

Application No:	Consultees Name:	Received:	Comment:	Response:
2024/4642/P	Jeffrey Gold	15/11/2024 15:31:42	OBJ	ROYAL FREE VASCULAR THEATRES

POND STREET RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION – OBJECTION LETTER

While it is encouraging to see the hospital expanding vascular services to help cut waiting lists, the proposed location for the two new vascular theatres on stilts above the access to the heart attack unit and lower car park is short sighted overdevelopment and should be re-thought.

Our grounds for objecting to the current proposals are:

1. Overdevelopment, particularly while traffic congestion and poor air quality remain unresolved
2. Front entrance traffic congestion and car park access/ queueing
3. Restricted pedestrian access to and from the lower car park
4. Loss of light
5. Design appearance
6. Lack of consultation
7. Lack of safeguards for neighbouring properties

Below we outline each of these in turn:

1. Overdevelopment, particularly while traffic congestion and poor air quality remain unresolved
For well over a decade, local residents have pressed the Hospital to publish its master plan for the Royal Free Hospital site, always being told that it was being worked on but there was a delay. The plan would enable everyone to see what the hospital might look like in the future. There has never been any indication that the hospital was considering filling in the gap between the main building and the Pears Building.

This new proposal will only add to and worsen the already existing serious traffic congestion and pollution. This is confirmed in the applicant's transport report which states "We anticipate that the proposed development will generate an average 32 2-way car trips in an hour. This equates to a demand of approximately two vehicles at any given time over and above the existing demand."

According to the Hampstead Neighbourhood Forum's recent five yearly air quality survey, after the completion of Pears Building, Pond Street and South End Road are the only two locations in NW3 where air quality has deteriorated over the past five years. The applicant admits that air quality on the site and in Pond Street is far worse than it should be. Their air quality report concludes that the proposed development "... will not lead to further deterioration of existing poor air quality".

In their planning statement the applicant argues that "...there is a critical and fundamental need to deliver the proposed development ... ". But this is no justification at all for why the new theatres have to be in the location they propose.

This latest proposal constitutes overdevelopment, particularly because of the adverse effect it will have on the neighbourhood and while the existing traffic congestion and poor air quality remain un-addressed.

2. Front entrance traffic congestion and car park access (with the lost opportunity to implement the most promising solution identified by the hospital's own traffic consultants)

Application No: Consultees Name: Received:

Comment: Response:

Traffic congestion and pollution in Pond Street have undoubtedly worsened since the Pears Building was constructed. Traffic jams, congestion and cars honking their horns are now daily events in Pond Street. Prior to the Pears Building they were a rarity. Neighbours warned at the time that almost halving the number of parking spaces and the loss of the slip road beside the old car park which enabled traffic to exit via Rowland Hill Street would lead to congestion problems and we have been proved right.

There is no indication at present that the Hospital authorities or the London Borough of Camden have any idea how to solve the current problems.

The Hospital acknowledges that traffic congestion is a problem and recently commissioned Evoke Consultants to propose options for re-designing the Pond Street entrance road layout. Evoke reported in December 2023 and gave several options. The most promising solution for re-sighting the car park queue is where the hospital now proposes to put the support stilts for the new theatres. Re-siting the queue would then allow space for a new mini roundabout to facilitate faster entry and exit from the site. We will send you a copy of this "Evoke" report separately

Locating the new theatres as proposed would be a huge missed opportunity for what is likely to be the only way of alleviating traffic congestion and pollution. The hospital should properly resolve the existing traffic congestion and circulation difficulties before contemplating any further infill construction on the Pond Street side.

3. Restricted pedestrian access to and from the lower car park

Locating the support pillars in the middle of the pavement will unacceptably narrow pedestrian access to and from the lower car park and prevent wheelchair users from safely navigating their way to the main entrance.

4. Loss of light

Before the Pears Building, neighbours living on the other side of Pond Street had a view of the skyline above the old hospital car park and the gardens. Now the only light comes from the gap between the two buildings. The proposed new theatres will significantly narrow the gap and reduce available light. It will therefore result in considerable loss of light and amenity to the neighbours on the other side of Pond Street.

One thing which has emerged is that the proposed new structure is to have two floors one of which is to be unoccupied. There can be no justification for detrimentally affecting neighbours any more than is absolutely necessary, which would be less if the building was only one storey.

5. Design appearance

An eminent journalist once said that the Royal Free had the best views in Hampstead as it was the only building that did not have a view of the Royal Free. The proposed building would only extend and enlarge the current eyesore.

The buildings on the other side of Pond Street are within a conservation area and many are listed. This application is detrimental their setting.

6. Lack of consultation

There has been little consultation by the Hospital which has not really spelt out the plans and inconvenience to

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neighbours. There should be considerably more consultation before any planning application is submitted and/or considered by LB Camden.

7. Lack of safeguards for neighbouring properties

When the Pears building was constructed, there was a considerable period of disruption with noise and dust being created which greatly inconvenienced neighbouring properties not least Hampstead Hill Nursery School and St. Stephens (former) church. There were also very reasonable fears that there would be structural damage not only to these buildings but also to the buildings on the other side of Pond Street.

The proposed new building will be on stilts which will entail extensive digging and piling and will cause considerable disturbance both inside the hospital and to all neighbouring properties. There does not appear to be any assessment indicating the likely impact on those properties. Adequate safeguards for these properties should be in place before any application is granted.

There is an additional important practical factor. When a crane is required to lift heavy equipment to and from the hospital roof, our understanding is that the only place where there is sufficient loadbearing capacity is the site of the proposed new building. Neighbouring properties are entitled to be concerned that future crane movements could give rise to damage to their properties. Adequate safeguards must be in place not only to protect neighbouring properties but also the hospital and its users.

Summary

While we welcome the Hospital's contribution to reducing waiting lists for essential surgery, this proposal is hasty and poorly thought through.

It constitutes overdevelopment, particularly because of the adverse effect it will have on the neighbourhood and while existing traffic congestion and poor air quality remain un-addressed.

The hospital should properly resolve the existing traffic congestion and circulation difficulties before contemplating any further infill construction on the Pond Street side.

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Total: 1