

6 STREATLEY PLACE PLANNING APPLICATION NO 2014/7778/P

I am writing to voice my concerns about the planning application (Ref: 2014/7778/P) for a hotel development located at 6 Streatley Place.

I live in New Court, so in this letter I will briefly address a few issues that are of concern to all Hampstead residents, but primarily my intent is to highlight some issues which are specific to New Court.

Firstly a more general note – I personally didn't find the information given in the planning application comprehensive enough in some areas to fully assess the impact of the proposed development. For example:

- Camden publishes guidance which sets out its requirements for information to be included in its planning applications but in the areas I was most concerned about e.g. possible restriction of light, the prescribed information was not provided.
- The plans and drawings were hard to understand for someone such as myself not trained in planning and architecture. Given the complexity of the site, is there a more accessible way to present the information?
- As others have commented, most of the buildings surrounding the site are incorrectly identified, both in photo captions and in text, viz. New Court is consistently called Streatley Flats; Streatley Flats are called Streatley Cottages; 5A Back Lane is allocated to Streatley place, and so forth. Thus the context of the site environs is described in 2.2. as the following "The site is bordered to the north by the gardens of Streatley Flats, to the east by 5A/7 Back Lane, to the south by the garden of 3 Streatley Place and to the west by Streatley Place passage". There are similar inaccuracies throughout the document which made the application harder to understand than it need be (not to mention that confronted with such basic errors my confidence in the competence of Living Architecture plummeted!).

I would ask that further consideration and clarification of the following issues take place before any decisions are made:

Consultation:

In the Neighbour Consultation paragraph (4.2 in the Design and Access Statement), Living Architecture state that "letters regarding the proposed development have been sent to the owners of Streatley Flats". From conversations with my neighbours, I gather that only a few residents in New Court received notification of the planning application, despite the fact that they will be directly affected. Furthermore there is no mention as to whether Genesis Housing Association, who owns the freehold of New Court, has been informed about the proposal.

Aesthetic and architectural considerations:

I have been impressed by what I have seen and read about other buildings designed by Living Architecture. Sadly I am disappointed by the proposed design for 6 Streatley Place. Very briefly, I think the height and size of the building is too big for the plot and there is a lack of relevance to the heritage and ambience of the surrounding area. Such insensitivity and seeming ignorance of location does not seem to be evident from pictures of Living Architecture's previous projects – indeed their impact rests on their relationship with the surrounding area.

Impact on Amenity:

There is clearly concern amongst residents living adjacent to the site regarding the impact on amenities, specifically: loss of daylight and sunlight; overlooking and loss of privacy; artificial light pollution, particularly at night; noise, particularly at night.

Here I would like to address the impact on amenity in relation to New Court. New Court is a Grade 2 heritage site comprised of two 4 storey Victorian buildings, one of which consists of twenty six flats (New Court 1-30) and the other, 9 flats (New Court nos.31-40). The site of 6 Streatley Place is adjacent to New Court on the west side. The site extends from the boundary wall with Streatley Place to about a quarter of the way along the back of New Court nos. 1-30. There is a boundary wall (also Grade 2 listed) which runs between the two sites. There are private gardens behind New Court nos. 1-30 and a communal garden between where New Court nos.1-30 ends and the boundary wall with Streatley Place.

Corridor of light behind new court 1-30 communal garden

New Court nos. 1-30 does not get much direct sunlight in the morning but in the afternoon the sunlight falls on the back of the building, on the private gardens behind the building and the communal garden at the end of the building. It seems likely that the proposed development would restrict the natural light falling on this "corridor" behind the longer New Court building and the small garden area. Residents in New Court could potentially be adversely affected by a loss of light in their homes and the biodiversity in their private gardens would also be affected. The children of New Court residents would also be detrimentally affected as the communal garden provides a safe and pleasant play area for them and their friends. However, it is impossible to assess this impact on the light accurately from the information given in the planning application.

Light pollution at night is also a potential problem.

Noise

The quality of life for New Court residents could also be detrimentally affected by noise from the hotel, particularly at night.

Boundary Wall between New Court and 6 Streatley Place

In Section 2.2. of the Design and Access Statement, it is stated that a Feasibility Study drew attention to what they described as the precarious state of the boundary wall. In fact the boundary wall has had some repair work done to it eight years ago (subsequent to the quoted survey) and presumably was deemed fit for purpose as a consequence of these repairs. Living Architecture's proposal is that as part of the preliminary work for the project, it is intended "to prop, underpin and partially reconstruct these walls".

Once again, there seems to be inadequate information as to what this "reconstruction" will consist of and what assurances are in place that they will not increase the height of the wall or change its appearance if the application is granted.

I am concerned for the following reasons.

- Potentially a reconstruction of the wall could further restrict available natural light for residents.
- Reconstruction of the wall would cause great upheaval given the extremely limited access.

- New Court is a Grade 2 listed building, with social and architectural significance. A change in the appearance of the wall could also impact on the Heritage Assets of New Court. There is also a concern regarding both the proposed use of the wall to stabilise the hotel and also the close proximity of the building to the wall. As Mark Nevard has pointed out in his letter from the Flask Walk Neighbourhood Association, the requirements of English Heritage regarding the boundary wall must be respected and specifically any development on this site must be set back from the boundaries.

Fire risk

A related issue is the increased fire risk to New Court created by the extremely close juxtaposition of the buildings. This is an issue for all the adjoining buildings but is particularly relevant for New Court as the buildings have no fire escapes. Added to this is the fact that there is no access for Fire Engines. Eight years ago an electric pumping station was installed in New Court. This was partly to address the low water pressure supplying the buildings but also to provide a water supply for use by the Fire Services in the event of a fire. Further detail is required in the planning proposal regarding plans for protection from fire risk.

Increase of height of the boundary wall between the hotel and Streatley Place

The effect of the proposed increase of height of the wall between the hotel and Streatley Place is yet another concern which directly affects New Court Residents. Streatley Place is used frequently by New Court residents as it provides a route to access both Heath Street and New End. In addition, a significant number of people walk through New Court garden (there is a public right of way) from Flask Walk to Streatley Place, again, to have quicker access to Heath Street and New End (and vice versa). This route also provides a short cut to New End School - so many parents use Streatley Place to take their children to school. Thus the amount of people walking through Streatley Place is possibly more than could be assumed without local knowledge.

The proposed increase in the height of the wall (in addition to blocking the views of Streatley Flat residents) will potentially block sunlight coming into Streatley Place in the section in front of the wall. The pavement here is made of York Stone and in wet weather can be slippery on sunless or rainy days. Also, there are a few areas where the sunlight does not reach and hence does not become dry and consequently moss grows and makes the area slippery. A reduction in the amount of sunlight to dry this section of the alleyway could conceivably stop the area drying and hence could exacerbate the risk of accidents particularly for elderly and schoolchildren.

Another consideration is that whilst we don't currently have a crime problem in Streatley Place, the high wall creating a darkened and canyon like effect may change that situation.

Change of land and building use classification from B1 to C1.

6 Streatley Place is currently classified as Business - B1(c) general industrial suitable for a residential area. Approval of the planning application would grant the developers a change of land and building use to Commercial – C1 Hotel.

The pre-application consultation regarding the use of the proposed development has been described in section 4.4.2 of the Design and Access Statement. Although I understand the reasoning given i.e. that the proposed hotel is of a unique and bespoke nature and that its usage would be similar to a typical dwelling house, I was surprised that this was deemed to be acceptable justification for such a change. (Also, there was no mention of an economic impact assessment to justify the change of use).

I had understood that Camden's Core Strategy Policy was to protect industrial sites and premises, as potentially these provide accommodation for new and expanding businesses, which support both the Central London economy and indeed the National economy. And furthermore, these Camden policies not only protect, but aim to promote development of space for industrial uses to serve the Central London business market.

This site has historically been for light industrial use, and its regeneration into industrial units could accommodate a significant number of small businesses and give work to local people. People working in such businesses would have a vested and long term interest in the Hampstead community, and hopefully have the same care and respect that longer term residents' show. Living Architects statements about the unique and bespoke nature of their hotel being run more like a home and their assurances about the behaviour of their guests does sound convincing but there is no way around the fact that there will be a succession of short term guests who by virtue of their temporary residence may have no reason to respect the environs.

A further benefit to maintaining B1 status is that building is only allowed up to one storey, thus many of the Amenity problems would be avoided.

Another concern about granting a change of use to class C1 is that once this is granted, the owner of 6 Streatley Place would have permitted development rights to change the use from a hotel to a state funded school or a nursery providing childcare without having to apply for planning permission. So there is no guarantee that this building would continue to be a hotel.

In comparison to possible light industrial use of the land, it seems that the proposed Hotel is not contributing to either economic growth or community adhesion in Hampstead. Hampstead already has a number of hotels, guest houses and an increasing number of people offering short term accommodation through online rental services.

Given Alain De Botton's interest in the effects of architecture on people in both home and work life, perhaps this could be a more suitable use of the land?