

Conservation Area Consent Supporting Statement (August 2006)

Arundel House is a concrete framed office building (with ancillary workshops and cafeteria) built for De Beers, the diamond merchants, in the 1960s. The design of the building is typical of its time, where the concrete frame is expressed externally as a white grid with discrete infill panels of brown brick and full width steel framed glazing. The ground floor consists of dark stained timber framed glazing above a blue patterned tile plinth with obscured glass blocks below. The secure entrances at the ends of the building are faced in vertical timber boarding, while one additional bay is occupied by a sliding folding shutter. The building appears to have undergone a series of services alterations over the years and as a consequence some bays have been infilled with louvres and some external flues and pipework have appeared on both front and back elevations.

The building has five storeys above basement level; the fourth floor is set back approximately two metres to form a terrace, which has been fenced off for security reasons. This parapet height and set back is common to a number of buildings on Kirby Street and is a dominant feature of the streetscape. The entire roof deck above is filled with mechanical plant, some of which is tall and can be glimpsed obliquely from Kirby Street. A common feature of Kirby Street, and the immediate vicinity is a vertical emphasis in elevational treatment. However, this feature is not reflected in 36-43 Kirby Street where the square proportioned grid does not provide a dominant axis in one direction or the other.

The proposal to create 128 studio flats for students and 42 jewellery workshops involves stripping out the brick and glass infill between the structural elements and locally cutting away the floor slab on Kirby Street to provide level access from pavement level to the bin store, cycle park and sub station. Additional slots will be cut into the ground floor slab on Kirby Street to provide rooflights to the workshops proposed in the basement, in order to increase daylight to these spaces. The fourth floor will be removed in its entirety to enable the construction of a steel framed roof extension. All internal non-structural partitions will be removed and two new holes will be formed in the floor slab from first

floor upwards to provide smoke venting. The demolition involved is the minimum necessary to convert the building to its new use and the massing of the building visible from street level will remain unchanged.

Planning Policy Guidance 15 (PPG 15) states that in exercising conservation area controls special attention should be paid to the 'desirability to preserve or enhance the character of appearance of a conservation area', with a presumption in favour of 'retaining buildings which make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of the area'.

However, we consider that with its present 'tired' appearance, the building does not make a positive contribution to the appearance and character of the conservation area. The strong parapet line, which is a common feature to Kirby Street, and massing of the building visible from street level will be retained.

The proposed works, together with the replacement design provides a high quality solution that is sympathetic to the industrial heritage of Kirby Street, and the wider conservation area. This is achieved through the introduction of materials such as oxidised copper sheet and copper mesh panels, adjacent to the glazing. Render is proposed as the backdrop to these elements as a material sympathetic to the concrete frame which remains visible at ground floor.