

John Diver
London Borough of Camden
Planning Department
Development Control
Second Floor
5, St Pancras Square
London N1C 4AG

1st October 2017

Dear Sir,

**Re: 6 Stukeley Street London WC2B 5LQ
Planning Reference 2017/4135/P**

This site has been subject to a planning appeal and the Inspector's decision letter dated is very recent (28th July 2017) and clearly takes legal precedent over the pre-application advice which was issued in February this year, which in any event has nominal planning status. The planning application was submitted *after* the Planning Appeal Decision on 5th September, so the applicant is clearly aware of the Inspector's decision and reasoning and can not rely on the pre-application advice to justify their latest scheme, but that is precisely what the developer has sought to do.

The application should be judged in the light of the Inspector's decision letter and current adopted planning policies, and this letter makes comments on the planning application accordingly.

Context

6 Stukeley Street is within the Seven Dials (Covent Garden) Conservation Area (CA). It is highlighted in the Conservation Area statement as a building making a positive contribution to the CA. It is a single storey building with a hipped slate roof and because of its height and very modest bulk allows views from the public realm in Stukeley Street to the rear elevations of the other buildings within the CA along Drury Lane to the west, Macklin Street to the south, and when viewing towards the east, to the City Literary Institute and rear elevations of buildings facing the alleyway section of Stukeley Street.

The Inspector's decision letter when considering the existing building states:

" Its modest scale including its height, its horizontal proportions and its simple utilitarian appearance in combination with and contrast to the scale and appearance of neighbouring buildings on this very narrow pedestrianised street results in a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. (CA)" (see paragraph 8).

Design and Conservation

The proposal is to demolish the existing building behind the retained facade. Whereas the current building contains one dwelling the new development proposes two 4 person 2 bedroom dwellings. This is to be achieved by excavating 4 meters over the whole site and extending the height of the building over two thirds of its length by 4 meters (13 feet +). The current building is one storey; the proposed development is a four storey building and will be significantly higher than the no 4 Stukeley Street by over 2 meters (7+ feet), the

parapet line of 8 Stukeley Street by 1.5 meters (5 feet) and marginally higher than 2 Stukeley Street by just under a meter.

The new element of the building above ground level is proposed to be 1 meter behind the line of the existing retained Stukeley Street facade; this will be constructed of glass blockwork and will be some 7 meters narrowing to 6 meters away from Goldsmith Court (GC). The variation of distance is due to the narrowing of Stukeley Street in this section of the pedestrianised street. GC has commercial uses at street level with four floors of residential accommodation above.

The bulk and height of the proposed scheme will severely obscure the current views and outlook across the existing building both from the street as well as from the commercial and residential accommodation in GC opposite. This will be particularly severe to the accommodation on the first and second floors within GC. The Inspector turned down the previous application for a number of reasons but in particular because:

"the height increase would result in a harmful loss of scale within the streetscape. The height would also result in an increase of enclosure within this part of the street and the loss of the view above the existing building towards the rear elevations of other buildings within the CA and this would be harmful to the CA." (see para 9)

The Inspector went on to say in paragraph 11:

"I consider that the harm to the significance of the CA that would result from the proposal would be less than substantial. As such having regard to paragraph 134 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework), this harm needs to be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. Whilst the proposal would provide one additional dwelling, this does not equate to a public benefit which would outweigh the harm identified."

The scheme now under consideration has not preserved the views and outlook across the site, but continues to severely prejudice such views, and inevitably the proposed increase in height and bulk of the development will result in an increased enclosure to this section of the street. The fact that the current scheme contains one additional dwelling is clearly **not** sufficient reason under the National Planning Framework Policy to outweigh any public benefit that might accrue from the intensification of development on this very small site. The Inspector is quite clear on this point. (In passing why an additional dwelling that will be marketed at a price well over the majority of Londoner's financial bracket might be considered 'a benefit' is hard to comprehend and certainly will not address any of the pressing housing needs of London).

The inspector also drew attention to the height of the development in comparison to adjoining property particularly nos 2 and 4 Stukeley Street. The inspector stated in paragraph 8:

"The height of the proposed dwellings would exceed the height of No 4 and would be of a similar height to No 8, a prominent corner building and having regard to the length of the appeal site frontage and to the increased height proposed, the proposal would result in a harmful loss of variety of scale within the street scene."

The latest scheme has made a crude effort to vary the scale along the frontage by extending the building upwards along 7.5m of the 11.5 length of the facade but this extended section is still considerably higher than Nos 2 Stukeley Street and over 1.5

meters higher than the parapet line of 8 Stukeley Street, the corner building. Rather than adding variety it appears rather like a dispossessed lump that has no relationship to what is below and adjacent; in addition being constructed of glass blocks it will visually jar with the low key and mews-like domesticity of the current street frontage.

The existing single storey building with higher buildings either side results in a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and the latest proposal will destroy this variety of scale and will harm all the qualities that the CA aim to protect in this section of Stukeley Street as set out both by the Inspector in the decision letter and contained within the Conservation Area Statement; the openness, views across the site from the street and loss of scale, all these qualities the Inspector considers important and makes clear that they should not be damaged.

The defects in the latest scheme as a consequence of the substantial increase in height and bulk are common to the defects in the scheme that was rejected by the Inspector.

The current proposals fails to preserve the character and appearance of the CA and would *not* meet the requirements of section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

For the same reasons it would *not* accord with paragraph 132 of the National Planning Policy Framework *nor* with Camden Council's recently adopted Local Plan, specifically **Policy D1 Design** sub-section (a) as it fails to "respects local context and character," (b) does not "preserves or enhances the historic environment and heritage assets in accordance with Policy D2 Heritage", (f) does not "integrate well with the surrounding streets and open spaces.....", and (m) does not "preserve strategic and local views", rather it will destroy such views and **Policy D2 Heritage** sub-section Conservation Area (e) states that, "The Council will require that development within conservation areas preserves or, where possible, enhances the character or appearance of the area" - the current application fails on both of these obligations.

Living Conditions/Residential Amenities

Currently all the residential accommodation in GC on the first and second floors fronting Stukeley Street enjoy views across and over 6 Stukeley Street. The fact that the street is extremely narrow increases the importance of preserving the outlook from these dwellings.

The latest proposals, as like the previous scheme, will block the outlook and if granted will result in a solid obscur glass wall varying between 6 to 7 meters away from the living room and bedroom windows of the flats within CG on the first and second floor that face Stukeley Street (Flats 1,2,3,5,6 and 7). This will severely damage the outlook and amenity of all of these dwellings, and clearly is *not* in accordance with Camden Local Plan **Policy A1 Amenity** subsection (a) that states that new developments should "seek to ensure that the amenity of communities, occupiers and neighbours is protected" and in sub-section (e) that "visual privacy, outlook are protected".

The Inspector stated in paragraph 14:

"Although there are taller buildings than the existing building (no 6 Stukeley Street) in the immediate vicinity of the appeal site including opposite Goldsmith Court, this does not justify the harm to outlook that would result from the proposal and I note that the proposed dwellings would be taller than Nos 2 and 4 Stukeley Street and that no 8 is offset from the

front of Goldsmith Court.”

and in Paragraph 15 and 16

“...Whilst I agree with the appellant that it may in some circumstances be appropriate to have lower separation distances in urban areas as opposed to suburban areas and whilst I acknowledge that the Council raised no objections with regard to sunlight and daylight, for the reasons stated above, the relationship between the proposal and GC is not considered to be acceptable notwithstanding the urban context of the appeal site and the existing relationship between some flats in GC and other nearby buildings.

Taking the above matters into consideration, I conclude that the proposal would have a significant adverse effect on the living conditions of the occupiers of Goldsmith Court having particular regard to outlook and privacy. It is therefore contrary to policies A1 and D1 of the CLP. These policies seek, amongst other things, to secure high quality design that respects local context and protects the quality of life of occupiers and neighbours”.

The current proposals because of its height and bulk will result in a harmful feeling of enclosure and will be overbearing to adjoining residential occupiers in Goldsmith Court. Moreover the height of the latest scheme is still in excess of both no 2 and No 4 Stukeley Street and also 1.5m higher than the parapet line of 8 Stukeley Street. The loss and damage of the views across 6 Stukeley Street from GC and amenity is clearly in conflict with the the Inspector’s letter that states that these views should be maintained and not damaged.

Layout and Design of the Proposed Development

The basement bedrooms only view is of the solid wall flank wall of 4 Stukeley Street a mere 1.5 meters (5 feet) away and will have diabolical, if any, daylight penetration and no sunlight penetration being 4m (13+ feet) below ground level. These ‘habitable rooms’ will have no outlook whatsoever. This may be suitable for troglodytes but could not in any way be described as good quality housing design. On the ground floor the situation is marginally better with the primary window looking straight out onto the same flank wall which will now be only 2 meters (6.5 feet) distant; again the daylight and sunlight penetration will be grim and clearly throughout the day every room in this dwelling will have to rely on artificial lighting, hardly a requirement that complies with the Council’s ecological aspirations. The accommodation on the first and second floor is not that much better with the same flank wall of 4 Stukeley Street being only 2 meters (6.5 feet) away from the bedroom windows at first floor level.

Camden Plan contains **Policy C.C.1 (a)** that states the Council *will* require all developments to minimise the effects of climate change and promote zero carbon development. This is not compatible with the design of this development that will require artificial lighting to be on all day long when the lower dwelling is occupied.

The ground floor dwelling does not have level access with a quite horrible shared entrance lobby with the upper dwelling. Having navigated past the flat’s front door, three steps lead down to the living accommodation. The design is clearly not Life Time Homes compliant.

Cycle storage has been located in the basement. If it is possible to get around the entrance lobby to open the flat door while carrying the cycle, the design requires you to

take your cycle through the galley kitchen and then go down to the basement level via the narrow staircase with 18 steps of which 8 are winders. In all probability anyone attempting to take a cycle to the basement will at some point fall down the stairs. Apparently the applicant (and Camden Design Officers?) consider this complies with Camden's design standards.

The amenity space consists of a basement yard reached through the bedrooms. While the area of this 'open space' is in excess to that required, it's location some 4 meters down from ground level and only 1.5 meters wide is so poor quality it will in effect provide no amenity whatsoever. It is a grim hole in the ground with walls on all four sides rising to 8m.

The upper dwelling has it's front door on the first floor which is reached again via a narrow staircase with winders at the top and bottom of the 18 stepped staircase. Again the accommodation clearly is not compliant with Life Time Homes standards, which the Council seeks to apply to all new housing.

The cycle storage to this dwelling is equally impossible being at first floor level so residents are expected to carry their cycle up the steep stairs with winders top and bottom and get through the front door to the flat, pass in front of the bathroom and locate the cycle/s within the sole utility store presumably beside a washing machine or other white goods!

The amenity space proposed for the upper dwelling consists of a balcony at second floor level that is a narrow slither of space which is only wide enough to stand in, and because it will be directly looking into the accommodation to the rear of no 8/10 Stukeley Street, is to have a glass obscur wall built in front of it full height. Clearly this space will offer no amenity.

There is no refuse storage provision at ground floor level for either dwelling so apparently residents will be obliged to place their rubbish in plastic bags on the street where it will inevitably be kicked around. Stukeley Street is within Covent Garden and subject to a very high level of night time revelers. Stukeley Street is situated directly opposite the Travel Lodge Hotel in Drury Lane. Residents in GC experience anti-social behavior with rubbish bags kicked open and rubbish strewn across the street on a regular basis. The failure to provide a secure street level communal refuse storage facility is symptomatic of the poor quality design.

The Council states in **Policy D1 Design** to "*seek high quality design in residential design*". The current proposal are diabolically poor, and clearly fails to provide high standard of accommodation and fails to meet a plethora of Council policies concerning daylight, outlook, amenity, sustainability, accessibility, refuse and cycle storage (see policies set out in paragraph 7.32 and elsewhere in Camden's Plan).

Accessibility and Life Time Homes

While the Inspector did not address this aspect of the appeal scheme I would suggest that the advice that the developers have been given in the pre-application letter from the Council must be reconsidered.

It would appear that because the developers are now proposing to retain the facade of 6 Stukeley Street but demolish everything behind it, excavate over four meters and extend the development some 4 meters higher than the existing building over two thirds of the site, provide two dwellings on four floors whereas currently it is a single story building

containing one dwelling, the scheme is considered to fall into the category of an extension/ rehabilitation of an existing building rather than the construction of two new dwellings. As a consequence the Council's design requirements concerning lifetime homes and disabled access are minimal.

To minimise accessibility requirements is absurd when well over 98% of the existing building is being demolished and officers should insist that the requirement for accessibility and lifetime homes standards be met. To fail to do so, in this case, is most odd. Officers appear to be condoning, even encouraging, a scheme that fails to comply with Camden's own planning policies. The minimum level of accessibility should comply with the Building Regulations Approved Document M4(2) category 2 and the Council in accordance with their planning policies should insist that the applicants meet these standards because the scheme is a total redevelopment behind a retained facade and not a rehabilitation of an existing building.

Conclusion

The Council should reject the application in the light of the Inspector's decision letter and as the scheme is contrary to many planning policies listed above especially those concerning Design and Heritage contained in the Camden Local Plan.

The Inspectors Decision Notice states clearly that any development of the site should maintain the existing outlook and views across the site from street level as well as from adjacent residential accommodation in Goldsmith Court. The presumption is that any development that significantly increases the height and bulk of the existing building will not be acceptable because of the damage to the Conservation Area and the consequence of the adverse effect such a development will have on the living conditions of adjacent residents.

The poor design derives from the desire by the applicant to squeeze onto this tiny site two dwellings when the site and its site constraints all militate towards the need to undertake a modest development containing one dwelling that maintains the existing height and bulk of the existing building. An alternative scheme based on this principle has previously been provided to the Council that demonstrates that all the Council's design and Heritage policies can be so met.

I invite the planning officer's dealing with this application, when they carry out a site visit, to contact me as I will facilitate access to residential accommodation within Goldsmith Court.

Yours sincerely



Jim Monahan
Flat 5 Goldsmith Court
Stukeley Street
London WC2B 5LF