

**10 Bertram Street  
London N19 5DQ**

David Fowler  
Principal Planning Officer  
London Borough of Camden  
5 Pancras Square  
London N1C 4AG

30<sup>th</sup> November 2016

Dear Mr Fowler

**Planning Application - 2016/6088/P - Highgate Newtown Community  
Centre Unit A, B, C, D & E - 25 Bertram Street London N19 5DQ -  
Planning Objection**

I am writing to you to express a wide range of objections to the above planning application.

**Evidence of the need for this redevelopment**

There have been a number of claims made about the need for this major redevelopment centring on the assertion that *'the existing buildings are reaching the end of their life'.....' a conditions survey that identifies costs of over £2million to carry out all the refurbishments necessary to bring the building up to a basic standard'* (Frequently Answered Questions, Camden Council hand-out 20<sup>th</sup> September 2016).

Following a request to see all the relevant documentation that informed these conclusions, the Project Manager replied on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2016 as follows: *'The surveys were commissioned some several years back and helped inform the strategy to redevelop the site, costs have changed over time, as well as the scope of works required to reach the improvements we are seeking with a new build. The surveys were visual inspections rather than intrusive and therefore may not be as comprehensive as required.'*

This 'evidence' is inadequate and I would therefore challenge the basic assumption that this development is necessary. I consider that an alternative refurbishment is viable and possible. In determining that the (estimated) £2m refurbishment is unviable, the council made a simplistic judgement on the basis that 'the council does not have the money'. This is a narrow and short-sighted conclusion and assumes that the only source of funding lies within the council and, failing that, the only alternative is to put private housing on community land to pay for improved facilities. This ignores completely the ability of the third sector to raise funds from charitable sources, private companies and benefactors and non-departmental public bodies such as the Big Lottery to address accommodation improvements.

## **The design concept of the redevelopment and its implications**

I would like to object strongly to the basic concept of the design. The proposed development is simply too high and overbearing as a result of excessive height, bulk and mass, and represents a serious over-development of the site, resulting in a significantly harmful impact on the character and quality of the Conservation Area.

The design will have a harmful impact on the setting and outlook of adjacent homes. There is loss of privacy as a result of windows and terraces directly overlooking both homes and rear gardens and a loss of amenity as a result of reduced sunlight and daylight to rear gardens and a number of adjacent homes.

The proposed development is positioned too close to the edges of the site, positioned hard up to the site's edges for much of the development and rises too high including up to five storeys in a small back-land courtyard. This causes unacceptable negative impact on the residential amenity of the many adjoining homes to all of the site's edges

It is inappropriate from practically every angle. Camden, as the Planning Authority, needs to consider how this proposed development not only fits into the area from all aspects but also ensures that it enhances its character not detracts from it.

The justification for the height, bulk and mass is unacceptable. References have been made to the height of the neighbouring blocks in Croftdown Road as providing some sort of justification. These buildings are placed in an entirely different context and it is an inappropriate comparison. The Croftdown Road blocks are situated on a wide road and have communal gardens separating them from the nearest buildings. The proposed new housing and community centre blocks are situated in a small back-land courtyard at the end of a cul-de-sac and there can be no justification for the height and mass proposed in such a small area other than the council needs as many flats as possible to pay for the development.

The proposed blocks, themselves, are imposing, overbearing and ugly. The development will be oppressive for those living in the new housing, the neighbours and any visitors to the community centre or youth club.

### Bertram Street

Bertram Street is recognised as making a positive contribution to the conservation area with its long terraces and cobbled street. The proposals on the western aspect of the development make no sense in relation to the Bertram Street terrace. If a redevelopment is proved necessary then a simpler 'terrace like' development broadly on the footprint of the current community centre would be far more in line with the character of the street and could potentially enhance it. The proposed buildings on the west of the

site protrude forward with unattractive and irregular site lines in complete contrast to the lines of Bertram Street.

On the eastern side, the proposed development will impact on sunlight and views from the front eastern side of Bertram Street. The rear gardens of both sides of the street will lose daylight and sunlight.

The houses at the southern end of Bertram Street will be the most severely affected in terms of their views and daylight from the new over-sized housing blocks and community centre building.

The claim that long views from Bertram Street are enhanced is misleading. The images shown to demonstrate this are from only one particular angle. Otherwise the views from most of Bertram Street are diminished.

### Croftdown Road

The proposed development will have a harmful effect on the western side of the site. The new buildings have been pushed right to the boundary of the ancient right of way and will be an oppressive presence for people using this route. The buildings overlook the residences on Croftdown Road and the designers have failed to listen to the concerns about overlooking with balconies and living areas overlooking the bedrooms and communal gardens of Croftdown Road.

The gap between the proposed housing block A2 and Croftdown Road is unacceptable with the proposed development, rising to 5 floors at this point and only 6 metres from the rear of the apartments within 118 Croftdown Road seriously impacting on residents with loss of light, privacy and also communal facilities.

At the southern edge of the site Block B2 is positioned hard up to the site's boundary and rises up to 4 storeys to this residential edge. The flats and their rear gardens that run along the site's southern edge will be adversely affected by overlooking, loss of privacy, noise and an unacceptably bulky and obtrusive outlook.

The proposed electricity substation will also result in the loss of valuable communal garden space.

### Winscombe Street

The development will impact negatively on the adjacent neighbours in Winscombe Street by being far too close to the edges of the site and rising too high, reducing levels of sunlight and overshadowing over its neighbours. It will impact negatively on people's privacy in both their homes and from within their rear gardens as windows on these outer walls will look directly into adjacent properties.

## The proposed new Blocks A and B

The proposed new buildings within the site leaves a lot to be desired and does not make sense in relation to the overall design concept. The design of the scheme is apparently intended to create an active, central, public space at the heart of the proposals. However the public courtyard space is overlooked mainly by bedrooms, bins stores and a cycle store, rather than creating a series of active frontages which overlook and engage with this space.

There is still substantial overlooking of existing communal gardens with balconies and living spaces. The majority of the balconies of the new western-most residential buildings overlook the shared gardens of the Croftdown Road mansion buildings and the minority overlook the new central courtyard space in the scheme. The scheme shows 13 balconies and terraces directly overlooking the adjacent gardens with 4 amenity spaces on lower ground level. In the eastern-most building, one of the balconies face the courtyard and all of the balconies face adjoining communal or private existing gardens.

The design objective is to create a central space, which is 'open, safe and welcoming', and a 'place to hold public events that bring the local community together'. However the design itself does not support this intent. As a result, the use of the new shared space will be significantly compromised by the fact that 'quiet' bedroom spaces (often with closed curtains) overlook it, rather than active 'living rooms', so there will be little passive surveillance which would ensure the space is safe. Conflicts are likely to arise between residents either wanting to sleep themselves or with children sleeping in bedrooms and the needs of HNCC / FYA, who will want to hold community events in the public space.

Moreover, not only is the space between the new housing development and Croftdown Road compromising of privacy and overlooking, within the site itself Blocks A2 and B2 are so close to each other as to impact negatively on privacy and overlooking.

Further, it also appears that living spaces are located above bedrooms within the housing blocks themselves which is a poorly thought out in terms of the practical aspects of avoiding noise or disturbance for immediate neighbours.

### **Traffic, the courtyard and proposed through route**

#### Traffic

The proposals significantly underestimate the impact of increased traffic and congestion problems. One of the issues the council has been seeking to resolve is the financial viability of HNCC. The proposed cut in grant and increase in rent will require more intensive use of the existing or the new like-for-like space. The consequence will be increased visitors to the centre in order for it to survive financially.

There has been a wholly inadequate analysis of vehicle use as part of the proposal with only a two-day weekday study undertaken. This is not when the most intensive use takes place. At weekends, the car park is full and there is often a queue of cars seeking to gain access to the site causing congestion with cars having to reverse out of Bertram Street onto the bus route in Chester Road.

This occurs mainly with parents dropping children off for activities. This problem will continue and worsen if the development goes ahead. Parents of young children will not leave them at the top of Bertram Street or at the new access route in Croftdown Road. They will want to safely deliver and collect their children.

It is also acknowledged in the study that there is no spare parking space in Bertram Street and Chester Road and the assumption that there is sufficient spare parking space in Croftdown Road is flawed as there are hardly any spare spaces available at weekends and this compounded by the fact that there are double yellow lines to restrict any 'out-of-bay parking' outside parking zone times. The development will simply be displacing an already problematic on-site parking situation onto neighbouring streets

The proposed barriers into the site will create a logistical and resource issue. Who will operate these on a 24 hour basis? When the barriers are lowered, who will ensure that pedestrians and users of the courtyard are safe whilst lorries or vans are dropping goods of people?

#### The Courtyard and through route

The proposal fails on the basis of creating safe and welcoming space in the courtyard area. In terms of design, the excessively high buildings will overlook the area creating dark shadowy spaces. The height of the buildings will impact adversely on sunlight and the gap between the buildings in Block A will not provide the additional benefit being advanced due to the position of the sun as it reaches the western edge of the site.

The safety of the courtyard will be compromised, first for the reasons cited above in relation to traffic which will include refuse and emergency vehicles, access to the substation, community and youth centre passenger drop-off and collections and deliveries to the community centre and deliveries to the 31 new flats.

Also, emphasis is given to providing a through route to Croftdown Road for cyclists. This is ill-thought out and will create problems of safety for pedestrians and users if cyclists are seen to have any right of way. More important, this will be a magnet for mopeds which have been problem in the area for several years as it will provide an easy 'escape route' for moped riders evading each other or the police.

## Safe Play Space

The courtyard will provide no safe play space for children either living in the housing or users of the community centre. At present, there is a safe play area and garden in the outside area adjacent to the car park, which will be lost. The courtyard will not be safe for the reasons outlined above.

## Allotments

The two allotments at the rear of the site will be lost and despite some capacity being provided on a roof terrace, this will not adequately replace the existing facility adjacent to the café, which uses its produce.

## **The Construction Period and impact on viability**

The proposed development is extremely complex and is likely to take far longer than the two years anticipated. The complexity of the design will also increase costs and financial risks associated with the project, again putting pressure on the quality and outcome of the development.

As the scheme requires excavation of a large basement area, there is a significantly higher risk of unexpected or abnormal problems arising, which could lead to further major cost increases and delays to the building project.

The scale of demolition and excavation work this scheme requires will add to a great deal of additional disruption to the neighbouring properties, through earth removal vehicles adding to traffic, the potential for creating structural instability to neighbouring properties, groundwater issues, noise, dust, pollution and the potential for significant delays to the building programme. The amenity of local residents will be severely harmed during the construction process for this scheme

For example, the council has not spoken with the resident nearest to the development who is wheelchair-bound about the impact on her day-to-day life with a massive basement being excavated next to the room which she inhabits during each day. The continual traffic, dust and environmental damage will have a major impact on immediate neighbours and the proposed route for the trucks going past Brookfield School will also impact adversely on the health and safety of children attending.

We fully anticipate the development taking two to three years to complete. The proposal for the activities of HNCC to be relocated to 2 or 3 other sites in Camden and Islington is theoretically possible but practically challenging. This will impact on the viability of the centre sustaining its momentum and relationship with users from the local community.

## **The consultation process**

The consultation process has been inadequate and has singularly failed since the Cabinet decision in February 2016. The consultation was being undertaken on a reasonably careful basis in the period up to the autumn of 2015 with a number of iterations consulted on. A sudden change and swift presentation of plans in December 2016 led to a significantly revised scheme being presented to the Cabinet which, the report itself acknowledged, had no community support. The report dismissed the more popular Scheme 4 and despite requests for the report on which Scheme 4 was deemed unviable, the council, has refused to release this.

The Cabinet agreed Scheme 5 with 26 flats. Within a couple of months, the number of flats had increased to 32. The scheme grew out of all proportion and there have been continual strong objections from Project Champions, appointed by the council to advise on its development and the wider community. The objections have continually made the points about the over-massing and unnecessary scale of the development. Disappointingly, the council and its design team have been unable or unwilling to respond substantively to the points made, simply making minor adjustments to appease objections.

## **Conclusion**

This is an unacceptable scheme. The design process seems to have been led by the need to fit in as many flats as possible to pay for the community centre and youth club with little care given to the consequences for people living in and around the site.

The design concept is flawed and even within this flawed concept, the council has a design team that has proposed inappropriate buildings and demonstrated little experience of effective and compliant housing design. This is not just within the development itself where there are significant failings in the quality of some of the proposed homes which are sub-standard by contemporary standards but also in relation to the neighbours on all sides.

For the council to agree a packed, 5-storey development in a small back-land courtyard would be a huge mistake. Not just in relation to the impact on the immediate area but also in relation to other potential developments in the borough. This is a council-led project and, as such, should be an exemplar of urban design and appropriateness to a conservation area. To allow this development to take place would severely impact on Camden's reputation and set a potentially disastrous precedent.

The precedent set would impact on any proposed private developments the council would need to judge in future. Developers would simply cite the standard the council has set for itself as a benchmark on 'what can be got away with'.

I would urge you to reject this planning application.

It is unnecessary, a more predictable and less high risk schedule of works could be delivered to upgrade and improve the existing community centre, at a fraction of the cost of the council's proposed scheme, and deliverable in a shorter time in a much less disruptive manner to neighbouring residents.

It has a flawed concept and its proposed design and application is poor. The application has significant failings which are largely as a result of chronic overdevelopment of the site resulting in a proposal that is in direct contravention of National, London Local and Community Plan policies.

it will have a negative impact on the conservation area. The cumulative impact of such failings causes demonstrable material harm to the amenity of the neighbouring properties, and to the character and quality of the surrounding locality including important listed buildings and the Dartmouth Park Conservation Area.

It will have a permanent negative impact on the quality of life of people who live in the area. This is in relation both to existing residents who will be adversely affected by the proposals and any future new residents.

Finally, I have asked for a range of information from the council which has yet to be provided and may therefore need to add further points in response to the application.

Yours sincerely

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