

## **Camden Square Conservation Area Advisory Committee**

4 St Augustine's Road  
London NW1

**Date:** 16 June 2013

**Planning application Reference:** 2013/1210/P revised 02/07/2013 TS

**Proposal:** Erection of five storey building to create 9 residential units comprising 2x 2 bedroom and 7x 3 bedroom flats.

**Summary:** We object to the proposal as it now stands: it fails to enhance the Conservation Area

**Comments:**

1. Unusually, the architects for the development, CZWG, have written directly and in some detail to the Secretary to the CAAC with their reflections on our earlier comments. It is not our intention to respond to the letter from CZWG or enter into any discussion as to the merits or otherwise of their proposal. Our observations are based solely on the drawings as they now stand. That being said, we wish to acknowledge this is a particularly challenging proposal, elements of which have attracted divergent views within the CAAC team of specialist advisers especially with respect to style. The comments we now offer build on our previous comments and endeavour to reflect these divergent views.
2. **Technical adequacy of drawings**
  - 2.1. Whilst the drawings may be technically adequate, we continue to have concerns that there may be a mismatch between the proposed planning drawings and the actual buildings in relation to the thin window surrounds and the absence of a lift over-run. Although, for example, it may be entirely possible that the use of a hydraulic lift will obviate the need for a lift over-run, the absence of a section through the lift shaft leaves the plausibility of this proposal in doubt.
3. **Bulk**
  - 3.1. Although the proposal is bulkier than its neighbours, we accept that it suits the prominent position and is not too overwhelming.

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### 4. Scale and Proportion

- 4.1. From neighbouring buildings, of similar size to the proposed development such as numbers 14 to 20, it is clear that windows play a distinctive hierarchical role within the façade. However, this is not just expressed by their size as is evident from
  - the basement window being a 'hole' in the rusticated rendered façade;
  - the *piano nobile* window being given predominance by a stuccoed surround, topped by a pediment resting on consoles and cast iron railings creating a balconet;
  - the first floor window being of similar size but without pediment and balconet;
  - finally the top floor window, which is considerably smaller and of a more subordinate function, expressed by its position directly under the eaves which are visually supported by a pair of consoles.
- 4.2. We do not argue that the proposal for no. 4 should imitate these Victorian elements, but that its hierarchical window proportions should have some relationship with its Victorian neighbours. Whilst this may appear to be the case, the absence of graded heights in the glazed doors to West elevation balconies conflicts with this impression, confirming the uniform floor to ceiling heights behind the facades.
- 4.3. The elevations in the pre-application document lack graded window heights, but the adjustment of window heights appears superimposed and un-integrated. The proportions and scale of the significant West elevation have been improved, but the visually helpful gap above the vertical railing elements would need a further horizontal element to achieve a maximum gap of 100mm as required by Building Regulations.

### 5. Rhythm

- 5.1. The fenestration of the St Augustine's Road and Agar Grove elevations supports the rhythm of nearby houses.
- 5.2. The line of the St Augustine's Road street frontage, however, relates poorly to the consistent street frontage. Although the slight curve forward of the façade may be justifiable for the internal layout, it makes no sense in the street context. The justification for this modelling stated in the Design and Access statement – that it relates to the curve in pavement edge approaching the throating at Murray Street – is extremely weak, even if the Conservation Area Management Strategy had not proposed the redesign of this poorly designed junction.
- 5.3. The widening of the West elevation and a contrasting treatment is appropriate as a prominent termination, but the arrangement of glazed doors and curved balconies remains an unconvincing solution

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### **6. Appearance of Materials**

- 6.1. The materials generally relate well to the Conservation Area. Although the proposed greenish finish for the aluminium elements has little precedent in the area, it would be a positive element, breaking from the mid-grey practically ubiquitous in comparable housing schemes in the recent years.

### **7. Durability of Materials**

- 7.1. The statement that the "stucco element" of white self coloured render would not need any repainting is rather optimistic

### **8. Style**

- 8.1. The style of this proposal is a subdued version of the often dramatic post-modernism found in numerous CZWG housing projects since the 1980s. It is a matter of opinion whether this style suits the Camden Square Conservation Area, but its flexible contextualism seems to help in gaining planning permission. In this revised proposal, it appears that individuality has been further suppressed to increase the likelihood of success with planners, the CAAC and potentially difficult local residents.

#### **8.2. For example**

- The amendments to the main (western) façade, for example, can be seen as a partial improvement especially the attempt to establish a hierarchy of the balconies and the removal of the top balcony.
- Some changes, however, such as the narrowing of the top arched window, are not for the better, as its relationship to the lower windows is now broken.
- The suggested smaller contrast between the west elevation and the street elevations, achieved by the introduction of horizontal glazing bars which, as is evident from the west façade, unfortunately reinforces the fact that all floors are of the same height, looks even more arbitrary and superimposed on the street façades.

- 8.3. The results, while now less clumsy, remain unacceptably bland. This is a significant building in an important position, for which a self-effacing approach is inadequate.

### **9. Overshadowing**

- 9.1. Inevitably nearby residents will find that a sizeable building in place of a long-vacant site cuts natural light to their properties, but it appears that overshadowing is not unreasonable given the context

### **10. Density of development**

- 10.1. Although the development may increase local traffic slightly despite it being practically car-free, it could also assist the revival of shops in Murray Street. However, the overall influence would be inconsequential compared to the hundreds of new units proposed for the nearby Agar Grove estate just outside the Conservation Area.

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### **11. Conclusion**

- 11.1. Although this is a well worked-out proposal and has the potential to enhance the conservation area, it fails to do so. The elevation treatments continue to be a missed opportunity in a very important site. The street elevations are bland. While the West elevation offers perhaps the greatest design opportunity, it fails to relate to the street elevations or offer a positive contrast.
- 11.2. We thus object to the proposal and would urge that more thought is given to producing a coherent, strong design rather than one which appears just aimed at getting planning permission.



**Signed:**

David Blagbrough  
Chair  
Camden Square CAAC

**Date: 16 June 2013**