

Regeneration and Planning Development Management
London Borough of Camden
Town Hall, Judd Street
London WC1H 8ND

**Planning Application Consultation: application reference 2014/4270/P
Three new houses on Grafton Road, NW5**

Dear Sirs

23 September 2014

I am writing to add further comments to my previous emailed objections.

Overview

The Client's development process and proposals show that the Community Investment Programme cannot be successfully applied to the three Grafton Road sites. Key reasons for rejecting the application include:

- The assumption that the three sites are available for development is not correct.
- The context of a mid - 20th Century architecture has been misunderstood
- Urban design and landscape has not been adequately examined
- Drawings are inadequate and do not represent design intentions
- Camden's goals are not supported by the application

Development Assumption

The client promoter assumed, incorrectly, that the three sites are available for construction and that all the trees on the sites could be removed. Contrary to the promoter's assumption, each site is an integral part of the Barrington Court design and cannot be separated from the existing estate. In contrast to the promoter's landscape assumption, local residents required the Copper Beach tree to remain on Site C, effectively removing that site from the proposed development.

Mid-20th Century Architecture

Barrington Court is an example of mid-20th Century architecture inspired by a movement that rejected the street. Buildings were to be placed in a continuous parkland that would free both architecture and its inhabitants from the street's constraints. Architecture was to be an object in an open context similar to the shapes in a Matisse "figure and ground" paper cutout. At Barrington Court, the three end sites are an essential part of the "ground" and cannot be removed without harming the design's fundamental concept.

Unless there is an exceptional reason for altering important architecture from the past, buildings that illustrate our architectural history should be conserved. Camden's CIP programme is an admirable strategy for increasing new building but the proposed Grafton Road CIP development will only produce three small houses - one for two people – and, we understand, could make a financial loss. That development strategy does not justify damaging Powell and Moya's important mid-20th Century design.

Urban Design and Landscape

There are photographs of the surrounding neighbourhoods in the submission but no analysis of their urban design and landscape characteristics. Gospel Oak has some of the best street architecture in London and that forms a matrix of streets near the application sites. The short section of Grafton Road bordered by the mid-20th Century architecture of Barrington Court and Kiln Place is a wonderful contrast. For about 100 meters the city-scape opens to a tree lined, park like urban landscape, the urban landscape intended by Powell and Moya's design. Replacing the trees on one side of Grafton Road with houses would damage a small, but very valuable, part of Gospel Oak's environment.

Given the Client's lack of interest in urban landscape, it is not surprising that there are no ground level photographs of the magnificent trees that line Grafton Road between Lambie Street and the bridge over the rail line. Those photographs would have shown that the existing large trees, including the Copper Beach, arch over the road to create a landscape very different from the surrounding streets. It is both continuity and contrast that makes cities rich.

Inadequate Presentation

Plan and Elevation Drawings

Plan and Elevation drawings in the Design and Access Statement are engaging cartoons but do not contain the coordinated information needed to understand the proposal or make planning decisions. Complete information is especially important for House "C" and for the appearance of the proposal in its urban situation.

- The tree at House C: The plan, page 19, shows the location of the tree's crown. It extends over the pavement at Grafton Road but, on page 20, the stylised leaves that indicate the tree's crown in the design drawings do not reach past the external house walls and, on page 25, the "sketch view" shows the tree contained within the house plan. Achieving the image shown in either the elevation design drawings or the "sketch view" would require removing at least half of the tree's crown, effectively destroying a magnificent Copper Beach.
- Consultation information: Point 2 in the record of Consultation Meeting 4 states that House C is to be built around the existing copper beach and the tree is to be retained. At Consultation Meeting 5, the drawings discussed in the previous paragraph were shown. There is no description of the damage required to the tree to match the images shown at consultations, no "before and after" to show how the shape of the tree shown in the drawings would be achieved. Saving the Copper Beach was a key promise to local residents in the consultation process but, apparently, the proposal has failed to keep that promise.
- The courtyard at House C: There are no section drawings of the houses. A section drawing of House C would show that, if the tree was "retained" as promised during consultation, the courtyard would always be in shade and never receive sunlight when the tree canopy is filled with leaves: six months from May to October. There must be a question about a design focusing on a small courtyard that is continuously in deep shade during the time most householders want to use outdoor space.

- The surrounding environment: There are no section drawings that show the three sites, Grafton Road and the open space at the Kiln Place Estate. Those drawings would have given a clear representation of the street trees, including the Copper Beach.

Three dimensional Design Images

The design drawings shown on pages 23-26 do not give an adequate visual sense of the proposal in its context. We would expect computer generated images in accurate eye-level photographs.

In the Grafton Road image on page 25, the drawing of the tree at House C is misleading and the street trees on the opposite side of the road are not correctly drawn. The Copper Beach and the Kiln Place trees overarch the road, their crowns almost touching. Rather than the desolate street described in the drawing, Grafton Road is like a green avenue.

Achieving Camden's goals

Instead of building a vibrant regeneration in Gospel Oak, Camden's proposal for the three Grafton Road sites will damage valuable neighbourhood amenity and a historically important architecture without producing satisfactory new homes. From our experience working with London developers, we expect that the proposal's complexity, and - in House C - its very odd arrangement, will not make profitable regeneration. Why should the Council build a destructive, unsatisfactory and financially questionable development?

The current application is ill-considered and incomplete. Camden has three ways forward: withdraw the application, recommend that permission not be granted or recommend that permission be granted with the certainty that the committee will refuse permission.

I want to see successful local government and my recommendation is that the Council quietly withdraw the application and look for alternative development locations. Rebuilding the existing Kiln Place tenants' hall with added flats would be a very positive addition to Gospel Oak.

Yours faithfully

Dean la Tourelle

Dean la Tourelle
Curl la Tourelle Architects
80 Lamb Street
London NW5 4AB