

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

31 July 2015

For the attention of Ian Gracie, case officer

Dear Sir

PLANNING APPLICATION NO 2015/4041/P

Proposed external insulation cladding of 11-78 Dobson Close by the London Borough of Camden

I write in connection with the above planning application. I have examined the plans and I live in Dobson Close. I wish to object to this retrofitting of insulating material to the flats in Dobson Close.

The ostensible reason for undertaking this work is to reduce the carbon footprint of Camden's housing stock (of which Dobson Close is part) and to tackle fuel poverty. On the latter, the local authority does not know who - if any - in Dobson Close is in fuel poverty, nor does it know the average fuel bill of the flats, nor the fuel efficiency of the heating systems used. On the former, the carbon reductions forecast are speculative as the calculations are based purely on modelling and not empirical research; under an FOI request, Camden has advised me that the actual energy reductions are unable to be predicted and the CO2 footprint for installation and maintenance is not known. Alternative and less intrusive sustainable methods of reducing the carbon footprint of Dobson Close, for example, solar panels have not been examined. I am concerned that the proposals are being pursued in haste and with inadequate consideration in order that they are eligible for funding from the Energy Company Obligation towards the cost of the cladding.

Appearance: Dobson Close - indeed the whole Hilgrove Estate - was designed in the mid 1950s by the respected architectural firm, Louis de Soissons, Peacock, Hodges and Robertson. The design is a typical understatement of the era, particularly the concrete detailing around openings (windows, entrance doors, open walkways) and the tiled ledges to the window sills. This will all be lost under and marred by the proposed thick cladding. [The Louis de Soisson partnership are still in existence, but have not been consulted on this major change to what is classic architecture of the 1950s.]

The architecture of the 1950s is much underrated and consequently is overlooked when allocating conservation areas. I am very concerned that the aesthetics of the Close - the beauty and charm of the simple brickwork (which is in excellent condition), the subtlety of design - will all be destroyed should this proposed work proceed. The freehold properties in the Close will escape cladding and will only emphasise the vandalism of the clad blocks.

Permanent detriment to the design and fabric of the original buildings: The application of cladding will damage the existing brickwork and so will preclude reversal of this 'improvement'. The lifespan of the cladding is just 30 years; at some point the whole system will need to be replaced causing further damage to the original buildings. Any failure of the cladding such as water getting into/ behind it, would not be immediately detectable and would certainly result in further damage to the original structure.

Loss of daylight: the windows being recessed by 10.5cms will significantly reduce light into the flats. An additional worry is that the deep ledges created will become colonised by pigeons.

Increased fire risk: The insulating materials being used, even if they meet the relevant fire regulations as a construction material, are not as resistant to fire as brick and so residents are being placed in greater danger. Gas pipes are not being re-sited to be outside the cladding but are to be 'boxed in' (less insulation, potential for gas build-up unless vents are checked)

Evacuation in case of fire will be impeded as the cladding will narrow the decks on the upper floors by 10.5 centimetres (from 101 to 90.5cms). This narrowing of the decks will also hamper fire-fighters and other emergency services. In addition, residents will have less room to manoeuvre large deliveries such as fridges, beds etc, increasing the risk of damaging the protective rendering over the insulating material.

Condensation & mould risk: There are issues concerning the breathability of cladding. Currently the solid brick walls allow for a level of transfer of moisture outwards that will be curtailed with the proposed insulating material and rendering – increasing the risk of condensation and mould inside the dwellings. The cladding is also to be pierced by numerous existing airbricks and vents and re-sited satellite dishes that increase the possibility of water ingress behind the rendering where hidden mould could develop.

Subsidence risk: There is known to be an issue of ground instability in Dobson Close and the Greater London Council carried out sample bore drillings in the late 1970s (documents held at the London Metropolitan Archives). There are tubes lines and covered railways running either side of Dobson Close. More recently Camden Council has had to investigate subsidence affecting the stairwells for the lower lying blocks. It is therefore a concern that additional weight is to be added to the buildings without careful examination of the increased hazard of land collapse and compression. Cladding will mask any future episodes of cracking or shift and so hamper and delay investigations and remedial action.

Flooding risk: Dobson Close is in an identified flood risk area (contrary to applicant's claim) and any change of water run off could have dire consequences. The present brick exterior takes up some water from rainfall that is then lost through evaporation; the proposed cement rendering will be impervious and water will immediately run off. The additional weight of the buildings will also have an effect on natural soak away. All this will change the drainage dynamics of the Close, increasing the risk of flooding and could affect land stability through land dissolution.

I understand that I am not alone and that the majority of the leaseholders and tenants in Dobson Close share these concerns; currently 44 are opposed, 0 are for and 22 unknown. Camden Civic Society is concerned about the change in appearance of the estate and has recommended the involvement of the Twentieth Century Society.

If this application is to be decided by councillors, please take this as notice that I would like to attend the meeting of the committee at which this application is expected to be decided. Please let me know as soon as possible the date of the meeting.

Yours faithfully,

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Permanent detriment to the design and fabric of the original buildings: The application of cladding will damage the existing brickwork and so will preclude reversal of this 'improvement'. The lifespan of the cladding is just 30 years; at some point the whole system will need to be replaced causing further damage to the original buildings. Any failure of the cladding such as water getting into/behind it, would not be immediately detectable and would certainly result in further damage to the original structure.

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