

I am writing to add my comments to the planning application for the site at 21/31 New Oxford Street WC1A 1BA
Application number 2014/5946/P

The planned building is far too big for this area of international cultural importance. It will dominate this historic area which should provide an appropriate transition between the museum quarter and Covent Garden. It would overpower the local area and block views of St George's Bloomsbury and down from Museum Street.

As a local resident I would like to see a building which is appropriate in scale and provides desperately needed accommodation, both residential and also cultural and educational for Camden residents. This is a potentially dynamic space which could be used to meet the needs of local people. It must be developed by a group that has a long-term commitment to the area not the usual dull office/cafe development which will only alienate us from our environment.

This building does not fulfil the original brief from 2004 and I urge the council to scrap this application and tell the developers to start again. The minor adjustments made to the first application do not address the issues raised by the local community or move the plans into line with the original brief.

Eva Driskell
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To: Camden Planning Dept
From: Helen Mc Murray
Secretary, South Bloomsbury T.R.A.
Date: 26th January 2015

**OBJECTION TO PLANNING APPLICATION 2014/5946/P, 21-31 NEW OXFORD STREET
(FORMER SORTING OFFICE)**

Building Design

Our residents' association is objecting to the application in the strongest possible terms. The sheer size and bulk of the proposed building in this sensitive location will have a detrimental impact on the adjoining Bloomsbury Conservation Area, one of the first to be set up in the country, an indication of its national importance. The area between the British Museum and St. George's Bloomsbury have a village character and were traditionally known as 'the Earl of Southampton's 7 1/2 acres', having evolved into a warren of small streets, initially to serve the needs of the gentry living in Bloomsbury Square. Although there has been some changes over the centuries, occurring mostly on the perimeter by the creation of New Oxford St, the character and scale of this unique inner city area has been largely retained, as noted in the Bloomsbury Conservation Appraisal.

Museum St is at the heart of the 'village' as the main street leading up to and from the British Museum. Therefore the views from this street are pivotal to the area and should be fully considered as part of the planning process. Indeed, The 2004 Planning Appraisal notes that the site provides a 'bookend' from W to E and N to S: In relation to Museum St:

"The north west corner of the site when viewed from ...north to south along Museum Street sets the building as a bookend for the prominent view from the British Museum ."

The proposal to build upwards and outwards will overwhelm the scale of Museum St and not so much provide a bookend as unambiguously terminate it, blocking out the skyline and reducing light, creating an oppressive feel for residents and pedestrians. Considering that this particular street is the main arterial N/S route and almost 7 million people annually visit the British Museum, a large proportion of whom will have approached it via Museum St, or have visited its shops on leaving the Museum, Camden should ensure that the experience of future visitors is not undermined by a such an insensitive structure.

By contrast, the existing sorting office building, although in 1960's Brutalist style, is stepped back and has voids at roof level, so minimising its impact looking south along Museum St and keeping below the steeple height of the celebrated Hawksmoor masterpiece of St. George's Bloomsbury Way.

The additional bulk of the building will also mar the view E to W, as it will block out Centre Point, now an established landmark, and will reduce the streamlined effect of No.1 New Oxford St.

The proposed reduction in height by the developers and the partial opening up of the roof line will not make any significant improvement to the mass of the building which will still be disproportionate and overwhelm neighbouring buildings and views in the conservation area.

Proposed Uses & developer's amendments

The proposal radically departs from the 2004 Planning Brief, in which a sizeable proportion of the building was planned for housing and D1 community uses. The Local Development Site Allocations Plan of 2013 endorsed the housing requirement. This would seem appropriate usage for a building which was, after all, owned by the public. Furthermore, the increase in property values that has occurred on account of the proximity of the site to Tottenham Ct Rd development, also funded from the public purse, would seem to make it morally imperative that more of the building should be given over to desperately needed housing as well other community facilities. The proposal is for the major part to be given over to speculative office, with some retail; this would not tie in with the traditional cultural and small retail uses of the area, for which the area is noted. Some amendments have been proposed by the developer, our comments are specifically:

(i) housing - only 21 flats are being allocated and they are sited to the north of the building facing onto High Holborn, the least interesting and most congested road in the area. There has been no suggested increase as part of the developer's amendments.

(ii) G.P. Surgery: the space allocated for this is too small to meet the needs of the area. A surgery on Bloomsbury St has recently closed and the nearby Soho Clinic is under pressure to close. There will be a huge increase in the number of people working in the area due to the large developments at St. Giles and Tottenham Ct Rd which together will put even greater demands on local medical practices. During discussions with the developer, they do not appear to have consulted widely on this issue, limiting their discussions to one G.P. practice. Unless the rental values can be controlled as part of a 106 agreement, the proposal is unlikely to be realized, as they will be too high for the NHS to meet, as has happened with the proposed surgery on the site of the former Middx. hospital.

(iii) cultural & small business uses: a straw poll carried out with residents has brought up new ideas which would help to stimulate the area and respond to local needs, e.g. a fresh food market. There is a strong literary and artistic heritage in Bloomsbury, continued through to today by bookshops, literary institutes, galleries and by the nearby University of the Arts. The number of pop-up exhibitions in the currently empty sorting office which has included famous artists, e.g. Tracey Emin, testifies to a need for a large exhibition space. We have learned from local residents that there is also a need for small workshop and gallery space, at affordable rents, for up-and-coming artists and also affordable premises for small businesses. The new offer of 350 sq m is totally inadequate for demand and there are no guarantees on affordability which should be built in to a 106 agreement.

(iv) roof terrace


Any offer of additional public space is normally much appreciated, except in this case it is quite ironic that it will only be provided at the cost of increasing the size the building, undermining the scale of the adjacent conservation area and limiting the amenity of people on the streets below, particularly anyone using Museum St! The proposed roof garden will not stretch to the NW corner where some of the best views will be possible, as it will only be accessible to office workers, and the developers

have informed us that access will be limited to the summer months and will close at 5pm. This amendment does not compensate for the overall loss of amenity.

Surely it must be possible to design a building that will improve on the existing one without compromising the adjacent historic area?

Helen Mc Murray

James Tait
Flat 7, The Alcazar
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London WC2H 8BS



January 25, 2015

Neil McDonald
Camden Planning Department,
2nd Floor, 5 St. Pancras Square
c/o Camden Town Hall
Judd Street
London WC1H 9JE

Dear Mr McDonald:

2014/5946/P Old GPO sorting office, 21-31 New Oxford Street

I wish to re-state my objections to the current application to develop the Old Sorting Office site in New Oxford Street. I am a Camden resident and live close to this site. My principal objections to the application are contained in my letter of 5 November 2014.

The proposals for a roof garden are confused and seem to offer limited public access or benefit. The proposed addition of 300 sq.m for D1 use is insufficient and vague. The increased height of the development is unjustified and would harm the surrounding area including a Conservation Area and many listed buildings. The development as proposed, with its increased height and volume, is oversized and would overshadow existing buildings. It remains the case that the proposals for housing are scandalously inadequate.

The revisions contained in the most recent plans are minor and superficial and the revised application does not meet Camden's own standard to '*provide a visionary sustainable mixed-use development including a very significant quantity of new residential accommodation.*'

The members of the planning committee will be fully aware of the acute shortage of suitable and affordable housing both locally and nationally. It would be crazy for our public representatives to stand by and allow such a shoddy short-term commercial redevelopment of a former publicly owned site.

Yours sincerely,

James Tait