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AMENITY GROUP CONSULTATION COMMENTS

Date 25 April 2016

Planning Application Number
2016/1445/P

Planning Application Address
6 Stukeley Street WC2B 5LQ

Proposal

Demolition of an existing single storey house and redevelopment of the site with erection of two 2 x bedroom units within three storey building and excavation of basement level.

COMMENTS

The building is within the Seven Dials Estate Conservation Area Statement (CA), which is a statutory planning Guidance document. In this document the building is highlighted as making a positive and important contribution and appearance to the Conservation Area. The applicant's Design and Heritage documents (which are identical) make no mention of this fundamental fact. Numbers 4-14 Stukeley Street (including no 6) are specifically highlighted in the Conservation Area statement, that states: " between the City Lit building and Drury Lane are two storey buildings, with both residential and commercial use which add contrast and interest by their lower roof lines and cottage appearance".

Before the Council can countenance the demolition of 6 Stukeley St, the Council must be assured that the replacement building will be an improvement to what is currently there. The application demonstrably fails to meet this requirement.

Height and Bulk

Currently this part of Stukeley Street due to the scale and height of the existing buildings on the south side, has a very attractive quality which is recorded in the Conservation Area statement. The proposed development is almost twice the height of the existing building and as a consequence encloses this very narrow part of Stukeley Street and makes it into a chasm. Simply put, the proposed development is much too bulky and high. A basic parameter of any new development should be to maintain the existing height of the front parapet line or thereabouts. It is not acceptable to build up to the height of no 8 Stukeley Street as to do so will completely change the special quality of this part of Stukeley Street.

The roof view over 6 Stukeley Street from Goldsmith Dwellings across to Macklin Street is remarkable; it is very open and the variety of rooflines and building forms makes for a most interesting and particular urban landscape. Moreover there is not one air conditioning unit visible, a rarity in Covent Garden. The proposed scheme will severely damage this quality and dramatically darken and enclose Stukeley Street, and will destroy just those qualities that the Conservation Area statement considers important and which should be protected. The openness that comes from the low height of the street elevation of no. 6 is very apparent at street level and is a very important contributor to the quality of views looking along Stukeley Street from Drury Lane and when viewed from the east end of Stukeley Street. The proposed scheme pays no respect to these views and if approved will destroy the special quality of the streetscape.

The width of Stukeley Street varies between 5.2 and 4.8m between 6 Stukeley St and Goldsmith

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Court opposite. This is a very narrow street. The proposed development will turn a narrow but open and light thoroughfare into a dark and unremarkable alley.

Street Elevation and Layout

The proposed elevation lacks quality and contains very cumbersome detailing; the design is a crude pastiche of a mews house in a location where a mews-type house is a very inappropriate form to emulate. The windows are extremely large and will look directly into habitable rooms that run the full length of Goldsmith Court directly opposite which is only 5 meters away. The level of overlooking will be very severe and is completely unacceptable. None of the street windows are proposed to have obscure glass and all are openable; the noise and loss of privacy to the flats in Goldsmith Court will be severe and certainly the design for 6 Stukeley Street does not comply with Camden's nor the Mayor of London's Housing Design Standards nor planning policies concerning protecting enhancing established residential accommodation. The dormer roof raises the building much too high and will in effect make the current attractive mixture of buildings forms with a strong variety of heights into a homogenous and bland mews type pastiche elevation.

The problem lies in the greed represented by trying to cram onto a very narrow site block two houses; the building envelope of a new development should respect the existing building envelope and this probably would imply that the site should only be developed to provide a single dwelling. All but one of the windows serving habitable rooms are north facing and all but one habitable room are single aspect, characteristics that demonstrate the really poor internal and external layout of the proposed residential accommodation.

In order to get some good daylight penetration and some sunlight into the development, an inner court or void might be introduced into the design; at present the sunlight and daylight penetration into the habitable rooms is minimal and clearly all the rooms will heavily rely on artificial light at all times of the day throughout the year to supplement the little natural daylight penetration that will be the characteristic of the current proposals. Certainly the proposed development will damage the Conservation Area.

A much better design is required that takes into account the site parameters, the Conservation Area requirements, the amenity and very close proximity of adjacent residential accommodation in Goldsmith Court and most of all, of a quality that is commensurate with the demands and qualities required for such an interesting site within a Conservation Area.

The design statement blandly says that refuse disposal will be as existing. The existing single storey house leaves its rubbish in plastic bags on the pavement that by the morning is strewn up and down the street on the common occasion that night revellers pass along Stukeley Street. The new development contains two houses and has almost four times the floor area of the existing building. The palpable lack of concern and awareness shown in the proposals merely illustrates the inept design and its crude realisation.

Daylight and Sunlight

A daylight and sunlight assessment accompanies the application that has been signed off on page three as being checked and fully accurate. The trouble is there are so many errors in the report that the veracity of the whole report is very much in question. The sunlight results that are tabulated on page 13 indicate that the windows of the 4th floor of Goldsmith Court will have a reduction of around 7% sunlight as a consequence of the development whereas the windows at first floor level will only experience a 3% reduction; it is quite obvious that the windows at the lowest levels of Goldsmith Court will be more overshadowed and effected by the proposed three storey development directly opposite than windows located on the fourth floor which are sited some height above the proposed development (see windows 481 and 484). The author's credentials set out on page 18 of the report clearly indicate the kind of crude designs that are the staple diet of these consultants; they highlight that their clients are the likes of Taylor Wimpey and Barratt Homes, volume house builders whose product is frankly anathema to the design skills that are required for such a sensitive site.

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Clearly there will be a huge negative impact and adverse reduction in daylight and sunlight, view and amenity for the flats particularly at the first and second floors and partially at the third floor in Goldsmith Court, and while the reduction of the level of sunlight and daylight may not fall within minimum standards, the cumulative effect of all four considerations will add up to a very significant erosion of amenity for at least 9 of the 16 flats contained within Goldsmith Court. In addition the residential accommodation along Drury Lane and the remainder of Stukeley Street, will also lose the street and roovescape and streetscape views and openness that allows a high level of privacy between dwellings on what is a densely populated block within the Conservation area.

Conclusion

The application is a very poor design and will do considerable harm to the Conservation Area. Listed Building approval should not be granted for the demolition of 6 Stukeley Street as its proposed replacement is unacceptable and of very poor design quality. The current scheme would seriously damage the amenity of adjoining residential accommodation and should not be granted approval. The applicant should be advised that a smaller development might be acceptable but it requires a significant improvement in design quality and realisation and that the Conservation Area statements about the building, in terms of its height, qualities and context must form the basis of any new design.

Comments submitted by

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