

Cc: Planning
Subject: Cartwright Gardens Student Halls redevelopment proposals

Follow Up Flag: Follow up

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Richard McEllistrum
 East Area Team
 Development Management
 Camden Council

Dear Mr McEllistrum

Re: Cartwright Gardens Student Halls redevelopment applications - 2013/1598/P & 2013/1787/C

I am writing on behalf of the Marchmont Association to provide you with our comments on the above applications. Whilst we recognise that the University of London has made changes to its original scheme in response to feedback received at the various public consultation events it organised, we have a number of concerns about the final scheme which has been submitted to Camden Council for the purpose of obtaining planning permission. Members attending the recent Annual General Meeting of our association also expressed concerns, with a majority vote calling for the University to "go back to the drawing board" with their plans for the student halls.

We therefore object to the planning application as submitted.

1. **Height and Mass of the Cartwright Gardens elevation of the proposed building:** We remain concerned about the height and mass of the building, which has been inappropriately referenced by the applicant to the monumental Victoria House in Bloomsbury Square, the equally large and foreboding Hotel Russell in Russell Square and the over-dominant School of Pharmacy building in Brunswick Square, all built in different times without the constraints of today's planning regulations. These references do not chime with the University's stated intentions to respect the historic setting of Cartwright Gardens and the Bloomsbury Conservation Area, in that they are comparing the low-rise, predominantly residential locality of Cartwright Gardens with much larger squares and the traffic-dominated arterial routes which dissect the wider area. We also regard English Heritage's description of the proposed building as having "Institutional Gravitas" as a total mis-reading of the historic character of this rare residential Georgian Crescent, located within a predominantly residential area. Whilst we understand the economic need for the University to increase the quality and quantity of student accommodation on the site, we feel this should and could be achieved with less height and mass.
2. **The Leigh Street frontage:** We welcome the substantive changes made to original design of the Leigh Street elevation to better reflect the historic character of Leigh Street and north Marchmont Street, together with the opening up of the ground floor frontage to provide for the possibility of a future publicly accessible use. Our first preference is for this space to be an A1/Retail unit, which could have a beneficial effect on the local trading environment, behaving as an 'eye-catcher' to attract passing trade from busy Marchmont Street into 'struggling' Leigh Street. Alternatively, this space provides a great opportunity to activate the street frontage with an innovative ideas-exchange/information-hub/creative-centre, which could help to bridge the artificial gap between University students and the general public. We therefore see the proposed 'Sui Generis' use as a sensible 'holding position', subject to further discussions between the University and other interested parties, leading to a future application for a change of use reflecting the chosen end use.
3. **Loss of sunlight:** Several of our resident Members living in Sandwich Street have expressed their concerns about the potential loss of light from the west which will be caused primarily by raising the height of the new building on both the Cartwright Gardens and Sandwich Street elevations. Whilst recognising the changes made to the original scheme designs to mitigate the negative effects on Sandwich Street residents, we feel that more should be done.
4. **Noise break-out:** Since submitting our comments to the University we held a meeting with

representatives of Sandwich Street Residents' Association (SSRA) in which they expressed concerns about the need to prevent noise break-out from student rooms overlooking Sandwich Street, citing the current plans as inadequate to address this long-standing problem. We would ask the Council to ensure that this matter is adequately addressed in the final designs for the scheme. We also support SSRA in asking the Council/University to ensure that the 'flexible study space' indicated on the plans in the large ground floor space on the Sandwich Street side of the building does not become a conference centre at a later date, with all the potential associated increase in noise and traffic. SSRA have also voiced similar concerns about the location of common rooms on the Sandwich Street side of the building.

5. **The University's proposals for the historic gardens:** Notwithstanding the above concerns, we wish to emphasise that we welcome the University's plans to open Cartwright Gardens to the public after 200 years as a 'private enclosure', together with their proposals for upgrading the gardens and improvements to the entrances and adjacent highways, which aim to improve safety and accessibility. We particularly welcome their proposal to install a much-needed footway along the eastern perimeter of the gardens, which is an improvement we have been lobbying the Council to introduce for some time. However, at our recent AGM, a straw poll of members revealed a majority in favour of retaining all four existing tennis courts, because of the shortage of sports facilities in the area and the anticipated increase in demand arising from the courts being more readily available to the general public. Our only other concern is that the proposed introduction of one-way traffic between Marchmont Street and Mabledon Place does not have a negative impact by increasing traffic volumes in neighbouring residential streets. We have been led to believe by Camden's Transport Planners that this will be subject to separate consultation on traffic orders to be undertaken only in the event that planning consent is granted for the main scheme. We look forward to working in partnership with the University and other partner organisations in forming a 'Friends of Cartwright Gardens' to develop the gardens as a 'top notch' community resource.

We would like to be notified about the date of the Development Control Committee at which these applications will be considered.

Yours faithfully

