

**From:** Bloomsbury Association  
**Sent:** 11 October 2023 15:28  
**To:** Planning  
**Cc:** David Fowler; Chair Association  
**Subject:** APPLICATION FOR PLANNING PERMISSION 2023/2510/P & 2023/2653/L - 1 MUSEUM STREET

**SELKIRK HOUSE, 166 HIGH HOLBORN, 1 MUSEUM STREET, 10-12 MUSEUM STREET, 35-41 NEW OXFORD STREET & 16A-18 WESTCENTRAL STREET**  
LONDON WC1A 1JR

**Proposal:**

Redevelopment of Selkirk House, 166 High Holborn and 1 Museum Street following the substantial demolition of the existing NCP car park and former Travelodge Hotel to provide a mixed-use scheme, providing office, residential, and town centre uses at ground floor level. Works of part-demolition and refurbishment to 10-12 Museum Street, 35-41 New Oxford Street, and 16A-18 West Central Street to provide further town centre ground floor uses and residential floorspace, including affordable housing provision. Provision of new public realm including a new pedestrian route through the site to link West Central Street with High Holborn. Relocation of cycle hire docking stations on High Holborn.

Application for planning permission reference: 2023/2510/P  
Application for listed building consent: 2023/2653/L

The **Save Museum Street** group's comments on these applications are being submitted incrementally as attached.

Stephen Heath  
**On behalf of the Bloomsbury Association**

**Save Museum Street is led by a community coalition including:**

Bloomsbury Residents' Action Group, Bloomsbury Association, Camden Climate Emergency, Charlotte Street Association, Covent Garden Community Association, Covent Garden Area Trust, Drury Lane Residents Association, Dudley Court Tenants' Association, Goldsmith Court, Grape Street Residents, Leicester Square Association, Red Lion Residents Association, Rugby & Harpur

Residents Association, Seven Dials Trust, South Bloomsbury Tenants and Residents' Association, Tavistock Chambers Tenants' Association, The Bedford Estates, The Soho Society, West Central Street Residents and Willoughby Street Residents

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## 1 MUSEUM STREET, LONDON WC1A 1JR

**Application for planning permission: 2023/2510/P and**

**Application for listed building consent: 2023/2653/L**

**Save Museum Street**, which comprises the organisations listed below, **objects** to these applications. Our concerns are set out in the following sections, which will be submitted individually, as will the documents shown in the list of supplementary documents. A composite document will follow.

	Section name	Attached
1	Sustainability, environmental, climate emergency	●
2	Housing	●
3	Townscape and visual impact	●
4	Heritage impact	●
5	Design quality	●
6	Community engagement	●
7	Daylight and sunlight	●
8	Open space and public realm	●
9	Basement impact	●
10	Transport, access and servicing	●
11	Construction management and noise	●
12	Hotel use	●
13	Phasing and financial appraisal	●
14	Health impact	●
15	Policy non-compliance / information required	

### List of supplementary documents

	Document name	Attached
1	Alternative Approach	
2	The Carbon Case for Retention and Retrofit 1 by Targeting Zero, dated 15 March 2023	●
3	The Carbon Case for Retention and Retrofit 2 by Targeting Zero, dated 5 July 2023	●
4	The Carbon Case for Retention and Retrofit 3 by Targeting Zero, dated 5 September 2023	●
5	Heritage Statement by Peter De Figueiredo	●
6	Historic Assessment - 'Heavy Going: A study of the history, building typology and conservation of Working Horse Stables' by Shannon Edwards, University of York	●
7	Statement from Dr Geoffrey Tyack FSA, FRHistS, Kellogg College, University of Oxford	●
8	Daylight and Sunlight Report by Right of Light Consulting	●
9	E-mail from Regional Manager, Travelodge, dated 28 March 2023	●
10	E-mail from Camden Conservation Officer, dated 18 August 2023	●
11	E-mail from Chief Executive, Historic England, dated 7 September 2023	●

### Save Museum Street Campaign: led by a community coalition including:

Bloomsbury Residents' Action Group  
Bloomsbury Association  
Camden Climate Emergency  
Charlotte Street Association  
Covent Garden Community Association  
Covent Garden Area Trust  
Drury Lane Residents Association  
Dudley Court Tenants' Association  
Goldsmith Court  
Grape Street Residents

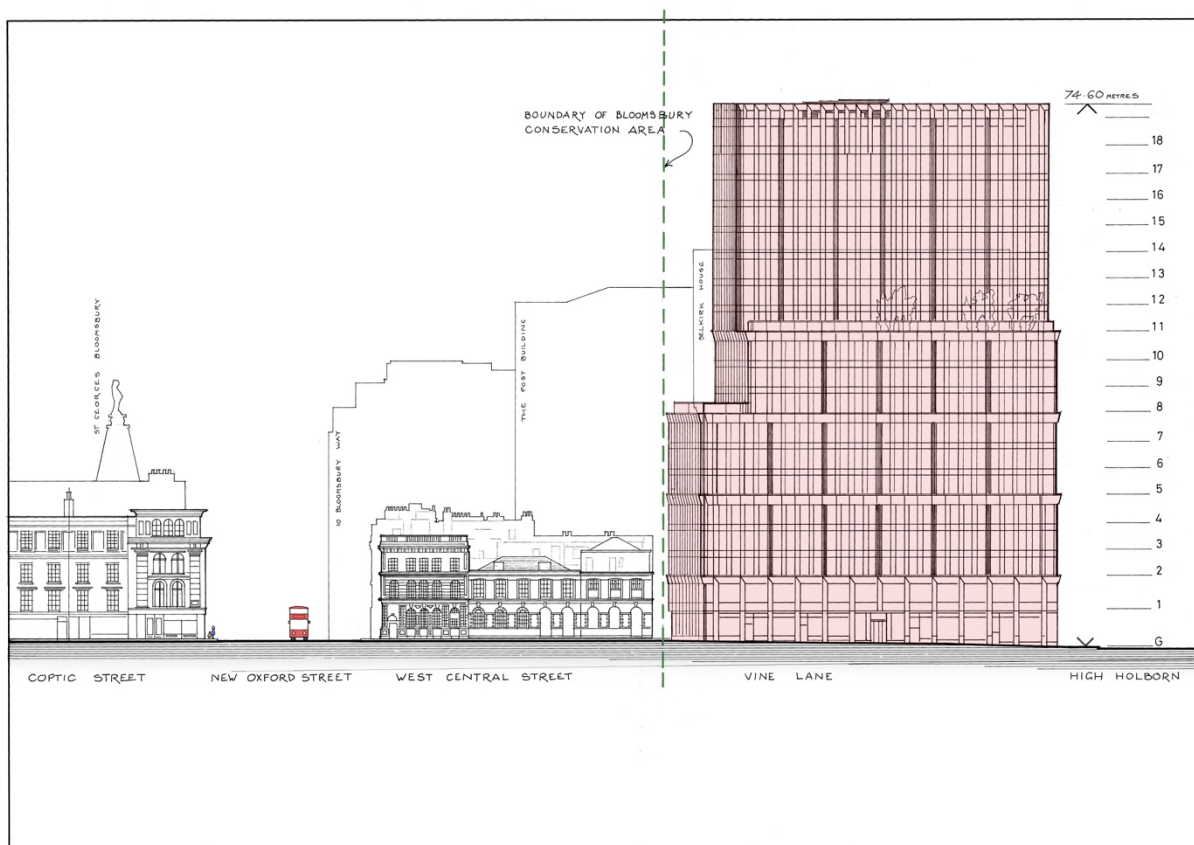
Leicester Square Association  
Red Lion Residents Association  
Rugby & Harpur Residents Association  
Seven Dials Trust  
South Bloomsbury Tenants and Residents' Association  
Tavistock Chambers Tenants' Association  
The Bedford Estates  
The Soho Society  
West Central Street Residents  
Willoughby Street Residents

### 3 Townscape & Visual Impact

#### 3.1 Existing conditions

3.1.1 Selkirk House, the former Travelodge Hotel, rises to 14 floors, above a three-storey podium. It is the applicant's proposal is that this already excessively high building be replaced by a speculative office tower rising to 19 floors and at a height of 75 metres.

3.1.2 The present roof parapet level of Selkirk House is +78.46m AOD, while the roof parapet of the proposed development will be at +100.00m AOD. Ground levels vary across the site but is typically circa +25.00m AOD. The existing building is 53.46m above ground and the proposed building 74.60m, so the proposed tower will now be 40% taller than Selkirk House and 65% the height of Centre Point.



Section at West Central Street illustrating the conflict with the Bloomsbury Conservation Area boundary.

3.1.3 The proposed tower will be much wider therefore far more visible. Its bulky 41m long east and west elevations will present a slab-like appearance to both close and distant views. As illustrated above the 75-metre-high office tower 'slams' into the sensitive Bloomsbury townscape with no 'zone of mitigation' and with no regard for its proximity to listed buildings and conservation areas. The applicant's model, shown below, reveals the true massing and bulk of the development. It really cannot be described as "an elegant tall building which responds to the sensitivities of context"<sup>1</sup>. This structure is more the product of an optimum 5000sq.ft. commercial floorplate placed on the site and extruded through to maximum height and crudely moulded by rights of light constraints. In other words this is a financial model which ignores wider architectural, townscape and heritage constraints.

<sup>1</sup> As suggested in the Camden Draft Site Allocations Consultation: Policy 07 Holborn and Covent Garden: Policy HGC3: para 7.27  
<https://www.camden.gov.uk/documents/20142/145786127/Site+Allocations+2020+-+07+Holborn+and+Covent+Garden.pdf/c92d7948-f144-cfee-e66d-6418b62a855b?t=1581430511103>



Block model prepared by the applicant: view looking north towards the British Museum.

3.1.4 The proposed tower will not in any way enhance the street scene in the Bloomsbury, Covent Garden, Seven Dials and Soho Conservation Areas and will not meet the basic requirements of Policy D2. On these grounds alone, such an inelegant and ill-placed structure should be rejected, and the applicant required to provide a building which meets all Camden and Mayoral stated policy criteria.

3.1.5 We are unconvinced by the conclusions in the developer's Townscape Visual Impact and Heritage Report (TVIH) that states "the development would relate well to the local townscape character" and would "relate successfully to the varied heights of other buildings in the local area" and "enhance short, medium and longer-range views". It will certainly not do any of these things.

3.1.6 The November 2019 Design Review Panel was similarly unconvinced by previous but similar proposals and concluded that: "The Panel finds the height of the proposed tower problematic and when compared with the existing building the proposals show a significant increase in height which will make the scheme very visible in this sensitive context, especially in long views from Bedford Square and the British Museum steps". It also states that: "Buildings in the local context have more squat proportions". The Panel also suggested that it could be beneficial for the scheme to reference these proportions, making the tower shorter and wider, "This massing may be more appropriate to the identity and character of the area". This opinion did not carry over into the 2020 review, with three new panel members out of five, although the building remained the same height, as confirmed in the evolution of the design outlined in Section 3.3 of the D&AS. There was some discussion on the impact on heritage assets but the consequences of precedent were not considered nor was there any mention of the impact on the setting of Centre Point, now also a Grade II listed building.

3.1.7 These proposals are non-compliant with the requirements of the Camden Local Plan 2017 and the London Plan 2021. These policy documents enshrine requirements intended to protect sensitive areas such as Bloomsbury from damaging and out-of-scale developments.

**Compliance with Camden Local Plan 2017 Policy: Policy 7.35 (Tall Buildings):**

Tall buildings are described as *“those which are substantially taller than their neighbours or significantly change the skyline”*.

The proposals for 1 Museum Street fall into this category being 20 metres taller than the existing Selkirk House building and six metres taller than the recently completed Post Building and will make a significant change to the skyline.

In turn, both of these neighbours are already taller than the general mid height blocks in an area of generally 8-10 storey buildings.

The Policy also states that *“the siting and design of tall buildings should not detract from the nature of surrounding places and the quality of life of those living and working around them”*.

**These proposals will.**

**3.2 London Plan Policies on Tall Buildings:**

3.2.1 Policy 7.7(A) states that: *“tall buildings should not have an unacceptably harmful impact on their surroundings”*

**These proposals do.**

3.2.2 Policy 7.7 also states that *“tall buildings should only be considered in areas whose character would not be adversely affected by the scale, mass, bulk or height of the proposed building”* (B)

**In this case the area would be adversely affected.**

3.2.3. *“The form of the building would relate well to the form, proportion, composition, scale and character of surrounding buildings, urban grain particularly at street level”* (C)

**In this case the 74-metre-high tower would not.**

3.2.4 *“The tall building will improve the area by emphasising a point of civic or visual significance and enhance the skyline of London”* (D)

In this case the proposed office tower will not, as it entirely blocks views looking north from Drury Lane and despoils the view from St Georges Bloomsbury, the British Museum and from Bedford Square, Bloomsbury Square and Russell Square. Its bulky and lumpen profile will in no way enhance the skyline.

3.2.5 *“Tall buildings will incorporate the highest standards of architecture and materials, including sustainable design and construction”* (E)

These proposals do not. They include short life facade construction of coated aluminium (25 years maximum) and as our separate sustainability report by Simon Sturgis states *“...incorporates highly carbon greedy and unsustainable construction”*.

3.2.6 *“Tall buildings should have ground floor activities that provide a positive relationship with surrounding streets.”* (F)

**These proposals do not.** They provide many metres of glazed yet inaccessible frontage devoted entirely to impermeable office foyers, access ways and servicing in much the same way as the Post Building opposite does, all to the detriment of street ambience.



3.2.7 *"Tall buildings should contribute to the permeability of the site and wider area". (G)*

**These proposals do not** and West Central Street will become a narrow canyon with the 74-metre office tower on one side and the new proposed six storey block on the other with all daylight and sunlight excluded. Vine Lane also creates another new dark passage going nowhere and which will inevitably be gated at night.

3.2.8 *"The proposals should incorporate areas on upper floors which are accessible to the public" (H)*

**These proposals do not**, but even if they did, would be subject to the unpleasant process of body scanning and surveillance by security guards, as presently experienced by visitors to the adjacent Post Building roof terrace.

3.2.9 *"The proposed building to make a significant contribution to local regeneration" (I)*

**This building will harm local regeneration.** It will provide only expensive retail space that no local trader could afford and office space that will inevitably lie empty for years. The project has already resulted in the unwanted closure of a popular and profitable hotel for Travelodge with the loss of local jobs and associated benefits to the local economy.

### **3.3 Under Policy 7.7 (D):**

3.3.1 *"(A) Tall buildings should not adversely affect the microclimate by causing overshadowing, induced wind disturbance, etc"*

**This building will cause severe overshadowing** of surrounding homes, businesses and civic buildings and will inevitably cause wind disturbance at street level.

3.3.2 *"(B) Should have no impact on local strategic views"*

**These Proposals will.** They will have a severe impact on important local and London wide views as is clearly demonstrated in separate submissions by Historic England and others.

### **Under Policy 7.7 (E)**

3.3.3 *"The impact of tall buildings proposed in sensitive locations should be given particular consideration"*

**In this case no "particular consideration" has been given.** The proposals severely impact on two adjacent conservation areas, on many listed buildings and their settings, on historic parks and gardens and on the scheduled monuments of St Georges Bloomsbury and the British Museum.

## **3.4 Local Development Framework**

3.4.1 There is no approved Local Development framework in place which supports the proposed change from low and medium rise construction in Bloomsbury into a Development zone for tall buildings. These proposals, if approved, will establish an unfortunate and undesirable precedent for the high-rise expansion of Bloomsbury. There is no place here for a "cohesive group of tall buildings" which enhance the skyline and improve legibility. Bloomsbury has its own unique legibility which needs no such enhancement.

3.3.5 As the London Development Plan states, ***"tall buildings can have a detrimental impact on local character and they should be resisted in areas sensitive to their impact"***.

3.3.6 This statement must be brought to the attention of the Planning Committee and they must be directed to take note and refuse both of these applications.

3.4.4 At a presentation by the developer in November 2019, the Save Museum Street coalition responded by stating: "Just because there is an existing, poor quality, excessively tall building on the site, this is no justification for its replacement by a building even taller and bulkier". Analysis of the

existing skyline at this point on the Covent Garden/British Museum axis clearly indicates that a medium-rise, high site-cover group of buildings would be appropriate and that the creation of a 'western cluster' of tall buildings should be abandoned. Further discussion of this point has been consistently discouraged by the Council's development team but our strongly held views on this matter still stand.

### 3.5 Visual impact

3.5.1 The Zone of Visual Influence also demonstrates the extent to which the proposal will be visible across a large part of Central London. It confirms what we have been saying all along, while Camden have been led to believe the building would be invisible. Indeed, this study indicates that the proposals would be more visible than we hitherto expected.

3.5.2 That said, a degree of caution needs to be taken in considering this assessment, when the modelling it is based on is not accurate. The note on page 2 states: "This study is generated using a simple computer model that combines an accurate model of the proposed scheme with a highly simplified model of the surrounding context (with buildings shown to an accuracy of approx. +/- 1.5m)." It would be helpful to see how simplified that contextual model is, because it could have a significant effect on some of the longer distance views.

3.5.3 Equally, we need to be mindful that the map on page 3 seems to plot the shadows cast by a 'light' source on the top of the building when the model on page 2 suggests other light sources might have been placed at different heights up the building. Analysis of the comparative shadows cast by light sources at different heights would reveal the amount of development that would be visible and hence some initial judgement could be made on its impact. While we suggest that further information should be requested from the development team it is clear that the shadow cast by this monolith over its surroundings will further deprive the public realm of precious sunlight.

3.5.4 The development team, in an e-mail to us dated 9 July 2021, maintained that the proposal is invisible, arguing that the building "has been carefully situated so as to be fully screened in all local views tested... and its impact, or lack thereof, on the total set of views can be seen within. Consultation sessions with Millerhare encouraging community led selection of new 3D views also included this equipment." This is misleading, particularly as there were no 'consultation sessions with Millerhare'. It is equally misleading when the TVIH concludes that the proposal is visible and, "The height of the tower would provide a piece of townscape 'punctuation' along High Holborn..." The backdrop to the Grade II listed Shaftesbury Theatre viewed from Princes Circus can hardly be described as mere 'punctuation'.



Proposed new backdrop to the Grade II Shaftesbury Theatre.

3.5.5 In an e-mail to the planning case officer, dated 22 February 2021, the Bloomsbury Association anticipated that a tall building on the site could, amongst others, be visible from the following locations in Camden:



Bedford Square  
Bloomsbury Square  
Russell Square  
Lincoln's Inn Fields  
British Museum forecourt  
Drury Lane  
Princes Circus  
Primrose Hill

It was also anticipated it would be visible from the following locations in Westminster:

Soho Square  
Cambridge Circus  
Shaftesbury Avenue  
Oxford Street  
Grosvenor Square, looking along Brook Street  
Whitehall, approaching Trafalgar Square  
Great Marlborough Street  
Piccadilly approaching Piccadilly Circus  
St James' Park  
Horse Guards' Parade  
Regent's Park

3.5.6 Crucially, it would be visible from and do extensive harm to the Bloomsbury, Covent Garden, Seven Dials and Soho Conservation Areas that surround the application site, in addition to having substantial cumulative impact on several heritage assets: the many listed buildings located on the northern part of the site and in neighbouring streets. It would also do harm to strategic views safeguarded by London Plan Policy 7.11 - The London View Management Framework. These include protected river prospect views from Blackfriars Bridge, Lambeth Bridge, South Bank, Albert Embankment and especially the protected silhouette of the Palace of Westminster.

3.5.7 It would also dominate Museum Street, Bloomsbury 'village' and the setting of St George's Bloomsbury.

3.5.8 The height and bulk of the proposed development would be such that it would have an intrusive, harmful effect on the setting both of Bloomsbury's squares and of the listed buildings within and around them. Views from the squares, especially after leaf fall, will suffer from the adverse effect of the unattractive addition to the skyline.

3.5.9 The Bloomsbury squares are important and world-renowned architectural set pieces safeguarded by the Bloomsbury Conservation Area within which they are located. There are many listed buildings in and around these squares. They are important both to the many nearby residents who live in an area of open space deficiency and also to internationally important institutions. Bedford Square is a particular example affected by the proposal.

### **3.6 Bedford Square**

3.6.1 Bedford Square was built between 1776 and 1780 for the Duke of Bedford. It is considered one of London's finest and best-preserved historic squares and is the only intact Georgian square in London. It was the first garden square with an imposed architectural uniformity that set the style for garden squares in London through the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

3.6.2 To reflect its importance, all of Bedford Square's 54 buildings are Grade I listed and Historic England defines Grade I buildings as being 'of exceptional interest, sometimes considered to be internationally important'. The gardens have a Grade II\* listing on the English Heritage Register; all its later gas lamps are Grade II listed as is the garden pavilion. The meticulous design of Bedford Square reflects the classical tastes of 18th century England for coherence and consistency in urban planning

and city-scale architecture.

3.6.3 The broad principles established in national policy and guidance on the historic environment are reflected in the London Plan. The Plan's policies seek to ensure that the protection and enhancement of historic assets in London is based on an understanding of their special character, and form part of the wider design and urban improvement agenda. This recognises that asset value is more than the fabric of the square's buildings but in the spatial quality of the space that they define and the approaches to, from and within it.

3.6.4 For this reason, in 2000, with substantial funding from Bedford Estate, English Heritage, Crown Estate and the London Borough of Camden, its public realm underwent careful refurbishment to reflect the high asset value of its heritage.

3.6.5 Selkirk House already detracts from the setting of Bedford Square and its presence reflects the less than rigorous attitudes to our urban townscape prevalent at the time it was built. Lessons must also be learnt from these errors of planning judgement which permitted developments close to Bedford Square to be built that were harmful to its setting. The image included below, looking west towards Tottenham Court Road, provides further evidence of this damage.



Bedford Square: looking west towards Tottenham Court Road.

3.6.6 Bedford Square is a complete architectural entity. Its Georgian terraces, unique streetscape and fine gardens present a classic environment of international importance and one equal to the level of becoming a World Heritage status destination. Further erosion of this prime asset by allowing the erection of a further overbearing buildings in close proximity must be resisted.

3.6.7 The proposed development at 1 Museum Street by virtue of its bulk and height, will continue to

make things worse. It will be dominant in views from the north and eastern sides of the Square and will detract from its setting. These are characteristics that are not compatible with current policies that seek to safeguard existing townscape assets, nor are they consistent with Policy D2 of Camden's Local Plan or the design principles contained in the Fitzrovia Area Action Plan.

## 5 DESIGN QUALITY

5.1 The context for this scheme, surrounded by conservation areas is mixed; adjacent on Museum Street is the recently retrofitted Post Building, a substantial structure dating from the 1960s. To the north of the site along New Oxford Street are mainly 19thC buildings of modest scale, mostly 4, 5, or 6 storeys, often individual buildings giving visual variety in the street frontage.

5.2 The site itself also has a mix of buildings, including the modestly scaled West Central Street block bounded by New Oxford Street, Museum Street and West Central Street. Selkirk House, a modern movement 1960s building, consisting of a podium and office tower, is the dominant building, sitting at the corner of Museum Street and High Holborn, it was built as the headquarters office for TrustHouse Forte, a leading hotel and leisure company of the period. The photograph published in the architectural press at the time shows an elegant building proudly displaying the THF logo.



Image courtesy of the RIBA archive

5.3 The new planning application follows the listing of a number of the buildings in the West Central Street Block, 33, 35 and 37 New Oxford Street and 10-12 Museum Street. In addition to the listed buildings Nos 16A and 18 West Central Street are considered in the Bloomsbury Conservation Area Appraisal to make a positive contribution to the conservation area; as a whole this block retains its integrity and continuity on all three frontages.

5.4 The treatment of the small-scale West Central Street block is a missed opportunity to respect and enhance the conservation area. Although the listed buildings are to be retained they will be subjected to alterations and the insertion of a first-floor deck and staircase to the rear of the Museum Street and New Oxford Street buildings which will damage their historic integrity and interest. The proposed demolition of 16a, 16b and 18 West Central Street involves the loss of a building which makes a positive contribution to the conservation



area and is of historic interest as a 19th century central London horse stable. Its replacement with a six-storey residential building is out of scale with the 19th century block and is damaging to its character and that of the conservation area.

5.5 The Design and Access Statement draws from the local context, referring to the influence of the architect Charles Doll, who designed the adjacent King Edward and Queen Alexandra Mansions, as well as the Kingsley Hotel adjacent to St George's Church on Bloomsbury Way and the Russell Hotel in Russell Square.

5.6 Doll's style creates rich street facades using fine terracotta and red brick, classical details such as fluted columns, organic decoration, bays and oriels and horizontal datums.

5.7 The contrast between the 19<sup>th</sup>C buildings of Doll and the new scheme is stark – while his use of horizontal datums has been used as a design key by DHDS, this has not been done to enrich the architectural treatment of the facades of No. 1 Museum Street, but to introduce cut backs in the bulk of the new building. Instead of the low podium of the TrustHouse Forte HQ, the new building fills its footprint to a height of five stories, already a step up from the Cuban Embassy, with a modest cut back to the eighth-storey. The final cut back is at the 11th storey, above which rises the full height of the new tower. The overall impact is of a much bulkier and taller building than its surroundings, which will have a dominating impact, towering over the substantial Post Building, dwarfing the nearby 19thC buildings and having a significant and detrimental impact on important nearby listed Grade 1 St George's Church one of Nicholas Hawksmoor's fine London churches, the Grade 1 British Museum, a building of international importance and the nearby Shaftesbury Theatre. The applicant claims that the existing Selkirk House is prominent when viewed from the steps of the British Museum but this is an exaggeration – the view as existing shows a modest part of the north elevation of Selkirk House but the new tower will be a dominating presence, rising above the site's North Oxford Street frontage.



View from the portico of the British Museum

5.8 In detail, the facades of the new building are regular and bland in contrast to the rich variety of the buildings of Charles Doll, the cut backs are used in the manner of the commercial buildings of New York, built in the period of the 1950s-60s to maximise the volume of the building within the context of planning and daylight legislation. The impact of the bulky and tall new building will be similar to the New York experience, creating canyons with little sunlight.

5.9 The stepped design lacks the architectural simplicity of the building it replaces but does not achieve the visual interest and quality of detail of the nearby 19<sup>th</sup>C buildings. The West facing side of the existing grey tower already makes an impact due to the glow of afternoon sun. The proposed aluminium cladding on a much higher and wider tower will create a distracting, shiny surface especially visible from Bedford Square and above the Shaftesbury Theatre.

5.10 A purported 'benefit' of the scheme, a pedestrian landscaped passageway, Vine Lane, is illustrated by an artist's impression showing a space flooded with sunlight. This image is totally misleading. The very narrow space and its North/South orientation will mean that the sun will rarely penetrate the passageway, when briefly aligned with the route's axis; the sun will for most of the year be too low in the sky not to be obstructed by adjacent buildings. The diagram illustrating scale comparisons in the Design and Access Statement (Design Proposal-Public Realm) shows Vine Lane, 6m wide with 21 and 20 storey buildings to each side, Pavilion Road, an attractive shopping street in Knightsbridge, 8m wide with 8 and 10m high buildings to each side and Floral Street in Covent Garden 7m wide with 18m high buildings to each side. Pavilion Road has an open and light air, Floral Street is narrow with little natural light, Vine Lane would be narrower and the higher buildings to each side would give a canyon like claustrophobic feel. The diagram in the Design and Access Statement is in fact misleading; to the East of Vine Lane the height of the new building is shown as 21m but at that height there is a very small cut back with the build rising by a further six stories at which point there is a further cut back before the new build rises to its full 19 storey 74 metre height.

5.11 The route proposed does not form a logical corridor between existing pedestrian routes and will be a dark and potentially dangerous alley, offering a new home to the drug dealers who frequent West Central Street. It will be of no public benefit.

5.12 In summary, the new development proposes a building of excessive bulk and height, which will dominate its surrounds and adversely affect views from important public spaces and key heritage buildings.

5.13 This over development is an example of unintelligent densities and demonstrates the difficulties of such density when impacts become unmanageable. Unintelligent densities and market forces do not shape place, they destroy it.

5.14 The D & A Statement 1 has a longitudinal section along High Holborn (page 31 section AA), this shows the site and nearby buildings as far as Centre Point to the west and shows the Central St. Giles development a key recent scheme on an important site at the north end of Shaftesbury Avenue. Architecturally forceful with the individual blocks clad in vibrant colours, the scheme maintains the general height and scale of its surroundings by breaking the bulk into individual elements and avoiding the ego trip of a tall tower. This is a modern, successful commercial scheme demonstrating that overdevelopment and excessive height and bulk are avoidable. However, the street level and inner courtyard are sterile experiences despite the cafes, sculpture and an olive tree.

## **5.2 Planning Policy Compliance**



Relevant policies include:

## 5.2.1 The London Plan

### 5.2.1.1 Chapter 3 Design Quality

#### 5.2.1.2 Policy D1

A. Requires Boroughs to 'define the characteristics qualities and values of .. places within the plan area'.

A.3 ...urban form and structure (for example townscape, block pattern, urban grain, extent of frontages, building heights and density).

D. Development Proposals should:

1) enhance local context by delivering buildings and spaces that positively respond to local distinctiveness through their layout, orientation, scale, appearance and shape, with due regard to existing and emerging street hierarchy, building types, forms and proportions.

The proposal **fails** to respond to local distinctiveness being grossly out of scale with the immediately adjacent listed and heritage assets and being alien to the hierarchy and proportions of these assets.

11) respond to the existing character of a place by identifying the special and valued features and characteristics that are unique to the locality and respect, enhance and utilise the heritage assets and architectural features that contribute towards the local character.

The proposal singularly **fails** to meet these tests, instead of enhancing, it exacerbates the harm caused by the existing tall building and is in a form, bulk and detail which are alien to the nearby conservation area and world class listed buildings, squares and views.

## 5.2.2 Camden Local Plan

### 5.2.2.1 Policy D1 Design

Requires that a development:

a. respects local context and character.

7.2 ...will expect developments to consider:

- character, setting, context and the form and scale of neighbouring buildings
- the prevailing pattern and density of surrounding development.

f. Integrates well with the surrounding streets and open spaces.

The proposal fails by not respecting the local context and character, not only does the proposed new tower conflict dramatically with the adjacent conservation area but the more recent larger scale buildings along High Holborn are of a consistent height and similar massing, from the St Giles development at the North end of Shaftesbury Avenue past intermediate building to the adjacent Post Building and carefully restored and improved Commonwealth House, the new tower will rise substantially above all of these buildings and be inconsistent with these policy tests.

Tall Buildings

p. How the building relates to its surroundings....how the top affects the skyline.

q. The historic context of the building's surroundings.

7.29 The Council will also seek to protect locally important views ...these include: views into and from conservation areas and views of listed and landmark.... (including) St Georges Bloomsbury.

5.3 The proposal fails to respect its historic context and surroundings and will cause significant harm to the view from the portico of St Georges, the British Museum and Bedford Square as well as adversely impacting the Bloomsbury Conservation Area

## 6 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

6.1 This is a highly controversial proposal, relating to a site which straddles the Bloomsbury Conservation Area and which will have a significant impact on that area as well as on important historic buildings and spaces in the vicinity. If granted, the applications would also significantly and adversely impact views in central London. Consequently, a comprehensive and transparent consultation process is vital. Public law principles, known as the *Gunning Principles*, are engaged.

### 6.2 Initial community engagement for the site

In 2016/17 the previous developer for the site invited BCAAC (Bloomsbury Conservation Area Advisory Committee) to a consultation meeting about their initial plans for redevelopment. They had engaged TP Bennett Architects to come up with a design for the West Central/ Museum St/ New Oxford Street which looked promising as it was much more in keeping with the original Regency period character of the neighbourhood and the Bloomsbury Conservation Area.

6.2.1 Then Labtech took over and our local Tenants and Residents Association took the initiative to meet with them in 2017 via the London Communications Agency. We wanted to express our views early in the process about the need to respect the scale and architecture of the historic area. The TP Bennett plans were mentioned as an appropriate example. Labtech were now engaging Orms (who were responsible for the successful No.1 New Oxford St project and the highly successful retrofit of the 1960s Camden office building, now the Standard Hotel). Orms chief architect showed some new plans for the site but at no point was there any suggestion of a new tower.

6.2.2 We also expressed our wish, as before with the Post Building, for the community to have some space in any new development for local uses e.g. a new GP surgery and workshops for local artists, ideally with rents to be subsidised in a Section 106 agreement.

6.2.3 Labtech's spokesperson at the meeting was Mark Alper, who had been heavily involved in their Camden Markets venture. He indicated he was interested in meeting again to discuss community engagement but, in spite of promises to do so, there was no further contact from them.

### 6.3 Comments on the developer's statement of community involvement (SCI)

6.3.1 Reading the SCI, one almost gets the impression that Labtech/ BC Partners (and their proxies) do not understand the true meaning of the word consultation, which involves both providing (complete and accurate) information and listening to, and taking some account of, the views of consultees. Consultation is a two-way process, entailing listening and dialogue. This is made clear in guidance and case law on the *Gunning* principles. There is a chasm between the impression which London Communications seek to create in their artfully composed document and the actual reality of the conduct of Labtech, BC Partners and their proxies. Entirely consistent with the candid comments of Mr. Watson on 15 April 2021, discussed below, the so-called consultation process has been an exercise in Labtech/ BC Partners simply telling residents and community and amenity groups what they are going to do on a unilateral basis. Labtech has also sought to claim, without any adequate explanation, that Camden's unspecified requirements leave it with no option but to knock down the existing structures outside the Bloomsbury Conservation Area and erect a conspicuous tower (originally 80 metres, now 74 metres high), on the edge of, and dominating, the Bloomsbury Conservation Area.

6.3.2 Most residents and community groups do not recognize the narrative set out in the SCI of a full consultation process about a proposal to erect an office tower of (originally) 80 metres, now slightly reduced to 74 metres by way of concession. Labtech carried out an erratic process beginning in 2017 with minimal resident involvement on two separate occasions in Dec 2017 and January 2018 but then failed to keep in contact with them or to provide any explanation for the delay, for a further 18 months, until a new design proposal emerged.

Since then, by its own admission, Labtech has chosen to ignore the views of local residents and community associations. Simten on behalf of the invisible BC Partners private equity, apparent successors to Labtech, have confirmed more recently (meeting of 31 May 2023) that there has been no consultation and that that meeting was intended simply to present as a *fait accompli* some changes (apparently agreed with Camden) made to the plans for the plots within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area in order to get over the problems for BC Partners caused by the recent listing of some of the buildings in the plots within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area.

6.3.3 The SCI document purporting to summarize the consultation process is fundamentally misleading both because of its slanted presentation and because of the significant matters it omits.

6.3.4 In passing, it is noted that LCC have chosen to include in its materials action purportedly taken in relation to the 2021 application. It seems unfair and unreasonable for the Council to allow this, whilst at the same time insisting on disregarding submissions made by the public in relation to the 2021 application.

6.3.5 It has not been possible in the time permitted for public comments on the Planning Applications to refute exhaustively the content of LCC's documents, but, depending on the timetable adopted for the consideration of the application, it is intended to supplement this submission with some more detailed corrections of the significantly inaccurate record submitted by LCC in the name of BC Partners as part of the Planning Applications. In the meanwhile, the Appendix contains some examples of the inaccurate, incomplete or misleading claims made in the SCI.

6.3.6 The SCI document is also very selective in a number of key respects. In particular, it fails to acknowledge that the principal meetings which have taken place were organised either by Camden (in one case) or by SMS. One of the meetings organized by SMS was held on 15 April 2021. The purpose of this meeting, faced with a complete lack of community engagement by Labtech, was to propose a genuine and constructive dialogue between Labtech and the various community groups and individuals who had organised to express their concerns about this development. At that meeting, Jonathan Watson, a senior member of the Labtech team, made the categorical statement that Labtech had no intention to discuss their brief, nor for that matter anything above the ground floor level, with the local community, asserting (incorrectly as it subsequently turned out) that this had been agreed with Camden. Any consultation would be limited to the landscaping proposals.

6.3.7 It is important to bear in mind that the Planning Applications constitute in reality several proposals combined in one massive project. Understandable focus on the proposed 80/74 Metre bulky tower block means that there has been very little disclosure or transparency about the detailed proposals for the New Oxford Street/ Museum Street block in the Bloomsbury Conservation Area or the proposed new constructions on West Central Street. By way of example, there has not been any attempt at public engagement in relation to what seem very problematic aspects of the proposed demolition stage, both in terms of the acknowledged engineering challenges and the risks and adverse impacts on the amenity (including asbestos removal, piling, pollution and even access to our homes) of local residents.

6.3.8 More generally, there has been a pattern of evasiveness, initially on the part of Labtech and its team and then continued by the private equity firm BC Partners, who seem to have chosen to hide behind Simten. For example, it is noteworthy that the onemuseumstreet website, which calls itself a (unilateral) consultation, never indicates the height of the proposed skyscraper. There is a consistent pattern of our legitimate requests for information and clarification being ignored.

Labtech and subsequently BC Partners/ Simten have been selective in a number of key respects:

- they appear to have been selective about who they decide to consult with, referring in the SCI to unidentified *stakeholders*. Local residents and businesses have been ignored. There is some sort of database used by the applicant's publicists, but it is unclear what methodology has been used in compiling the data. It seems that the database excludes important persons and groups known to be following the applications whilst including rather marginal organizations. The most egregious recent example of this was a meeting on 25 January 2023 arranged by Simten and LCC, to which those on the LCC circulation list were not invited, which brought together a small and seemingly unrepresentative group of people. It is not clear on what basis these people were singled out for the privilege of a meeting. Requests to hold a similar meeting with SMS and local residents have been ignored. Simten have even declined to put us in contact with the lucky invitees to this meeting. It is not clear why BC Partners consider engagement with the Asian Women's Resource Centre more important than engagement with individuals resident in Bloomsbury and groups representative of residents and businesses in Bloomsbury.

- They have been selective, bordering on evasive, about the information they choose to make public. Some of that information, notably about existing residential accommodation, appears to have been inaccurate.
- They have camouflaged their proposal to erect a 74-metre tower by summarizing their application as  
*Commercial Minor Alterations, New Mixed Redevelopment, Residential Minor Alterations*  
Sadly, Camden have reproduced this completely misleading summary on the Camden planning portal.
- They have been selective in producing the summary in the SCI of their “consultation” process.
- They have been selective in what views they have been prepared to make available of the impact of the proposals on heritage buildings and places in the local area, as well as of the particular angles they have chosen to use for their images. The images they have chosen to make public of their project (including the two-dimensional image now on display in Selkirk House) seek to present their skyscraper as less overwhelming than it would in fact be.
- The impressions the developers have sought to portray of light levels in new/ refurbished residential properties in plots in the Bloomsbury Conservation Area are misleading; it has been acknowledged by the architects that these levels could only be achieved in reality at midday in high summer. Indeed, the details lodged in connection with the Planning Applications show that, for a number of properties and residents, light levels would be reduced significantly below recommended levels.
- Even indications of the timetable seem to have been selective. A brief mention on the project website that the demolition and construction periods would continue until 2028 was rapidly removed, and 12 months cut from the programme, when this was queried with Simten earlier this year.

6.3.9 During the period which, according to Labtech/ BC Partners/LCC, began in 2017, there have been four set piece general presentation sessions for local residents.

These were held as follows:

- The first, in December 2020, was organised and hosted by Camden.
- The second, referred to above, in April 2021, was organised by local community groups.
- The third, on 7 September 2022 was also organised by SMS and was an attempt to engage with the new private equity owners, BC Partners, who, sadly, failed to attend.
- The fourth, on 31 May 2023 was arranged by Simten and, as indicated above, was acknowledged by Simten not to be a consultation session but a meeting to present to Councillors and affected residents and community groups the decisions (in relation to the plots within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area) which had apparently been previously agreed between BC Partners and the planning team at Camden.

None of the first three sessions was organised by Labtech or BC Partners. None of them involved any **listening** by Labtech or BC Partners. In the absence of any explanation of the purpose or outcome of the bizarre session, with a limited invited audience, on 25 January 2023 (which in any event seems to have been another “this is what we are going to do” session), this has been disregarded.

6.3.10 In 2022 there were two very poorly advertised “open days” in the car park on Museum Street. Once again, these were presented as “This is what we are going to do” sessions. A few display boards, conveying a very sketchy high-level impression, were available for inspection. For reasons which are unclear, the model was only available at the second session.

6.3.11 This lack of genuine consultation is particularly remarkable given that Labtech boasts a director whose title is *Director of Community Engagement* and who, in addition, managed to combine that role with being a Camden Councillor and Cabinet Member for a long while during the process.

6.3.12 One example of the blatant lack of consultation and engagement on the part of the Applicants relates to the very important question of sustainability. SMS consider this so important that they commissioned the expert Simon Sturgis to carry out an independent report in relation to the applicant's proposals.

What happened was as follows:

- Simten (on behalf of BC Partners) initially (September 2022) asked to discuss their draft sustainability report with SMS before it was submitted to Camden. SMS agreed and followed up with many reminders asking in September and October 2022 when they would have sight of the BC Partners draft; SMS informed them that SMS would be in a position to meet a couple of weeks after having had the BC Partners draft, so that SMS could read it carefully and be able to have an informed discussion. Simten never replied, nor did they provide a draft of their sustainability report.
- In fact, Simten reneged and submitted it straight to Camden, not even informing SMS that they had done so. SMS only found out when they looked at the planning portal.
- Simten/ BC Partners have also failed to engage with the report by Simon Sturgis commissioned by SMS on sustainability, merely saying in their latest report that they disagree with it but without any reasons given.

For completeness, we acknowledge that, at the 31 May 2023 meeting, Simten did belatedly commit to arranging a meeting with the BC Partners sustainability expert, although there has not been any follow up. This was in any event rather late, as the report had already been filed.

6.3.13 Another illustration of how low a priority information, let alone consultation, is, is provided by the saga of the model. Prior to 2023, this was made available on one solitary day, 9 April 2022.

6.3.14 Once SMS was aware of the existence of the model, SMS lobbied hard (from April 2022 onwards) to have it placed on public display. It seems that Camden may also have sought to persuade BC Partners to do this.

6.3.15 At a meeting with a SMS representative on 6 January 2023 Simten confirmed that they would place the model on display in Selkirk House, so that it would be visible from the street. It took Simten until March 2023 to achieve this.

6.3.16 Shortly after the Planning Applications were submitted in summer 2023, the model was removed from public display. The reason given was that continuing to make the model available might make BC Partners liable to pay business rates. Even assuming that is correct, it shows that avoiding paying tax is more important to BC Partners than transparency and enabling genuine consultation. Subsequently a two-dimensional image has been put on display which seeks to minimise the pretended impact of the 74-metre tower by an artful and artificial choice of a completely unrealistic viewpoint. This is positively (and presumably deliberately) misleading. It does however reveal the nervousness of BC Partners as to the real impact of the Tower, if allowed to go ahead.

6.3.17 Looking back, it would seem that the Covid crisis was rather convenient for Labtech in providing a pretext to avoid the sort of transparency which is required for a controversial development of this nature in so sensitive a location. Since Covid restrictions were relaxed, there would have been an opportunity to have a proper consultation following a fully informed presentation of the totality of the proposal, including the impact on the local community and on surrounding streets, monuments and open spaces. In particular, Labtech and BC Partners have to date been opaque on what sort of ordeal it is proposing to inflict on the local community over the (now at least 4-year long) demolition and construction exercises to erect its 80/74-metre tower block and the other structures proposed. No advantage has been taken of that opportunity to engage in genuine dialogue. The Demolition Management plan and Construction Management plan are long winded exercises in going through the motions without providing much in terms of real information.

6.3.18 SMS believe that Labtech/ BC Partners are aware that they are vulnerable to the fact that they have failed to follow Camden's policies in relation to consultation. This is supported by:



- The claim made by Mr Watson of Labtech that this had been agreed with Camden (see 5.3.3 above); SMS understands that Camden does not agree with this assertion;
- A letter written by Simten on 21 July 2023 which claims that there has been consultation and which therefore attempts to rewrite history and contradicts entirely what a representative of Simten unambiguously confirmed at the meeting (convened by Simten) on 31 May 2023, as supported by multiple contemporaneous notes.

As a result, this is a flawed process and the Planning Applications should be withdrawn pending a proper and open consultation process.

6.3.19 In view of the above, SMS wholly rejects the claims made in paras 3.44 and 3.45 of the SCI, as follows:

*3.44. The SCI is in accordance with Camden Council's Statement of Community Involvement guidance (adopted in 2016) and the Applicant has taken the advice of the Council before commencing, and throughout the consultation programme.*

(In passing, we do not know what advice from the Council is referred to by LCC.)

*3.45 It also reflects the principles for consultation in the Localism Act (2011) and in the National Planning Policy Framework (2012 / 2019). The Applicant has fully considered the comments received and has addressed them where feasible within the SCI.*

6.3.20 The SCI makes claims that there has been consultation with unidentified stakeholders. SMS has been unable to identify who (apart from Camden officers) these are, with one exception. The Asian Women's Resource Centre (**AWRC**) is undoubtedly a worthy organization and SMS welcome their interest in the Planning Applications. SMS has asked, without success, to be put in contact with them. SMS questions the judgment of BC Partners/ Simten/ LCC in considering that AWRC deserve more attention and engagement than SMS and the residents and local groups brought together under the SMS umbrella. To this extent the process (which has not been a consultation) has been flawed.

6.3.21 It is interesting to contrast the non-consultation on this controversial and very sensitive application with:

- The extensive consultation process which took place in relation to the redevelopment of the Eastman Dental Hospital
- The recently announced and well publicized consultation about revised plans for the redevelopment of the historic Odeon cinema in Shaftesbury Avenue.

#### **6.4 Camden's role in relation to consultation**

6.4.1. This submission focusses on the deliberate failures by Labtech and BC Partners to conduct any genuine consultation.

There are also issues in relation to Camden's separate consultation responsibilities, including under the *Gunning* principles. Those principles include a requirement to conscientiously take into account feedback from consultation processes. For completeness therefore we mention some important points below. Camden has issued a policy document which addresses its expectations in relation to public consultation in the context of planning applications.

6.4.2 Para 3.10 of the Council's Policy document states that Camden:

*expect the applicant/ agent to agree the extent and type of the pre-application consultation with [you] to make sure that the consultation process proposed is suitable.*

In the light of this clear statement of Camden's policy, there are only two alternatives:

*Either*

the applicant has, to Camden's knowledge, failed to agree the extent and type of pre application consultation and Camden has chosen to do nothing to ensure compliance with the Council's policy.

Or

Camden has agreed with BC Partners (and previously with Labtech) that the applicant should dispense with public consultation.

6.4.3 It is not clear which of the two alternatives has transpired. We have already alluded to the fact that Labtech have claimed that their decision to avoid any public consultation had been agreed with Camden. Attempts have been made to clarify the position with Camden, but have been met with equivocation.

6.4.4. Both are entirely unacceptable in the context of such a controversial proposal in a sensitive and historic part of central London. It is hard to see how Camden could have concluded, on any reasonable basis, that what has transpired is "suitable".

6.4.5 If the former is the case, Camden should require the applicant to withdraw the Applications and revert with a revised proposal following a proper two-way consultation process, involving genuine engagement with affected residents, local businesses and community groups.

6.4.6 If the latter is the case, this, combined with Camden's decision to ignore previous submissions when the applicant has acknowledged that the Planning Applications are "unchanged" insofar as relates to the most problematic aspects, is likely fundamentally to vitiate the processing of the Application.

6.4.7. Although Camden has not itself consulted on the applications, it did carry out a "site allocations" consultation which included (within a more limited scope of consultation) the plots comprised in the applications. Camden has also produced a summary of the submissions made in relation to that site allocations consultation. The *Gunning* principles will require Camden to have regard to these submissions in considering the applications.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

6.5.1 In conclusion, suffice it to say, there is not a single community, political or local group that has come out to support this proposed development. A groundbreaking coalition of community members have, in fact, come together to oppose this project, very clearly signalling that the area does not want this to go ahead. We have made perfectly clear that we want something done with this site but we fundamentally disagree with destroying the existing structure, building something taller and providing so little public benefit such as housing (which seems of poor quality in general). LabTech have openly refused to engage with the local community throughout the process, going so far as to offensively say that the only thing we can have a say about is the street level gardening. If that's community engagement then it's laughable and Camden should insist on its policies being adhered to, particularly in so controversial a case as this, and intervene to see due processes are followed in a meaningful way. Community engagement thus far has been a sham, and that's without mentioning that LabTech have had a director of Community relations, who was for part of the time also a Councillor. Sadly, he hasn't engaged with a single community group.

6.5.2 This is a community, people are living here, raising children, working, growing and learning. A demolition and building project of this scale would have an enormous impact on our quality of life, not least in noise, pollution, congestion and the pain felt by those who have tried so hard to push for a better alternative. We've already dealt with several mental health crises at the point of this development being proposed, let alone carried out. What safeguards and benefits are on offer for the people who create, support and make this area great? So far none, and there has already been significant damage to many. The people get a say and our message is clear; we say, 'No' to this application.

## **11 CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT AND NOISE**

11.1 Local community groups, residents and businesses object to these proposals on the grounds that quality of life and business viability will be seriously damaged by the proposed construction process. The severity of this damage is being exacerbated by the developer's unwillingness to consider the environmentally appropriate option of reusing the existing structure of Selkirk House in line with current best practice, rather than proposing its total demolition,

11.2 The degree of disruption that will be faced by the community will be proportionate to the length of time that work is taking place on site. By adopting a repurposing strategy for the future of Selkirk House, rather than demolishing it, the period of disruption could be drastically reduced. The application documents give the anticipated demolition and construction period as four years. This will no doubt extend to five years, which is excessive and unacceptable to the local community.

Note: The additional benefits gained by the repurposing of Selkirk House as part of a strategy to meet Government whole life zero carbon target, is discussed elsewhere in this document.

11.3 If this project is not reconsidered and fundamental changes made to the overall brief, the local community will bear the brunt of an unwanted and unnecessary office development and will be faced with several years of continuous unwanted disruption.

11.4 Based on the experience gained from other recent major construction projects in the area, residents and businesses expect to suffer from continuous noise throughout the working day. This is often extended to include unsocial hours traffic movements as transport attempts to beat the Congestion Charge, with idling diesel lorries hovering at the site gates from 6.30am.

11.5 The dirt and dust generated on site, especially from demolition and removal of construction materials is rarely suppressed adequately and its effects on the health and well-being of those living in residential properties close-by will be profound. The risk that asbestos may be present in this dust is of particular concern. Although the site management plan refers to the requirement for essential monitoring of pollution levels, it makes no reference to the action that will be taken (and by whom) should these levels be exceeded.

11.6 We also object to the inevitable deterioration of air quality during the construction period. Whether from dust, particulate matter or nitrogen dioxide this will affect residents, businesses and visitors alike. Any business that operates using outside space, such as pubs, cafes, restaurants, will certainly suffer a loss of trade. Air pollution levels currently being monitored at the junction of High Holborn and Bloomsbury Way show that World Health Organisation safe levels are being exceeded on a regular basis. Construction traffic and site machinery, mostly powered by diesel, will further add to this unacceptable pollution mix.

11.7 Children and older people will be especially vulnerable to the deleterious effects of the demolition and construction process. Sleep will be disrupted and general health and well-being all seriously affected.

11.8 For some adjoining residents in properties in West Central Street the period of construction disturbance has already started, with unsocial hours test drilling already taking place on site without any prior warning. Many close residents conduct their businesses from home and construction noise will prevent essential meetings and telephone calls from taking

place, all to the detriment of their business and source of livelihood. The quality of life of these residents is likely to be so impaired that no mitigation measures will allow them to continue their way of life, without having to be moved and offered alternative accommodation.

11.9 Although boasting 'green' low carbon credentials in many sections of this planning application, this project embodies a huge array of mechanically driven noise generating plant and equipment. Numerous banks of ventilation fans, air source heat pumps, kitchen extraction plant, air source chillers and air handling units are indicated, all of which will generate noise in close proximity to neighbouring residents and all to the detriment of their overall quality of life. Again, although monitoring is promised, no indication is given on the action to be taken should the noise from these mechanical sources be deemed too high.

11.10 In recent discussions with Council officers it has become apparent that the developer is now proposing a phased construction strategy for the project. The exact purpose of this is not clear but it is inevitable that such an approach will further extend an already protracted demolition and construction period, so we could now be looking at a total construction period of 6 years.

11.11 It is apparent from the applicant's submission documentation that the full extent of the basement impact has not been fully considered. Our own professional structural assessment highlights many unresolved issues with demolition ground heave and the presence of underground railway tunnels and leads to the conclusion that the whole project may not be completely feasible. This apparent lack of precision leads to an expectation of yet further delays that will inevitably impact on the local community and its quality of life.

11.12 In summary we object to the construction and management plan for this development on the grounds of its:

1. Failure to repurpose the existing Selkirk House structure in preference to demolition and new construction.
2. Failure to follow a meaningful low carbon strategy.
3. Excessive length of the construction period of up to 5 or 6 years.
4. High levels of noise generated during construction and by the proposed buildings in use.
5. Unmitigated addition to the already unsafe pollution levels.
6. Disruption to the quality of life of local residents and businesses.

## 12 HOTEL USE

12.1 In the initial application 2021/2954/P LabTech contended, that hotel use for the site was not economic nor appropriate, and by implication that this was another reason to justify the demolition of the existing building.

12.2 The case put forward then was that there was no market for new hotel accommodation in this part of Camden and it would be uneconomic to undertake such a development.

12.3 Clearly in planning policy grounds, hotel use on this site is appropriate as Camden seeks to provide additional hotel accommodation in the Central Area and in particular in the Area of Intensification. In addition, there can be no dispute that hotel use is an established use on the site, as part of Selkirk House's last use was as a hotel.

12.4 The reason LabTech were endeavouring to suggest hotel use was not appropriate and not viable was that they wished to promote the false and simplistic argument that hotels are no longer the fashion while office blocks are, ergo Selkirk House must be demolished, conveniently forgetting the fact that Selkirk House started life as a prestigious office headquarters.

12.5 It became apparent that these statements were incorrect when SMS contacted the UK Development Director for Travelodge, who confirmed that demand for hotel accommodation remained very strong in the area<sup>1</sup> and this has recently been confirmed at a meeting with Camden planners<sup>2</sup>. It was also discovered through communications with the Travelodge Property Department that Travelodge had not wanted to cease operations at Selkirk House but it was a 'commercial decision' (one surmises, forced upon them). We were also told that the hotel was not an 'overspill' from Drury Lane but was an independent and profitable hotel in its own right.

12.6 This view has been further supported by the fact that Travelodge is seeking sites in the area and has been investigating the possibility of extending its Drury Lane operation.

12.7 In the current planning application, 2023/2510/P the developer has pivoted, conceding that the demand for hotel rooms is buoyant but now contends that there are sufficient planning applications in the pipeline to satisfy the demand. Somehow beds which are in the pipeline, due to materialise in several years' time, will satisfy current demand.

12.8 The application cites Camden's Policy E3 on tourism, namely to support tourism development and visitor accommodation, and to protect existing visitor accommodation in appropriate locations, but the applicant states that, 'the supply

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<sup>1</sup> See Supplementary Document 9

<sup>2</sup> Bethany Cullen, Head of Development Management, London Borough of Camden, 'there is a high demand for hotel use. We are getting lots of applications for hotels'.  
SMS Meeting with Camden Planners Friday 28<sup>th</sup> July 2023 via Zoom

and demand of visitor accommodation is of importance to the consideration of the level of protection required'. The applicant states that:

'the resultant impact on the local hotel market due to the loss of bed spaces at the site (and on the specific type of hotel market that the former Travelodge sits within) **will be minimal.**'

But fails to adduce any cogent evidence in support of that claim.

12.9 The alternative approach put forward by SMS is more in line with Camden's policy for this area because it creates further facilities and attractions for tourists, such as a Tourist Information Centre, (which is sadly lacking here, despite the huge number of visitors making their way to the British Museum) and the exploitation of the Post Office tunnels as a visitor attraction. SMS contends that the retention of Selkirk House as a hotel would be a more immediate way of satisfying the strong demand for hotel accommodation currently experienced in Central London, to which the nightly rates attest, and would furthermore be in line with Camden, and the GLA's climate policies.

12.10 Another argument advanced by the applicant in favour of dispensing with Selkirk House as a hotel, is that it is no longer operating as a hotel and therefore there would in fact not be any 'actual loss' of visitor accommodation. This ignores the fact that the hotel is vacant as a result of the developer's own actions, and Travelodge would have preferred to continue operating the site throughout. They furthermore state that as the other Travelodge on Drury Lane continues in operation, this will, 'ensure that it meets the future demand of customers'. Only, as we have seen, it doesn't. Demand is outstripping supply, hence Travelodge's urgent desire to expand its operations in Drury Lane.

12.11 The further arguments in support of its application advanced by the developer are that:

'Any potential concerns with the loss of visitor accommodation at the site will also be outweighed by the significant number of other benefits that the scheme will bring. The proposal will facilitate the physical refurbishment and reoccupation of vacant floorspace at the site, which will ensure the floorspace is brought into an economically active use having a positive impact on local economic growth, job creation and local earnings.

Having artificially brought to an end any economic activity on the site, they are now using the dereliction brought about by their own actions, as a justification for imposing their gargantuan building on the site instead. The fact is that the physical refurbishment and occupation of the site could be achieved much more quickly, with less damage to the environment and the historic setting, by refurbishment and retrofitting of the existing building<sup>3</sup>. Adopting this approach, which was implemented very successfully in transforming Camden's offices into the Standard Hotel and on many other nearby sites, would accelerate economic regeneration of the area, be

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<sup>3</sup> The time frame for completion of the proposed development is 5 years minimum and the site has already been kept vacant for at least 3 years.



more beneficial in climate-change terms and would not cause damage to the adjacent listed buildings and their setting.

12.12 The applicant's argument that there is an unsatisfied demand for hotel use rather undermines their own application for 22,650 sqm of office space. Where is the pent-up demand for more office space? Currently more than 100 million sqft of office space lies empty in London.<sup>4</sup> This does not bode well for the future of the development, still less so for the supposed benefits of a minimal amount of affordable and social housing, which will be perpetually cast into darkness by the tower to the south of the site, that is being dangled in front of Camden. These benefits are scheduled for the end of the construction period, by which time the developers will be pleading poverty, and an inability to fulfil their S 106 commitments.

12.13 There will be little economic benefit for the area, once the period of construction is over when the office workers who are supposed to spend their money in the shops and bars fail to materialise. Museum Street will be left with a hulk of a building, blighting the landscape across London, casting many adjacent buildings into darkness and spoiling the setting of the many charming buildings of architectural and historic interest in the locality.

12.14 For all these reasons, the grant of planning permission would be unsafe and inconsistent with the Council's and national planning policies. The applicant's justification for the removal of this building from hotel use is spurious.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.costar.com/article/869068522/empty-office-space-across-the-uk-surpasses-100-million-square-feet> 12th April 2023

## 13 CONSTRUCTION PHASING AND FINANCIAL APPRAISALS

13.1 The developers have estimated it will take about 5 years to complete their whole scheme from when construction commences. Assuming planning permission is granted in the near future the developers envisage works commencing in the autumn of 2024, and the development will therefore be completed around 2029 applying the developer's timings. The development is proposed to take place at a time of extreme financial uncertainty and the increasing need to address climate change as a priority.

13.2. Their first phase proposes to demolish Selkirk House and also to demolish 16a/18 West Central Street, buildings that are singled out as having merit and enhancing the conservation area.

It is proposed to use the West Central Street, Museum Street, New Oxford Street block as the contractor's building site, which means that the works to the listed buildings and the construction of the social and affordable housing are programmed to be the last items undertaken.

13.3. It is estimated that the demolition works alone will take 1 to 1.5 years. The demolition of Selkirk House will be a very complex operation due to the number of 'live' tunnels underneath, (the Post Office's railways system, and the close proximity of TfL's Piccadilly and Elizabeth Lines), that have to be maintained at all times.

13.4. In their second phase the proposed tower block is to be constructed and this is estimated to take 2 years

13.5. The third phase involves all the works to the buildings within the West Central Street, Museum Street and New Oxford Street block contained within Conservation Area, and entails the construction of all of the affordable and social housing and the restoration of the listed buildings. It also contains the private housing in Vine Lane and the Holborn block beside the Cuban Embassy. This work is estimated to take 2 years.

13.6. The pavement and road works improvements and reinstatement will take place within the second and third phases.

13.7. The time allowed for each phase could be described as optimistic and allows very little contingency. It is more realistic to estimate the whole programme taking at least six years.

13.8. What is evident is that the developer's programme proposes that all the housing, both private and affordable, will take place at the end of the overall construction programme. If there is any slippage, which is inevitable due to the construction complexities inherent in the site conditions and design, then it will be the housing element that will be most affected and as West Central Street is to be the contractor's hub, then the delivery of the social and affordable housing will be the last element of the whole development completed.

13.9. The developers insist that the office block must to be constructed before the affordable housing content of their scheme commences.

13.10 Gardiner and Theobald (**G&T**), quantity surveyors, have undertaken costs plans of the various schemes; the latest costed the proposals up to the end of April 2023. The total building costs are estimated to be £ 217,800,000 (A). The tower block element is estimated to be £145m, of which £15m was allocated to demolitions, substructure and facilitating works, which would largely be avoided if the existing Selkirk House were retrofitted. The Vine Lane and High Holborn block is estimated to cost £32m, of which £4m was allocated for demolition and substructure works, and the West Central Street block is estimated to cost £26m of which £6m is for demolitions and substructure works. Finally, an allowance is made of £15m for site wide works.

All figures have been rounded. Coupled to the purchase price of £108m (B), the known costs of the proposals are c £316m (A+B).

13.11. To this should be added the finance costs to date, all expended fees, and ongoing costs, which are likely to be of the order of £40m, giving a total cost at today's prices of £356m, an extremely large sum. Approximately £25m is being expended on ground works and demolitions, which would largely be saved, if 16a/18 West Street were refurbished and Selkirk House were retrofitted. Retaining 16a/18 West Central Street would have the knock-on effect that no excavation works would be required to be undertaken within the West Central Street block.

13.12. The current proposals have an inbuilt poor revenue flow from the development as any possibility of any rental income is delayed until the tower block is constructed, which will at the earliest be not until mid-2028. Whereas, if the West Central Street block were renovated in accordance with the alternative design, submitted by Save Museum Street, including the reinstatement of Stable Yard, then within a year ie by 2025 there would be the possibility of rental income. This is because the building works to this block would be relatively simple and uncomplicated, with minimal risk elements as no extensive new ground works would be required, in contrast to the developer's current proposals. In addition, the majority of all the affordable housing and social housing would be secured at the first stage of the overall project.

13.13 There have been three financial appraisals all undertaken by Gerald Eve. The first report dated April 2021 was undertaken for Teddy Sagi's Labtech, a privately owned property company. Following the sale of the site in June 2022 to a French based asset management company called BC Partners two further appraisals have been undertaken by Gerald Eve, in September 2022 and June 2023.

13.15 The CIL and section 106 contributions being offered by Labtech and BC Partners are largely the same with a difference of £1.9m between the first and last proposal. The social housing element of the proposals has increased from 9 dwellings to 19 dwellings.

13.16 The first viability assessment (April 2021) stated:

"GE concludes that the **Proposed Scheme is not viable**. It is further concluded that the proposed planning contribution package comprising 40% affordable housing (by GIA) plus S106 and CIL of c. £4.3 million represents the maximum reasonable level that can be anticipated by the Council and any further contributions cannot be justified based upon viability. In order for the Scheme to viably support further contributions, the level of affordable housing would need to be reduced.

13.17 Gerald Eve's report goes on to say

"We test the financial robustness of the Proposed Scheme through sensitivity testing in Section 12, which demonstrates that the Proposed Scheme is potentially capable of being viable. The Applicant has also confirmed that it is willing and able to proceed with the development. The Proposed Scheme is considered to be deliverable for the following reasons:

- *The Applicant is a major land-owner in the Borough that is committed to pursuing large-scale mixed-use development that benefits its wider estate. The Applicant is therefore able to take a holistic approach to the improvement of the wider area;*
- *Due to its financial standing, the Applicant is able to take a 'patient capital' approach to financial returns, whereby immediate returns are not expected, in anticipation of greater returns in the longer-term. It is able therefore to take a long-term view on potential growth in the commercial and residential markets and its own financial cost of capital; and*

- The Proposed Scheme offers the opportunity to create significantly more value and release more profit than the hotel refurbishment AUV.<sup>1</sup>

13.18 Within less than a year Teddy Sagi, who wholly owns Labtech, sold the development site, which rather undermines the unequivocal assurance by Gerald Eve that Teddy Sagi would take a long-term view and that he was able to take a holistic approach and therefore the fact that they considered the scheme not viable could be overlooked, as it was likely to be viable in the future. It also shows that their statement that additional social housing requirements would render the overall scheme unviable as a spurious assertion.

13.19 The second financial appraisal, dated **September 2022**, by Gerald Eve for BC Partners, following slight revisions to the development scheme that saw the affordable housing being increased to 19 dwellings, stated:

“GE therefore concludes that as per the scheme previously submitted for planning and BPS conclusions in that regard, **the updated Scheme is not viable**. GE further concludes that the proposed planning contribution package comprising 51% affordable housing (by GIA) plus S106 and CIL of c. £4.3 million represents the maximum reasonable level that can be anticipated by the Council and any further contributions, including a residential PIL, cannot be justified based upon viability. In order for the Scheme to viably support further contributions, the level of affordable housing would need to be reduced.”

13.20 This time Gerald Eve gave no explanation as to why BC Partners, a private equity company, whose financial affairs are all off-shore, would wish to carry out the development, bearing in mind GE still claimed it was not a viable proposal and again claimed that any more financial contribution than that being offered would make the situation worse and was not possible.

13.21 The third financial appraisal dated **June 2023** for BC+ Partners again by Gerald Eve, following further changes to the development scheme forced on the developers as a consequence of five properties within the development site being listed grade II, stated:

“We therefore conclude that as per the previous scheme submitted for planning and BPS’ conclusions in that regard, **the updated Scheme is not viable**. GE further concludes that the proposed planning contribution package comprising 51% affordable housing (by GIA) plus S106 and CIL of c. £6.24m represents the maximum viable level that can be anticipated by the Council and any further contributions, including a residential PIL, cannot be justified based upon viability. In order for the Scheme to viably support further contributions, the level of affordable housing would need to be reduced.”

13.22 Once again Gerald Eve gave no explanation why BC Partners, a private equity company, would wish to carry out the development, bearing in mind that GE were stating the scheme was unviable, but was somehow now offering more CIL and section 106 monies.

## 13.2 Conclusion

What is abundantly clear is:

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<sup>1</sup> The fact that Gerald Eve state that the continued use of the site as hotel would not produce an equivalent return to an office-based scheme appears to be the only justification for changing the land use of the site; this change does not comply with Camden and the GLA’s land use planning policy for this site within the Opportunity Area

13.2.1 Teddy Sagi, who owned Labtech himself and was using his own money for the development, decided that he wanted to cash in his land holding and had no intention of carrying out the development when it became all too apparent to him that the construction costs and risks made the overall scheme extremely risky.

13.2.2 BC Partners, who are not using their own money, but are using a whole variety of different equities and pension funds put up by others, have probably purchased the site for a very inflated sum (£108 million see sale details by Michael Elliot company).

13.2.3 Gerald Eve's assertions in every report they have produced over the past three years at the various stages of the development proposals, are highly suspect, especially concerning the ability of the developers to make financial contributions and provide a quantum of affordable housing. However, the one thing they all say, which will inevitably be cited, is that they have made it clear that as far as they are concerned each scheme has not been viable.

13.2.4 The cost plan report for the construction costs prepared by Gardiner and Theobald only concerns the building costs but do include contingency allowances. There are no allowances for any costs incurred and fees of the professional team to date or in the future, (other than a 5% allowance for the main contractors design expenditure) and no allowances for rights of light claims, which will be many, due to the extent of harm the proposed tower block will cause to all neighbouring properties. The fact that a number of notifications have already been lodged is telling, and it is extremely likely that other *major* landowners that have property interests adjoining the development will make substantial rights of light claims in the future, which will further reduce the viability of the development.

13.2.5 The phasing of the developer's proposals results in a very slow delivery of any rental income as this will only occur once the tower block is completed which is 2028 at the earliest.

13.2.6 The phasing of the development insisted on by the developers, namely that the construction of the office tower block is to take place before the affordable housing, **puts at extreme risk the delivery of the affordable housing and particularly the social housing.**

13.2.7 It is probable that the developer will require the scheme to be varied during the construction period, as unforeseen costs become apparent, and they will claim unviability, indeed as Gerald Eve have already stated. **The optimistic construction period and the complexities of the development and quantity of financial risks associated with the development and its timing, all strongly indicate that the social contents of the scheme, which are minimal, are highly insecure.**

13.2.8 Normally Councils rely on Section 106 agreements to ensure 'planning deals' are delivered. BC Partners are completely new to property development in the UK and their development partners Simten (partnership terms which are all confidential) have a minimal track record.

13.2.9 All BC Partners' trading is off shore and all their financial arrangements are hidden. The risks to Camden are high, and bearing in mind the universal condemnation of the architectural damage the development will inflict on the conservation areas and listed buildings in this unique and important part of central London, the mere possibility that all of the social housing, especially as the quality is so poor, will not materialise until the end of the six year development programme and then possibly not at all, should give yet further reason why the development proposal should not be granted planning approval.

**Save Museum Street**  
**Supplementary Document Number 9**

**E-mail from Regional Manager, Travelodge**  
28 March 2023

**From:** Tony O'Brien [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, March 28, 2023 3:11 pm  
**To:** Helen Mc Murray [REDACTED]  
**Cc:** John Hardy [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** Re: Hotel development opportunities in central London

Hi Helen,

Thank you for your email.

I do not think that the option of Travelodge reopening a hotel in Selkirk House is available, so I do not believe that it is appropriate for me to answer that hypothetical question. **However, I can confirm that Travelodge would like to open more hotel rooms in this part of central London, so I would strongly contest claims that there is no demand for hotel accommodation in the area. (Our emphasis)**

I believe that there may be some construction issues at the subject property, especially with regards to the car park, so I am not at all surprised by a proposal to redevelop this site.

This is a part of London that I know very well and which is very dear to me, as my first role in London was at Prudential Portfolio Managers on High Holborn. I acted for Travelodge as part of our JV with Bovis and The British Museum for the proposed redevelopment of the former Post Office Sorting Offices site for a new Museum Study Centre and Travelodge hotel, which, as I am sure you will know, failed around 20 years ago. I also acted as Travelodge's Development Manager for the conversion of Selkirk House from offices to the Travelodge. Finally, for a number of years, our London office was located in the existing Travelodge Covent Garden hotel, to which I was a very regular visitor.

I believe that the Central St Giles development scheme and the recently completed Post Building on the old sorting office site have been great new additions to this area.

Selkirk House was always one of the (very few) tallest buildings in this part of London, second only to Centre Point, but Central St Giles and The Post Building are around the same height.

As you know, there has been a general move towards taller buildings throughout central London and I think that there are strong arguments for and against this, but this does appear to be the general trend.

I have not reviewed the proposals for the 166 High Holborn redevelopment and so cannot comment on these plans.

With best wishes

Tony

**Tony O'Brien**  
Regional Manager, Travelodge