

Old GPO Sorting Office 21/31 New Oxford Street

Alternative approaches

Notes to accompany sketch proposals Option One and Option Two

Councillor Julian Fulbrook, Chair of Camden Housing and Cabinet Member of the Council requested that we look at the feasibility of providing a substantial number of good quality general needs homes at roof level on the site of the old GPO sorting office, 21/31 New Oxford Street in the context of the recent planning application lodged by Grantham Properties - planning reference 2014/5946/P.

The sketches attached are not a definitive design but seek to show that it is eminently feasible to construct high standard new low rent general needs housing on the upper floors of the old GPO sorting office in New Oxford Street within the existing building line and envelop.

It has also been assumed that the location of main stair and lift cores as shown in the developer's latest submitted scheme would be located roughly in the same areas

It has been assumed like the developer's scheme the existing levels 4, 5 and 6 floors are demolished. The proposed housing shown on the attached sketches are shown built off the deck of the deck of the 4th floor and follow the building line of the existing building. There are two options attached. Option One is three storey housing while Option Two housing over four storeys and both are within the existing height and boundaries of the existing building line at 4th floor level so that the bulk of the existing building is not increased and potentially, as in Option One, reduced.

The mix of dwellings shown for both options are indicative. The final mix can be changed to suit Camden's requirements. The quantity of housing floor space is the main determining factor as it is clearly possible to subdivide the available floor area in a variety of ways providing more or fewer large or small homes as are required.

The layout of the housing options provides accommodation to a considerable higher standard than the developer's small housing element proposed in that:

- all family accommodation will have good sized private open space directly related to the dwelling
- all accommodation would have double aspect and excellent daylight and sunlight penetration
- all housing communal open space is on the same level as the housing (unlike the developer's proposals).
- being located at the fourth floor the noise and pollution from the busy boundary roads will be significantly better than the developer's suggestion of locating housing facing High Holborn from the first floor level over their main service entrance road.
- all dwellings would have spectacular rooftop views.

Option One has approximately 5,900 sq m residential floor area that could provide 45 homes (27 one bed 2 person dwellings, 18 two and three bed family dwellings all of which have private gardens).

Option Two has approximately 7,000 sq m residential floor area that could provide 60 homes (38 one bed 2 person dwellings, 22 two and three family bed family dwellings all of which have private gardens).

(By comparison the current Grantham scheme contains 3,530 sq m of housing providing 21 dwellings, 66% are single aspect, the remaining have a view into a service yard; none of the family dwellings have private open space, and all the housing on seven floors is located on the noisiest and most polluted part of the site and the proposed accommodation do not fully comply with Camden Housing Design guidelines).

The sketch schemes are physically practical and in principle with means of escape requirements of the Building regulations in the event of fire.

To dedicate the upper floors from the current 4th floor to general needs residential use would result in about 16% reduction of current developer's speculative office floor space. However by adjusting the current commercial floor area layouts, introducing additional mezzanine levels and reducing the size of the commercial lift core the reduction could be reduced significantly so that the overall reduction would be around 8%, from their proposed 386,000 sq ft to around 355,000 sq ft though the developer's huge capital gain expectations would have to be tempered. The proposed retail area in the basement would be reduced to accommodate some of the plant currently shown on the roof.

Conclusion:

It is possible to comply with Camden's development brief that states that the site should be developed to provide a very significant quantity of new residential development and that the housing would be best located at roof level.

It is practical to provide a considerable quantity of general needs homes on the site and at roof level (as well as a public open space), without increasing the current bulk of the building. The alternative housing options would be of a much higher standard than is currently being proposed by the developers and would comply with Camden housing design guidelines whereas the developer's do not.

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Cross refer to Drawings

Option One Drawings: NOS/SK01 - SK04 inclusive
Option Two Drawings: NOS/SK05 - SK08 inclusive