

Application no. 2024/5468/P

The application claims that, in addition to providing a narrow storage room in place of the balcony this proposal would both improve accessibility and enhance the appearance of the rear of the building. In fact, it does neither. My objections are as follows:

ACCESSIBILITY:

1. ACCESS: The service road is the only vehicular access to the block, crucial for all comings and goings:- for deliveries, post, taxis, access to their cars for residents and their visitors, for services and emergency access and to the dustbins. Under the present plans for the first stairwell (on which I live), this will only be possible through the lift. What if it were out of order? At present all have immediate access to the building. The installation of the proposed lift with no alternative access on that side of the building would materially impact accessibility and therefore is unacceptable.
2. RAMPS: The very narrow service road slopes, and all four entrances to the building differ. Wheelchair access to the lift at my entrance would require a ramp running up and out into the service road sending water down towards the lift and creating a slipping danger.
3. WHAT TYPE OF LIFT? : This proposal is for a platform lift, one that moves more slowly than a person taking the stairs at a leisurely pace. Sam Price MA FREng FICEstructE HonFRIBA , of structural engineers Price & Myers, when asked for his opinion of the proposed lift wrote that *"Brookfield, which is a fine example of Edwardian architecture, deserves better than this."*
4. ARCHITECTURAL CONSISTENCY: I cannot agree with the Heritage Appraisal when (5.4) it states that *"Mansions blocks built in a slightly later period...were often constructed with internal lifts, and thus the addition of one here is consistent with the building's typology."* Of course, it would be wonderful had the architects of the Brookfield blocks designed them with internal lifts, but they didn't. The proposed design

with the external lightwells filled and with ill-suited small windows revealing objects stored in the enclosures would be deeply discordant with the design of the building and its neighbours.

LIGHT & VENTILATION:

Among the documents submitted with the application there is a photograph of a timber-clad enclosure such as I have in Flat 28. This gave me a very narrow larder-cum-storage space and seemed a good idea when I agreed to it in 2012. However, I came to regret the decision, as the ugly structure blocked the view from my hall window and substantially reduced the light to my flat. The proposed lift, with full enclosures, would take away the natural light altogether and remove all ventilation. On both counts the staircase would be adversely affected since in addition to the loss of light, the air that cools the building in summer would no longer pass through it once the rear windows were lost.

ARCHITECTURALLY APPROPRIATE?

The Heritage Appraisal (5.12) cites two cases which it deems relevant to the present application where Camden Council granted planning permission. The first, no. 2016/1422/P, granted on the 5th July, was for “demolition of existing concrete & mesh screen balconies and replacement with new steel frame balconies...at nos. 9-24 Brookfield Mansions”. These are visible from my window. The Appraisal quotes from the Council’s notes where they say: *“The proposal would have no detrimental impact upon the character and appearance of the conservation area.”* and argues that the elegant and simple solution to the same problem we have of decaying balconies, should serve as a precedent in granting planning permission for the heavy in-fill design which is in no way comparable. Similarly, the second application referred to, that of Cartwright Gardens (5.13), has little in common with the present application, since the lift behind Cartwright Gardens is accessed through the hotel which it serves, rather than outside, and does not restrict access to a service road.

THE BALCONY ENCLOSURES

In my opinion the 2016 design for replacement balcony structures referred to above would be an appropriate solution to the problem of our own balconies. If all of them, both enclosed and unenclosed, are to be demolished, we have a unique opportunity to restore the rear of the building to its original appearance, in harmony with itself and with the other Brookfield Mansions buildings.

CONSULTATION:

Consultation on this design and any alternatives has been limited. Following a recent online presentation by the architect, several leaseholders, (four of them ground floor residents), asked to meet him and did so on November 8th. In his subsequent report Mr Drake observed that *“There did seem to be a considerable amount of concern and lack of understanding of what has been previously agreed or required for the ground floor level entrances for both schemes. I do think this needs to be given some further consideration in terms of explanation to the residents or the like.”* His suggestion has not been acted on.

In his above-cited letter of 30 April 2018, Sam Price had written: *“...Whichever scheme is proposed I think it would be extremely advisable to build a full size mock-up in the intended position, so that everyone is clear about what it would look like and how it would work. This could be made of timber studs and plywood and would not be expensive.”*

His recommendation was rejected by the Board on grounds of cost.

FINALLY:

An observation perhaps worth considering by the Council:

Ground floor flats at Brookfield Mansions tend to attract older, less mobile residents and for the same reason come on the market more often than those on the upper floors. The latter attract younger people, sometimes with

families. The result hitherto has been a mixed population of all age groups. During the Covid epidemic it was noticeable how the more mobile, younger residents were able to help the elderly, bringing provisions and keeping an eye on them. Were lifts installed this balance in the population would almost certainly shift in a way less helpful to the community as a whole.