposal fails to comply with Camdens climate change policies and objectives such as the declared Climate Change Emergency.

It similarly fails to comply with National (NPPF) and Local (The GLA London Plan) policies relating to sustainability and climate change.

Save Museum Street have commissioned a report from Targeting Zero, acknowledged experts in the field, which raises fundamental questions about the justifications and figures submitted in support of the proposal and concludes that the application is flawed and unreliable in this respect.

Failing to insist on a refurbishment or retrofit solution for this site would be a dereliction of duty by the LPA and demonstrate a cynical disregard for the commitments made to make progress towards a zero carbon future for Camden and London.

5. The demolition of Selkirk House would not only waste tens of thousands of tons of carbon dioxide but would blight the locality for a long period having an adverse impact on the quality of life and health of many local residents and numerous visitors.

This demolition is unnecessary and the case for demolition has not been proved, it should be resisted.

6. New housing forms part of this application but its value must be questioned as little will be truly affordable and most will be of a poor standard with grossly inadequate levels of natural light and having an outlook dominated by the overbearing new office tower.

7. A proposed new pedestrian link, Vine Lane would lead from West Central Street to High Holborn at a point where the road is wide and often clogged with traffic, there is no pedestrian crossing point and the new pedestrian route therefore has little if any value.

The obvious pedestrian route to the British Museum from the South and Covent Garden is along Museum Street which leads directly on from Drury Lane.

Vine Lane would be too narrow and lacking in natural light to make a worthwhile contribution to the locality.

8. The recent Marks and Spencer Oxford Street decision by the Secretary of State to prevent the demolition of the existing building is part of a growing and important trend in favour of retrofit solutions. There are many similarities between the Oxford Street and Museum Street proposals and Camden should accept that the wasteful and unnecessary demolition of a sound building such as Selkirk House is wrong and put the council on the right side of history by refusing this application.

9. Alternative Approach. SMS have proposed an alternative approach for this site.

While I appreciate that Camden cannot consider an alternative scheme in the absence of a planning application it is nevertheless instructive to look at an imaginative and attractive alternative scheme which thoroughly debunks the argument that a refurbishment is not possible. There is scope for increasing the height and visual interest of the existing two storey podium block which forms part of Selkirk House and which is presently incongruous when viewed alongside the adjacent Cuban Embassy and Shaftesbury Theatre. For all of these reasons I urge that these applications be rejected.

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