

From: pbloxham

Sent: 19 October 2023 18:23

To: Planning

Subject: applications ref 2023/2510/P and 2023/2954/L

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)

Dear Sirs,

Please see attached as supplementary materials in support of my objections to both applications.

Regards

Peter Bloxham

Peter Bloxham

**Flat 3
Queen Alexandra Mansions
Grape Street
London WC2H 8DX**

Edward Beaver Esq
Simten

By email

19 October 2023

Dear Mr Beaver,

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)

I refer to your letter of 13 October and my holding reply of 15 October. Your letter seems intended as a reply on behalf of your client BC Partners to a letter I wrote to their Monsieur Theuriau on 14 August.

In view of the terms of your letter, I feel I have to set the record straight.

You claim that you want to *clarify the situation regarding our responses to your previous and ongoing correspondence*. I am not sure your letter does achieve this objective.

You go on to claiming that you value *dialogue*. It is not clear whether this statement is made by Simten or on behalf of BC Partners. It is not a plausible assertion in the case of BC Partners who:

- Failed to turn up to a meeting in September 2022 specifically arranged by *Save Museum Street (SMS)* to meet BC Partners and to engage with them as the new owners of the plots in and adjoining the Bloomsbury Conservation Area;

- Have bought into the “there can be no consultation” approach originally adopted and made very clear by Labtech at a meeting on 15 April 2021;
- Appear to be incapable of understanding the difference between:
 - informing affected neighbours what they have already decided to do and
 - Genuine consultation, entailing tabling proposals capable of adaptation, and then listening to the reasoned views of those likely to be affected by its overweening proposals.
- Adopted the device of re-submitting an essentially unchanged proposal, to seek to circumvent objections formally submitted to the original 2021 application.
- Consider avoiding tax more important than permitting the transparency which a project of this significance demands.

I accept that you have replied, with considerable delay, to some of the questions I have asked about your clients’ still very sketchy proposals. There have been as many apologies for delay as substantive written responses. I also note that a typical response indicates that the question raises issues of detail, to be sorted out at a later date.

We have had two meetings, one on 6 January and a second (subsequent to your letter) on 16 October.

It took from the January meeting to the end of September to organize the session I had suggested at that meeting to discuss issues specific to West Central Street.

You allude to the number of stakeholders to be marshaled. I am not sure to whom you are referring apart from Camden (not just the planners), GLA, Royal Mail and BC Partners’ financial backers, as well as Labtech, to the extent it has a continuing involvement. There will also be statutory consultees.

The list of stakeholders should include local residents and businesses. Sending random fliers and emails based on a rather poor database does not suggest a lot of respect for these local stakeholders. These are people designated for consultation by Camden’s published planning policies. The website is so partisan as to be misleading.

I appreciate that, because of the sheer complexity and riskiness of what you are proposing, as well as the specific problems it throws up, such as low daylight levels, a multitude of technical experts have to be involved, but I would not consider them as stakeholders.

It remains unclear why organising a session with the Asian Womens’ Resource Centre was more important than having an equivalent session with SMS or why the request

to repeat the session for the benefit of SMS (as SMS and its members were not invited to the January 2023 session) and to put SMS in touch with the Resource Centre has been ignored for months.

Freedom of Information disclosures show that there has been plenty of time to engage with Camden and seemingly to pre agree matters subsequently presented to SMS and others, including local Councillors, for information only.

Turning to BC Partners, I have sent in total 9 letters and emails to Monsieur Theuriau. I have not even received an acknowledgement, let alone a substantive reply.

I have also written to colleagues of Monsieur Theuriau, including the person who is designated as head of ESG for BC Partners and who, in materials published by BC Partners, described the plots acquired by BC Partners as follows:

In June 2022, BCPERE I purchased a development site in central London, on Museum Street, close to Tottenham Court Road Station. It comprises a 15-storey former Travelodge hotel, a 5-storey car park (at the foot of and underneath the vacant hotel building), and a collection of smaller adjacent buildings. Excluding the carpark, it totals c.90k sf. BCPERE aims to redevelop the site into a ground plus 18 story office tower, along with some retail and residential.

(I note in passing the reluctance, shared with your website, to specify the actual height of the proposed skyscraper.)

The dismissive reference to “a collection of smaller adjacent buildings” and the absence of any mention of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area or of the other heritage buildings close by shows how little BC Partners appreciate the particular nature and the quality of the assets they have acquired or the historic environment in which they are situated. It also speaks volumes for the seriousness with which BC Partners approach ESG matters, particularly when they clash with pure capitalism.

However, this is not about my *amour propre* in not receiving replies to my letters. This is about a failure on the part of BC Partners to engage with the local community in which they have chosen to make an investment, in the form of a number of highly sensitive and complex land parcels, some now including listed buildings.

I can only assume that BC Partners’ invisibility and reluctance to engage is something of an admission of embarrassment on the part of the French based private equity fund attempting to make money in central London out of a project which would be prohibited in central Paris.

In the circumstances, as I have already made clear, I do not see how it can be suggested that BC Partners have complied with Camden's policies regarding public consultation. For that reason alone, the applications are flawed (as well as premature). Nothing in your letter leads me to resile from that conclusion.

I am copying David Fowler and Monsieur Theuriau.

This is an open letter.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Bloxham.