

MEMBERS BRIEFING		Analysis sheet		Expiry Date:	04/07/2014
		N/A / attached		Consultation Expiry Date:	03/07/2014
Officer			Application Number(s)		
Charles Rose			2014/3422/P		
Application Address			Drawing Numbers		
114/118 Southampton Row London WC1B 5AA			Refer to decision notice		
PO 3/4	Area Team Signature	C&UD	Authorised Officer Signature		
Proposal(s)					
Installation and maintenance of a green living wall and associated external alterations to front facade.					
Recommendation(s):		Refuse planning permission			
Application Type:		Full Planning Permission			

Conditions or Reasons for Refusal:	Refer to Draft Decision Notice					
Informatives:						
Consultations						
Adjoining Occupiers:	No. notified	00	No. of responses	05	No. of objections	00
			No. electronic	00		
Summary of consultation responses:	Press and site notice					
	Press notice advertised between 12 th June and 3 rd July 2014 Site notice displayed between 6 th June and 27 th June 2014					
	Consultation responses:					
	Vicar of St George's church: Support I am very excited about this plan. I think it will help the pollution in Southampton Row, and help shape the character of the road wonderfully. I think it could start a welcome trend, and increase the quality of life locally.					
	Director & Founder of Groho: Support I would like to express our support for the proposed living wall as part of the sustainable development of Synergy House. Groho is a not-for-profit organization that aims to bridge the gap between urban and natural by supporting eco design and urban-greening projects in Central London. It is clear from the planning application that the proposed living wall could make a hugely positive contribution to the Bloomsbury Conservation Area in terms of aesthetics, sustainable design & biodiversity and that the living wall would provide a link between pre-existing green spaces in close proximity thereby enhancing green infrastructure in Central London. The potential biodiversity benefits would also help deliver the Camden Biodiversity Action Plan and it is for these reasons that we wholeheartedly support the planning application.					
	Director Models 1: Support I would like to express my support for the proposed living wall on Southampton Row, as part of the sustainable development of Synergy House. The development was brought to my attention by a friend, Sally Ashby, and being local to my business I feel it would be of benefit to both our staff and clients. We have many international clients coming in from Paris, New York and Milan. Our models would use the organic juice bar and I believe that stylish, contemporary and ecological design and architecture play an important role in promoting London as a progressive, green and fashionable city. I think it is a great idea and any increase in green spaces in close proximity to our business is something we readily support.					
	Director, The Production Factory: Support I would like to express my support for the proposed living wall on Southampton Row. The development was brought to my attention by a friend, Sally Ashby, and being local to my business I think it is something we would like to support.					

	<p>As a business we would certainly use the organic juice bar and feel that a living wall would enhance the local environment and look great. As a fashion company we support many industry creatives who visit us and the surrounding area and I'm sure it is something they would be impressed by. I think the living wall and the sustainable development of Synergy House as a whole would make a positive contribution to this area and it's a great idea. Any increase in green spaces nearby, even vertical ones, is something we would happily support.</p> <p>Inmidtown BID: Support</p> <p>Installation and maintenance of a green living wall and associated external alterations to front façade The above application is within the Inmidtown boundary and we support the application for the installation of a green wall. The existing building has been neglected for many years, and currently fails to contribute to the conservation area, and has a deteriorating appearance and tired look. In this context, the current scheme will vastly improve the appearance of the building while making it much more sustainable and make a positive contribution to the Bloomsbury Conservation Area, its heritage assets and economic vitality of the locality.</p> <p>In line with Camden Sustainability SPG and heritage guidance we believe that the proposed green wall provide useful habitats, shade and interest to the urban environment and preserves and enhances the conservation area.</p>
<p>CAAC/Local groups* comments: *Please Specify</p>	<p>Bloomsbury CAAC: Object</p> <p>We consider a green wall on the front elevation to be inappropriate. We would add that when in discussion their proposals with the developer this was no part of them.</p>

Site Description

- 1.1 The application site is a basement and 5-storey mixed-use block, which forms part of a terrace of commercial blocks on the northern side of Southampton Row. At basement and part ground floor of the building there is an existing restaurant (Pizza Express). This is excluded from the red-line plan submitted within the application. The existing vehicular entrance at ground floor leading to a part basement car park at rear adjacent to the restaurant is part of the application. The upper floors of the building have been vacant office use since February 2012.
- 1.2 To the north is Russell Square Mansions (120-124 Southampton Row), a seven-storey building with retail units on the ground floor and flats on the upper floors. Ormond Mansions (100-112 Southampton Row) to the south is five-storey with retail units on the ground floor and flats on the upper floors. At the rear of the site is a four-storey plus basement Grade II listed building (25 Old Gloucester Street) and a three-storey cottage building located in the yard of the Grade II listed 26 Old Gloucester Street (a five-storey plus basement building in use as residential and offices).
- 1.3 On the opposite side of Southampton Row are the eight-storey Bedford Hotel and the six-storey Hamilton House which has retail and restaurant uses at ground floors and residential uses on the upper floors.
- 1.4 The application site is located within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area, but not recognised as making a positive contribution to the area. The site is also within London's Central Activity Zone (CAZ) and the Holborn Growth Area. It is located approx. 400m from Russell Square and Holborn underground stations and the nearest bus stops are 70m and 110m away.

Relevant History

30/06/2014 APPROVED Erection of fifth floor extension, ground floor infill extension and rear extension, courtyard stairwell up to first floor and plant enclosure to the rear at second floor level in association with a conversion of basement car park to a wellness facility (sui generis), conversion of vehicle access to retail/financial unit (Class A1/A2) at ground floor, change of use from office (Class B1a) into events space with catering facilities (sui generis) at first floor, retention and refurbishment of offices (Class B1a) at second and third floor, and 4 new residential units (Class C3) at fourth and fifth floors. REF: 30/06/2014

The erection of a building comprising basement, ground and four floors over the site of Nos. 114-118, Southampton Row, Holborn, for use as shops on the basement and ground floors, offices on the first to third floors and two flats on the fourth floor with a garage in the rear part of the basement was granted planning permission in August 1957 and May 1958 (ref's N14/9/F/7132 & N14/9/F/23746 respectively). An applications for minor alterations to the building was approved in May 1959 (ref: N14/9/F/1776)

Relevant policies

LDF Core Strategy and Development Policies

CS1 Distribution of growth
CS5 Managing the impact of growth and development
CS13 Tackling climate change through promoting higher environmental standards
CS14 Promoting high quality places and conserving our heritage
CS15 Protecting and improving our parks and open spaces & encouraging biodiversity
CS 16 Improving Camden's Health and Well-being
CS19 Delivering and monitoring the Core Strategy
DP22 Promoting sustainable design and construction
DP24 Securing high quality design
DP25 Conserving Camden's heritage
DP26 Managing the impact of development on occupiers and neighbours
DP32 Air quality and Camden's Clear Zone

Camden Planning Guidance 2011/2013
Bloomsbury Conservation Area Statement (Adopted October 2001)
London Plan 2011
National Planning Policy Framework (Adopted 27/03/2012)
Camden Biodiversity Action Plan 2013-2018
Mayor's Air Quality Strategy: Clearing the Air (2010)

Assessment

2. THE PROPOSALS

- 2.1 The application seeks approval for the installation and maintenance of a green living wall and associated external alterations to front facade. The type of plants and species.
- 2.2 The existing façade of Synergy House is to remain intact with the living wall attached using cladding rails with a cavity of approximately 50mm between the existing façade and the proposed living wall. This cavity area incorporates a waterproof backing board as well as the irrigation zone. The living wall will cover the whole of the façade except for the window openings and ground floor
- 2.3 The façade uses plant panels that are 'pre grown' in nursery greenhouse conditions and uses and an irrigation design system that will not be visible from the public realm. The irrigation equipment and will be housed below the external stair in the courtyard inside a dedicated cabinet with irrigation pipework brought to irrigate the wall
- 2.4 The current proposal includes in the order of 8,000 plants. The plant species proposed are native to the conditions that can survive in the hydroponic system and can be maintained at a height.

3. ASSESSMENT

- 3.1 The main issues to consider are the impact the living wall would have on the character and appearance of the streetscape and wider conservation area having regard for the potential sustainability benefits of the proposal.

Ecology

- 3.2 The species selection, positioning and planting density is considered to be suitable for the site, with more shade tolerant species planted lower down the proposed green wall and less shade tolerant species higher up. The wall will provide ecological and environmental benefits to the area which will be regulated by a comprehensive automated irrigation system.
- 3.3 The proposed maintenance plan for the green wall is to include an inspection and completion of necessary maintenance works every 28 days which is considered to be sufficient. At the end of the initial 12 month period it is proposed that the maintenance is still to be carried out by BTL but only at the request of PPR. If approved it is recommended that a longer term maintenance schedule is conditioned to ensure regular agreed maintenance is carried out periodically for the duration of the green wall, not just the initial 12 months.
- 3.4 Public benefit would be provided by the ecological and environmental benefits of the scheme. However at present these benefits are limited to a 12 month period after which time the application has provided no assurance of the continued maintenance regime for the wall. This in turn could lead to a harmful outcome from the negative visual appearance of the façade if the green wall fails.

Amenity

- 3.5 Living walls can provide environmental benefit in the form of biodiversity, thermal insulation and cooling benefit to the building and noise which would improve the amenity of the local area.

Design and townscape

- 3.5 The application sites forms part of an unbroken terrace over 200m in length. All of the buildings are built of red brick except for the Holborn Hotel which is located at the junction with Theobalds Road. Moreover the terrace is located with the Bloomsbury Conservation and all of the red brick built building are identified in the Bloomsbury CAAMS as making a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation area except for the subject site which is a neutral contributor.
- 3.6 The subject building is a neutral contributor because it is a simply mid 20th century infill which is of lesser architectural quality than the adjoining Victorian and Edwardian building with rich and decorative front facades.



- 3.7 The proposal would conceal the red brick of the façade with a living wall. This would break to continuity and rhythm of the terrace. This is considered to harm the character and appearance of the terrace and wider area of which a strong character is its continuous run of terraces.
- 3.8 The site forms part of a densely built-up urban environment. Relief in the built development is found in the form of road junctions, open space and natural vegetation comprising street trees and trees and planting found in the squares and parks and private open space. This provides a natural and established character and appearance which adds to the conservation area. The

townscape quality is enhanced and the pattern of streets and squares is recognisable and appreciated. Introducing a green wall to the whole front façade of terrace building alters the established understanding and appreciation of the built environment which makes up the fundamental character and appearance of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. This is considered to result in substantial harm to the whole of the conservation area.

3.9 Moreover the living wall would add unnecessary attention to the buildings which is the least architecturally impressive in the street. It could be argued that the wall would disguise the building thereby improving its appearance and the visual amenity of the streetscape. However the Council do not take this view. Instead it is considered that the works would result in incongruous alterations to the front façade on a prominent thoroughfare which would be out of place with the character and appearance of the built environment in the area. The Design and Access Statement confirms that the, "The architecture of Synergy House responds to both of the adjacent mansion buildings in terms of scale and its underlying order of masonry and fenestration which is based on those of the traditional buildings on the Southampton Row."

3.9 Furthermore if the living wall failed the result would scar the building. This would reduce the quality of the buildings further result in a negative visual appearance of the façade within the streetscape. In this regard the long term maintenance and durability of the living wall is of particular concern with regard the visual amenity of the area. This type of living wall system requires extensive maintenance and cost to upkeep. It has not been demonstrated to a satisfactory degree that the proposal could be maintained in perpetuity or that any failure would not harm the character and appearance of the building and thus character and appearance of the area.

4 Conclusion

4.1 It is considered that the living wall and its potential for long term scarring of the building if it fails would cause harm to the character and appearance of the building contrary to policy DP24 of the LDF as well as harm to the character and appearance of the designated heritage asset (Bloomsbury Conservation Area) of which it forms a part contrary to NPPF section 12 and Camden LDF policy DP25.

4.2 The NPPF seeks public benefit to outweigh any harm caused. In this instance public benefit is derived from the environmental and sustainability qualities of the living wall (as set out in paragraph 3.1-3.5). However these are considered to be limited amenity benefits due to the size of the wall in question and intangible nature of the benefits.

4.3 Moreover the recently approved scheme on the site by the same owner are considered to provide substantially greater environmental and sustainability benefits without causing harm to the character and appearance of the building or area. The previous scheme proposed a sedum roof above the rear Pizza Express ground floor storey to cover an area of approximately 150sq m. As well as Living wall covering approx. 12sqm to the roof and 'planted roof terraces [which] will offer additional planting and visual enhancement. This approved documentation states this will "enhance ecological value and provide opportunities for biodiversity through breeding and nesting habitats for insects." Furthermore the approved scheme confirmed A BREEAM 'Excellent' rating is achievable for both the commercial and residential elements and "the project team will work to ensure targeted credits are met."

4.4 In this regard the proposed green wall is considered to add limited public benefit whilst causing significant harm the character and appearance of the area. The public benefit in respect of

beneficial environmental and sustainability which would be equally provided and surpassed with the more comprehensive and tangible 'bream' measures provided as part of the overall package of works approved for the site without causing harm to the visual amenity of the area.

4.5 For these reasons the proposed scheme is recommended for refusal.

