

[REDACTED]

Mr R McEllistrum
Planning Department
London Borough of Camden
Town Hall
Judd Street
London

5th June 2013

Dear Mr McEllistrum

CARTWRIGHT GARDENS REDEVELOPMENT – Planning Application Ref: 2013/1598/P

[REDACTED] I worked as a university lecturer for 37 years and am now retired. I have enjoyed working with and living next to students, but I am concerned that the proposed development would make it difficult for residents to maintain good relations with their student neighbours. This is because the design of the current buildings, which is sensitive to the needs of both students and residents, will be replaced with something that can only maximise friction between them. The proposed development ignores all effects of overlooking and noise and will provoke and exacerbate anti-social behaviour. My retirement has been a pleasure, and I am part of a close, supportive community which I rely on and could not replace if I moved. This grossly inappropriate building could have a deeply destructive effect on our local community.

NOISE

Students make a lot of noise. They play loud music, shriek at each other and get drunk. They stand outside their residences in large groups and hold shouting conversations. So did we, when we were students. The students need somewhere they can make noise without disturbing other people, and we need not to be disturbed by them. The Cartwright Gardens site is ideal for this because it has the buffer zone of the park on one side. It is hard to imagine a design that makes less use of this than the proposed development. There are no communal spaces on the Cartwright Gardens side of the building apart from 2 entrance halls which have security guards. In Sandwich Street there are: **9** unmanned doors at street level; **9** into the light well; **18** communal spaces at ground and basement level in the town houses, with windows that open onto the street; **10** common rooms in the central building; **1** very large communal room running the length of the central building in Sandwich Street, one third the length of Sandwich Street; **14** kitchen/lounges one on each of the floors of the tower block with windows facing Sandwich Street.; **9** 'green' flat roofs of the town house which have stairs up to them; **1** 'pocket' garden for the use of 246 students in the tower. In addition noise will come from the plant on the central roof and the gated delivery road, where heavy lorries will sit with their engines running.

All these new sources of noise have been placed on the quiet residential street rather than opposite the empty park, or in the internal wells of the building. There could be no clearer indication that the developers have not considered the impact of the building on the residential community next to it.

ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

Within 300 yards of Cartwright Gardens there is another student hall and two hostels for young people. In this small area there are already over 3000 short-term residents in student halls and hostels. The Council is aware of very serious issues with anti-social behaviour in the area. Drug dealers and local youths are attracted by a concentration of young adults. Anti-social behaviour is only controlled by extreme vigilance and co-operation between long-term residents, local councillors and the police.

The 9 unmanned entrances at the back of the proposed building are an invitation to drug dealers. Serious and dangerous drug dealers have managed to rent premises in Sandwich House, twice in the last few years, and it took a considerable effort to get rid of them. The communal rooms facing directly onto the street at the back at ground and basement level, and the pocket garden will bring students into close proximity with local youths encouraging disputes and brawls.

The proposed design will exacerbate anti-social behaviour. This is completely unnecessary and avoidable. Both the students and the local community need a building designed to limit the extent of anti-social behaviour and to address issues of safety on the streets.

OVERLOOKING AND LOSS OF LIGHT

The developers have completely ignored the subject of overlooking. They propose to build a high flat front along the whole of Sandwich Street just over 14 m away from the residences on the opposite side. Almost all the flats in Sandwich House will then be overlooked and flats that now have a view of trees and the sky, over half the flats in the block, will stare straight into student bedrooms or at a close brick wall. The majority of flats will have some loss of light and even the developers light report admits that over 20 will lose 40-58% of sunlight, which it acknowledges as a 'serious' loss while still managing to conclude that 'these breeches are minor in nature'. They are not minor to the score of households that will become dark.

At present most of our roof gardens have privacy and are not overlooked, only the few immediately opposite Canterbury hall have one storey of student bedrooms immediately opposite them. The proposed building will be 2m higher than Canterbury Hall and almost, if not all, of our gardens will lose their privacy.

CONFERENCES

The University intends to host very large conferences in the summer which could add 1200 more visitors to the area, inevitably adding to the extreme pedestrian congestion and increasing coach traffic to the narrow surrounding streets, which are already plagued with illegal coach parking. Conferences are noisy. Open windows in a room with a large audience will create noise that reverberates down the street. Conference sessions finish and all the participants spill out onto the street at the same time. Go past any of the large hotels in Russell Square or Southampton Row to see this. In the evening coaches turn up in convoy to take participants out. This quiet residential area is not suitable for a large conference hall.

TRAFFIC

Residents have protested at every meeting about the foolishness of having unmanned back entrances to the residence through the town houses and the potential for noise from communal spaces at ground and basement level in the town houses which are virtually unsupervised. The developers' response to this is disingenuous in the extreme; I quote from their Planning Statement:

Through the design evolution, the number of town-houses to the north of Sandwich Street have been reduced to respond to the concerns of residents at Sandwich House"

One of the town houses has been removed to make way for a new delivery road that will take all the daily traffic to this vast complex. We did not ask for this new road and we do not want it. The road will be gated, so every delivery vehicle will idle with its engine running waiting for the gates to open. Bread deliveries are at 6am. At present there is little traffic on Sandwich Street, this will create a large amount, all at one point. It will be a continuous nuisance to the residents opposite. There is no immediately obvious reason why deliveries cannot take place in Cartwright Gardens, where there are no neighbours to disturb.

The developers propose to make Cartwright Gardens a one way street immediately in front of the halls. This will push vehicles from Leigh Street round the west side of the crescent, creating traffic in front of the hotels, and possibly into Bruton Street. The new pavement will run beside the iron fence beside the gardens. The only entrance(s) are to the garden, so the pavement is not necessary for access. It would be possible to build a narrow pavement and keep the street two-way, avoiding the overspill of traffic onto quiet residential streets. The only apparent function of the one-way design is to facilitate coach parking in front of the halls. Perhaps this is also the reason why the developers do not want deliveries to Cartwright Gardens.

BULK

The extraordinary size of the proposed development is out of all proportion to the increase in the number of students it will house, 187. The building is large because it contains an unusual amount of 'amenity' space, not because the individual students have more personal space. The corridors along Cartwright Gardens in the hotel-like building each contain 60 student bedrooms but have only four 11sqm kitchen/lounges. The most obvious unusual area of amenity space is that a third of the ground floor is entrance hall, large lounges and the enormous 'flexible study space' which will be used for conferences, in all over 1100 sqm. The size of the building is also increased by; 200 sqm of 'flexible university space' (which at the last exhibition we were told would be used as university offices); the new delivery road which cuts off the tower block from the rest of the complex; and the huge bicycle store. The town houses also take up a lot of space, each town house has one and a half floors of communal space for 7 students.

The tower block will be completely separated from the rest of the complex by the new delivery road. Although the town houses do have rear entrances into the central courtyard, they are otherwise independent from the hotel-like building. The complex is still basically three separate structures, but the majority of bedrooms are in the hotel-like building.

WHY THE BUILDING IS BAD FOR STUDENTS AND THEREFORE FOR THEIR NEIGHBOURS.

Students need a home, particularly when they first come to university. The current three halls are friendly places where the staff can and do get to know the students. I sat in the entrance hall to Commonwealth Hall and saw the security employee on the desk greeting most of the students by name. This is possible in a hall with 300+ students, it would not be possible in a hall with 1000 students. If the hall is not a home and the staff cannot get to know the students, shy students will stay in their rooms and party-loving students will party. This will be a particular problem in the proposed development where the party-lovers will all gravitate to the very large ground floor space and congregate in large numbers, because there is no communal space near their bedrooms. Or if they want to avoid being observed they will party in the town houses which have no surveillance. Residences should be places where students can find companionship and peace in which to study. Everything about this design militates against this. The university should reconsider the advisability of putting the students in a group of 1000 rather than in more manageable groups of 300-400.

STUDENT MANAGEMENT

Successful management is dependent on the design of the building and the number of staff employed. The sprawl of the huge hotel-like building together with the separate town houses will have one warden, responsible for nearly 1000 students. This will be unmanageable. No Student Management Plan can remedy this. The proposed management plan will rely on a community liaison committee and a Section 106 for enforcement. So residents and the council will yet again be used to enforce responsible behaviour, in an under-staffed building whose design will increase anti-social behaviour.

CONCLUSION

The design of this development appears to be focused on developing conference trade, rather than creating a building that provides a safe and friendly home for students. It is totally disrespectful of its residential neighbours and ignores the local problems both of relations between students and local youths and the pervasive drug trade in the area. This is a unique site, in that it is both in a residential conservation area and close to the ever-expanding development area round St Pancras station. I am concerned that this is a public private partnership between the University and UPP and that the design appears to be driven by the need for financial profit at the expense of the welfare of students and of the local community. The need for the University of London to exist as an institution was called into question as long ago as 2007, now that the large colleges are universities in their own right. I am unclear what would happen to the development and any Section 106 agreement if the University of London ceased to exist or UPP sold its interest in the site to another company.

I ask the council to reject this planning application which would create many foreseeable problems that could last for decades. The university should use this unique opportunity to create a splendid building that enhances the neighbourhood and that students and residents can be proud of and enjoy.

