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ASTOR COLLEGE

SECTION 73 APPLICATION: COMMENTARY

1.0 Preamble

1.1 This Section 73 application relates to proposed minor amendments to the external elevations and Bedford Passage area of Astor College student residence, Charlotte Street, approved by planning application (2015/1139/P).

1.2 Some of the proposed changes are in response to stakeholder consultation undertaken by UCL and various user groups as well as technical design development by UCL's consultant team since the planning application was approved. Other changes arose from necessary technical design developments identified by the contractor, Galliford Try, who are appointed to complete the technical design prior to construction.

1.3 In order to describe these changes, new drawings have been prepared by DLA Architecture, who are the architects for the contractor, Galliford Try. These drawings substitute those previously approved by application 2015/1139/p in 2015, as set out below:

Title	Approved Drawing no. (Levitt Bernstein)	Proposed Drawing no. (DLA Architecture)
Proposed Lower Ground Floor	L/099	1099
Proposed Upper Ground Floor	L/100	1100
Proposed Charlotte Street Elevation	L/250	1250
Proposed South West Elevation	L/251	1251
Proposed Rear Elevations	L/252	1252

The proposed drawings will supersede the approved drawings once the Section 73 application has been approved. Annotations are included on the proposed drawings, to assist with identifying the changes.

1.4 The proposed elevational changes fall into the following categories:

- Redesigned main entrance
- Window format
- Plinth cladding (Charlotte Street)
- UCLU Gym entrance
- Café elevation at Bedford Passage
- Roof guarding
- Metal fins
- Changes to brick patterns

Details of, and justifications for, these changes are summarised below.

2.0 Summary of proposed changes

2.1 Redesigned main entrance

Following end-user consultation carried out by UCL Estates with other stakeholders – Security, Fire Officer, Inclusive Design, and LB Camden's Building Control Officer – the main entrance area to Astor College has been reconfigured. The new layout aims to make the entrance area more generous and welcoming, reduce segregation between stepped and ramped pedestrian access, improve sightlines from the reception desk to the entrance, and prevent tailgating.

As a consequence of these changes, space has been created internally by reconfiguring the external ramp, making it longer. The canopy over has been extended to suit the lengthened ramp, so that it is weather protected. In addition, the entrance door has been recessed to suit the new ramp configuration. This allowed the doors to swing outward, in accordance with fire escape requirements. (Refer to drawings 1100 and 1250).

At the meeting with Camden planning and design officers held on 03/04/17, this proposed amendment was considered acceptable.

2.2 Window format

Following consultation between UCL and LB Camden Building Control, windows have been changed in order to introduce an additional transom at 1.1m above floor level, as a fall protection measure. In addition, UCL have agreed to a contractor's proposal to unify the specification from three types of window system to one product, put forward by the

Contractor. Windows at the rear of the building that were to be retained in the consented scheme will now be replaced, in addition to those on the front.

Window sight-lines have therefore changed to suit the introduction of new window system changes, as indicated on the revised elevations. Window frames have been recessed behind the brick reveals to minimise the visible sightlines of the new frames (Refer to drawings 1250, 1251 and 1252). The window frame and transom arrangements have also been aligned along the rear elevations and the rear extension elevations, to provide for a consistent composition of these elements between the existing building and the new rear extension.

The windows were first discussed with Camden Planning officers at a meeting held 22/06/16 and since then have been developed further in consultation with Camden design officers.

2.3 Plinth cladding (Charlotte Street)

Structural investigations have shown that the existing concrete piers forming part of the structure of the existing plinth cannot be adapted. This prevents the installation of ceramic cladding over the existing brick wall as originally envisaged. In order to improve the visual appearance of the plinth, while still working within the applicant's property boundary, the retained concrete frame will instead be exposed and re-clad in new brick slip cladding. This will run in the same construction depth, with shallow brick slips also facing the piers. As a benefit, this will create a stronger, more robust finish at pavement level, mitigating any long-term damage.

Building services analysis has shown that additional extract ventilation louvres are required, to serve areas in the lower ground floor, and these have been incorporated into the façade of the plinth. (Refer to drawing 1250). This is to enable ventilation to the basement areas, where previously ventilation was provided via the podium deck, which is now to be built over to provide accommodation. This ventilation is in addition to existing louvres, including those for the electrical substation, where relocation was expected but has not proven feasible. The façade ventilation will be coloured to blend in with the brickwork and will be in the form of vertical louvres, rather than horizontal, to pick up on the vertical lines of the ceramic cladding and railings.

Taking into account the structural constraints required to strengthen the podium deck within the lower ground floor, the air flow rates have been calculated and the number of

ventilation louvres established. The louvre size and location within the plinth, between the piers, have been rationalised to provide a unified, consistent solution that improves on the original.

2.4 UCLU Gym Entrance

As part of the temporary site works for the Astor College scheme, formation of a vehicular entrance to the rear of the site has entailed the demolition and reconstruction of the link structure between the main building and the gym. This provides an opportunity to create an improved elevation in its place. Curtain walling is proposed in the reconstructed link to signal a new independent entrance to the gym, which will be accessed from Bedford Passage. This allows more light into the facilities, but also improves the lighting, animation and passive security to Bedford Passage bearing in mind the omission of the three café windows described below.

As an additional enhancement, the hard landscaping has been reconfigured to further define the entrance, which includes the introduction of a tree planter and tactile paving. The new landscape extends the Bedford Passage ground levels toward the gym, removing the existing low wall and filling in the existing sunken area. Both the new entrance and the pocket park are consistent with the aims of the Fitzrovia Area Action Plan to create animated frontage to Bedford Passage. (Refer to drawing 1099 and 1252).

At the meeting with officers on 03/04/17, the improvements to the gym entrance were welcomed.

2.5 Café elevations at Bedford Passage

Following receipt of planning consent for the refurbishment of Astor College in 2015, detailed design development has been undertaken. Structural analysis has been carried out for the proposals, and it has since been shown that the proposed new openings to create windows along the Bedford Passage façade are not structurally feasible. This is due to the resulting loss of capacity of the structure to resist wind loads and the effect of redistributed loads, which could overstress the existing frame. For this reason it is not possible to form these openings.

UCL acknowledge that this results in reduced activation of the Bedford Passage façade. In recognition of the importance of improving the existing façade given the future role of Bedford Passage, the design team have been working in consultation with Camden

design officers to develop a new solution to activate and enliven this elevation to compensate for the removal of the approved openings.

It is proposed to overclad the existing wall with ceramic baguettes and colour coated, perforated metal backing, similar to the approved baguettes featured on the Charlotte Street and rear elevations.

A considered design process has been undertaken to review several options, prior to settling on this option and presenting it to Camden. In each case, the design theme would be continued to in include the rear façade of the café adjacent to the new proposed gym entrance. Comments received at meetings with the planning officers have been incorporated during this process. Below, the design development process which was taken to reach this solution is set out:

a) Initial options included retaining the appearance of the proposed window openings by providing curtain wall frames but with obscure ceramic backed glass in front of the solid wall. Metal panels between the frames would be retained. This follows the original design with a similar elevational treatment. This option was discounted because it was not considered to sufficiently animate the façade.
b) This was further developed to replace the curtain wall frames with backlit panels, in response to the request to provide more light to the area. It was considered that the panels could also house display images, relevant to the university gym facilities.
c) Further options were developed using different coloured metal panels, reflecting the colour palette proposed for the ceramic baguettes to the Charlotte Street frontage and curtain wall mullions to the café. However, this option was discounted because is introduced an additional architectural language and the preferred approach was to differentiate the café as an independent element, while using the established material palette.
d) A brick clad solution was developed, using a dark grey brick slip, to match the proposed cladding to the podium plinth on Charlotte Street. The brickwork would be recessed to frame a neon sign, with wording and images relevant to the gym, to very literally bring light into this area. This option was not progressed because it was not considered to sufficiently add light and colour to Bedford Passage.
e) The brick cladding idea was further developed with the dark grey brick cladding at low level retained and following a diagonal line from the café roof at its upper level, then changing to glazed brick above this line. Various colours for the glazed brick

were considered, including monochrome and coloured solutions. This option was not progressed following discussion with LB Camden's planning officer at the meeting held on 22/06/17, where it was also not considered to add sufficient light and colour to Bedford Passage.

f) The brick plinth design was developed with the dark grey brick cladding at low level retained, linking the podium plinth and café. The material changing to ceramic baguettes above the brick, which steps down the slope of Bedford Passage. The same design and colour palette for the ceramic baguettes will be used as elsewhere to the other elevations.

g) This option became the preferred proposal. The ceramic finish brings a high quality, attractive finish to Bedford Passage that is subtly reflective and should bring colour and light to the pedestrian route. It also unites the ground floor elements of the scheme, which now share a continuous band of coloured ceramic and grey brick/metalwork, which still varies in colour where necessary to articulate the different elements.

2.6 Roof guarding

UCL have developed the access and maintenance strategy with LB Camden Building Control required the introduction of fixed guarding at roof perimeters in place of latchway system. This is considered to be a safer method of fall prevention. Guarding has been located in order to minimise its visibility from street level in response to officer comments at the meeting held on 03/04/17 (Refer to drawings 1250, 1251, and 1252).

2.7 Metal fins to rear elevation

The polyester powdered coated metal fins to the rear elevation have been rationalised to provide a more muted colour palette with a simpler arrangement. This follows development of the ceramic baguette colour selection on the front of the building, where warmer colours and more increased variety of colour will be used to define more public elements. The bedroom windows therefore use only the cooler colours from the range, which are arranged in a simple 'spectrum' from left to right. (Refer to drawings 1251, 1252).

2.8 Brick patterns to rear elevation

The brick slip system has been developed with the intention to achieve an appearance equal to that of a traditional brick wall, including brick coursing, mortar joints, etc. The existing floor levels dictate the setting out of the brick slip panels vertically. In order to avoid cut bricks at slab levels, which do not always co-ordinate with brick sizes, a double course of soldier bricks has been introduced in lieu of the single solder course originally proposed. (Refer to drawings 1251, 1252).