

From: Peter Bloxham

Sent: 11 September 2023 14:38

To: Planning

Subject: Re: Composite Planning and Listed Building Applications (Composite Applications) in respect of proposals for the development of a series of plots bounded by High Holborn, Museum Street, New Oxford Street and West Central Street including Selkirk House

Re: Composite Planning and Listed Building Applications (*Composite Applications*) in respect of proposals for the development of a series of plots bounded by High Holborn, Museum Street, New Oxford Street and West Central Street including Selkirk House, Museum Street (formerly Travelodge) (now reference 2023/2510/P and (listed building) 2023/2653/L), originally Labtech application 2021/ 2954/ P)

This is an additional **objection** to the proposals contained in the Composite Applications.

It is specific to one particular component of the complex proposals which, despite a complete lack of commonality, have been bundled together for reasons best known to the applicant.

It relates to what the applicant describes as the Vine Lane Building, proposed to be erected next to the building at the junction of High Holborn and Grape Street (east side), which currently houses the Cuban Consulate.

For convenience, I include an image of proposed building, taken from the applicant's propaganda website. It is clear from the image that the Cuban Consulate building is a fine example, with good detailing, of the brick and terracotta structures which are a feature of Grape Street.

The new structure proposed by BC Partners would be on the edge of, if not actually inside (in part) the Bloomsbury Conservation Area.

The design proposed looks like a brutalist parody or pastiche of selected colours and features of the Cuban Embassy building. To erect such a structure would cause damage to the integrity of the architecture and environment of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area.

It is clear that an attempt has been made to seek to claim that BC Partners has paid lip service to the Cuban Consulate building, but without any respect for its scale, or overall appearance and impact.

For example:

- A very short section of the western part of the proposed High Holborn façade appears to be presented as following the roof line of the Cuban

Consulate building. A closer look shows that BC Partners are pretending that the building's chimney represents the roof line, so as to justify additional and excess height immediately next to the Cuban Consulate building. The actual roof line along High Holborn is actually considerably lower.

- BC Partners have not stopped there in terms of excess height. The proposed High Holborn facade rapidly increases in height, so that it would fail to respect the scale of the Cuban Consulate building. A few metres along, there is also a step up, with an additional storey added.
- Finally the eastern end of the proposed Vine Lane building has an absurd angular tower which would dominate the High Holborn facade. Curiously, the tower appears to cast no shadow in the applicant's image. It looks as if the eastern end of the Vine Lane Building would be two storeys higher than its neighbour the Cuban Consulate building. It is impossible to work out what impact this much higher structure would have on light levels in Grape Street and West Central Street.
- The proposed structure fails completely to respect or replicate the subtlety of the facings of the Cuban Consulate building, which has variations between brick and stone work. One of the characteristics of the structures in Grape Street, including the Cuban Consulate, is the use of curved window corners. It would have been so easy for the designer to follow this example, to create a proper sense of continuity. Instead, the rectangularity of the proposed Vine Lane building fights with the Cuban Consulate facade.
- The proposed Vine Lane building is monochrome and has aggressive uniform vertical lines and looks like a prefabricated temporary warehouse, completely out of character with the neighbouring buildings in the Bloomsbury Conservation Area.

It is clear that BC Partners seek at every opportunity to increase height levels, not just for the 20 metre increase in the height of the skyscraper proposed to replace Selkirk House, but also in the West Central Street proposals and now the proposals for the Vine Lane building.

The proposals for this important site need to be re thought, with a design which respects the clear height limit of the horizontal line of the High Holborn mansard and the character of the existing neighbouring building and Conservation Area.

If that means that the entirety of the Composite Applications have to be rejected, then the applicant has only itself to blame for artificially combining these different proposals into a single application.

Regards

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