

Gordon Mansions Residents Association

Please reply to: Clive Henderson, Chair, Gordon Mansions Residents Association,

email: [REDACTED] mobile: [REDACTED]

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

12th April 2017

For the attention of John Diver, Planning Officer.

By email to: [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]

Dear John Diver,

Re: University College London, 1-19 Torrington Place, London WC1E 7HB:

Various external alterations to University building (Use Class D1/B1) including installation of accessible platform lift; alterations to front entrance; and the replacement of a number of Ground Floor and First Floor windows to rear and side elevations with louvered panels, metal doors or opaque materials.

Planning Application ref: 2017/1326/P

I am writing on behalf of Gordon Mansions Residents Association (GMRA).

We wish to make comment and objections on the above proposals:

- (a). regarding the installation of the accessible platform lift and alterations to the front entrance, at the East entrance nearest to Gordon Mansions; and
- (b). regarding the proposed louvered panels, which face onto the Rear Open Yard, which is overlooked by the Gordon Mansions flats of Stair 2 (flats 17 to 30).

Gordon Mansions' building in relation to 1-19 Torrington Place:

- (a). Gordon Mansions consists of two blocks of flats (77 in total) that are located in Torrington Place at the junction with Huntley Street, and with many of the flats (including mine) overlooking Torrington Place. The long established residential community here in Gordon Mansions, which very much reflects the cross-section of the diverse population of Fitzrovia, having as it does a mix of different income, cultural and ethnic groups, including families with young children, and elderly people.
- (b). The western block of Gordon Mansions, Block 1 (Stair/entrance 1 and Stair/entrance 2), adjoins and is on the party wall with, 1-19 Torrington Place. The flats of Stair 1 (flats 1 to 16) overlook Torrington Place, and are only 15 to 20 metres from the main entrance recess of 1-19 Torrington Place. I myself live in one of the 1st floor flats on the party wall, nearest to this entrance and thus over the years have observed the "informal" use of this recessed entrance especially during out of hours in the evenings and at weekends by members of the public.
- (c). The flats of Stair 2 (flats 17 to 30) overlook Huntley Street but their rear rooms (often the bedrooms) of these flats overlook the UCL's Open Yard at the rear of the 1-19 Torrington Place building. Over the years, the Open Yard has been, and continuous to be, a source of serious noise nuisance (especially air-conditioning/mechanical plant noise) and disturbance for our residents, and especially for those whose rear rooms overlook the Open Yard - there are reckoned to be some 56 rooms overlooking this Yard area.

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Re: University College London, 1-19 Torrington Place, WC1E 7HB - *continued*:

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(1). Proposed accessible platform lift and alterations to front entrance (East entrance):

We appreciate the need for an accessible lift. Although we do not oppose the lift in principle, we do wish to object to its design & to some of the proposed materials for the following reasons:

- (a). There are no detailed drawings to judge how the actual proposals will relate neatly to, and be integrated with, the existing stairs and handrails; and the existing finishes. All too often, the addition of such access lifts look as though they have been "tacked on" without proper detailed design consideration - the pity is that this one looks as though this may be so in this case; and with awkward unresolved junctions between proposed and existing. The drawings do not show how the relationship to the existing handrails and steps will be resolved; do not show if the concrete platform will have the same (or alternative) finish as the existing (polished stone) landing; etc.
- (b). The design and materials of the existing stairs, handrail and landing of the recessed main entrance to the building is a good piece of integrated design, and is characteristic of its period (1950s/60s). It is also robust and has stood well the passage of time; and easily cleaned.

Because of its nature and location, inevitably this recessed entrance is also part of the streetscape of this important street - Torrington Place is the main pedestrian route between the public transport (buses and Goodge Street tube station) in Tottenham Court Road and the university precinct area to the east of Gower Street.

Thus, the proposed design needs to acknowledge its importance in the streetscape of Torrington Place; and be better integrated in design terms.

- (c). The Proposed Elevation drawing indicates that the screen wall to the side of the platform lift and ramp will be an Anodised Aluminium panel - we wish to object to this material and panel, because it is unlikely to be robust enough, and is also likely to cause noise problems, due to people "banging" on it, especially late at night.

We know from long experience, that students and others returning along Torrington Place late at night/early hours of the morning from the various student licensed premises/bars in the university precinct will often bang on anything that makes a noise ! In particular, for many years (but recently removed) there were two metal (but nicely designed) ventilators at street level outside the Heal's office building, opposite our flats, that people loved to bang on to produce resonating metal sounds on their way home late at night.

Also, from our observations, (my flat is one of the closest to this entrance), this particular recessed entrance, including at its street level, is often used by members of the public outside normal hours to gather and smoke etc.

Thus, the enclosing construction, materials and finishes need to be more robust, possibly similar to the existing.

(d). Objection:

For the above reasons, we object to the current proposals.

In their covering letter of 6 March 2017, Deloitte Rear Estate for the applicant refers to National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) policies emphasizing the importance of design, including of high quality. In this instance, we do not think, disappointingly, that the current proposals meet this standard of good design. It is also in the Bloomsbury Conservation Area.

We would particularly ask that detailed proposals and drawings are provided, for further consultation.

(2). Proposed louvered panels, which face onto the Rear Yard etc:

- (a). The Elevation drawings show proposed metal louvers to several existing openings at Ground Floor and Basement levels of the main building, all of which face onto the existing Rear Open Yard. To clarify, this Rear Open Yard is at the Basement level referred to in the application; ("Basement" level in relation to the street Torrington Place).
- (b). In para 3.6 of the Design & Access Statement, the applicant says that "... the existing ventilation, heating & cooling ... systems ... will be stripped out and replaced to provide sufficient capacity for increased numbers of building users". We are greatly concerned

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that no details have been provided for the replacement mechanical plant, especially acoustic/noise levels, relating to these new louvered openings.

(c). **Objection:**

Thus, we strongly object to the louvered panels being approved, until information on the proposed replacement mechanical plant is provided for assessment and consultation. As described at the start of this letter, there are some 56 rooms (most, if not all, are bedrooms) of the Gordon Mansions flats (flats 17 to 30) that overlook the Rear Open Yard, and already are subject to noise nuisance from the Yard and mechanical plant.

In this context, it is particularly important that any replacement or new mechanical plant is assessed and consulted upon before these louvers are approved. It is somewhat putting the "cart before the horse", because mitigation of the noise levels of the mechanical plant usually determines the type, size and configuration of the louvres and baffles needed.

Enclosed:

Please find enclosed:

- (a). Our Map showing Residential, showing how Gordon Mansions (and other residential) related to Mullard House, 1-19 Torrington Place.
- (b). Our Map showing relation of the Rear Open Yard to the Flats (flats 17 to 30) that overlook the Yard; (**Note:** Open Rear Yard is the Basement level referred to in the Planning Application).

Yours sincerely,

Clive Henderson,
Chair,
On behalf of Gordon Mansions Residents Association.

Copy: GMRA Committee.
Local Ward Councillors.