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Planning Solutions Team
(attention Laura Hazleton)
Planning Department
London Borough of Camden
5 Pancras Square
London N1C 4AG

19th February 2019

Dear Sirs,

PLANNING APPLICATION 2019/0162/HS2
Wolfson House 2-10 Stephenson Way, London NW1 2HE
Submission under Schedule 17 of High Speed Rail (London-West Midlands) Act 2017

We write with reference to the above application on behalf of The Magic Circle and The Magic Circle Foundation Ltd of 12 Stephenson Way, London NW1 who are adjoining (including party wall) owners to the subject property as described in the planning application.

The Magic Circle has participated in several discussions with the applicants regarding the scheme which is the subject of this Schedule 17 application and has maintained certain reservations which have been put to the applicant and which we are now instructed to bring to the attention of the London Borough of Camden as planning authority when considering this application.

Our client's concerns are divided into three substantive areas as addressed below.

A. Setting and Context

1. The extent of development for the planning authority to consider in this application does not include the whole of the property known as Wolfson House, 2 -10 Stephenson Way.
2. The location plan of the extent of development to be considered includes only the footprint of the development and does not include any proposals for the development's curtilage apart from the western pavement of Stephenson Way. It is difficult to understand therefore how the planning authority can reach a reasoned view of the merits of the building design without knowledge of the setting and context into which the building is to be placed.
3. Given that the surrounding land to the west and north are within the applicant's control we consider that the Council should seek appropriate assurances from the applicant regarding the setting of the development including proposals for the public realm and other private spaces around the extent of the building. This is especially important given the prominent nature of the cube design and its presentation in the locale and from all angles.

4. The sketches accompanying the application indicate the provision of hard and soft landscaping to the north and west of the building which would support the design approach adopted by the applicant. The approach to the public realm and private spaces around the proposed building, as suggested by the applicant, is supported generally but with certain detailed concerns which we believe could be addressed by the applicant, more especially regarding the open space area between our client's property and the building and the area alongside Regnart Buildings. We are concerned that the Council should seek assurances to retain open views of each side of the cube with appropriate public realm and landscaping.

5. It is disappointing to note that the proposed building has not been set back from Stephenson Way to provide a wider and, therefore, safer pavement on Stephenson Way alongside the southern and eastern elevations of the proposed building.

6. The service entry doors on the building's southern elevation on to Stephenson Way are not an enhancement to the public realm and do not achieve any animation of the street scene, giving this end of Stephenson Way a 'dead end' service road feel. This is disappointing given the Grade 2* listed RCGP building opposite and may only encourage anti-social behaviour in the area, particularly at night.

B. Building Design

7. The proposed open fret work, within a hanging tiled surface, appears in theory to be an elegant solution for an otherwise bland and non-engaging utilitarian and monolithic building. However our concerns are that in time, possibly a relatively short time, the textured surface will become stained and streaked by rain, more especially given the minimal 40mm ledges that cover the entire facade.

8. London Underground has an unenviable record of providing nests and roosts for feral birds in Central London. Openings in the proposed facade appear to be ideal entry points for nesting pigeons and/or the deposit of litter, or worse, more especially at pavement/ground level. Whilst page 35 of the Design and Access statement offers some comfort that feral bird nesting will not occur, the design does not support this view and the addition of mesh suggests that a belief that birds will not nest in the facade is uncertain.

9. The Victorian glazed tile precedent study illustrates examples of flat facades with traditional cornice moulding details that are capable of washing by rain, as the cornice ledges encourage the protection of the tiled facades. The textured facade for the proposed building would have only limited run-off or at best differential run-off. The mesh would attract dust and dirt which would compound the potential for stains and streaks over time.

10. The proposed modular pattern of the facades appears to be at odds with the required standards for service entry doors. The illustrative material supporting the application suggest that these detailed issues have yet to be resolved. Some illustrations show no screens and others show tiled screens in place. The planning authority need some assurance from the applicant of exactly what is proposed as the visuals are misleading. The likely reality is that the illustrated screens would not be used on the service entry doors as they would be too heavy for hinges and too bulky to move with ease. This would be to the detriment of the local street scene, more especially in Stephenson Way.

11. The Magic Circle welcomes the blank facade facing the party wall to 12 Stephenson Way and the principle of open space within the gap between the buildings, although it is noted, as referenced in Section A above, that such proposals do not form part of this Schedule 17 application which is disappointing and really should be included when properly determining such an application as this.

12. Whilst the chosen design has the effect of highlighting the building, rather than complementing and blending in with the surrounding buildings and street scene, there is no indication within the application details as to how and if the building is to be illuminated at night. There appears to be no thought given in the design to the impact of the building and its setting to the night time environment which is itself likely to change with the full impact of an operational high speed station and any consented over-site development at the southern end of the reconstituted Cobourg Street. Our clients believe that this is a significant omission and wish to work collaboratively with the applicant to consider ways of enhancing the presentation of the building and its surrounds both during the night time and during the day to the benefit of local businesses and to encourage a safer, more secure and user friendly environment.

C. Other Matters

13. It is rather unnecessary and inappropriate of the applicant to make criticisms of our client's Stephenson Way facade (page 15 of the Design and Access statement), more especially when the treatment of the Magic Circle facade was designed, and lawfully installed, to evoke the memory of the Egyptian Hall Theatre, the traditional home of the Magic Circle in London, by creating proportions of an Egyptian Pylon within the facade.

14. The Magic Circle needs to attract audiences, corporate organisations and the visiting public to its building. It is essential that the surrounding area, including the redevelopment of Wolfson House as a whole, is therefore attractive and appropriate for this purpose.

15. Our clients are keen to work collaboratively with both the Council and the applicant to establish greater vibrancy, connectivity and accessibility to the arts and science quarter based around Stephenson Way and to celebrate the contribution that this unique pocket of Euston can make to the vitality of the neighbourhood ...hence our concerns regarding the inactive street frontages of the proposed building, the lack of firm plans for public realm and private open space around the building and the potential for the deterioration of such an 'unlived-in' property through poor design and inadequate maintenance, which could lead to a higher incidence of antisocial behaviour, something which is already present and needs to be eradicated through positive and vibrant design and activity.

16. The nature of piles required for the construction of the building is described within the application. Further information is requested, and the Council's consideration required, to understand the impact of such on the Magic Circle property, more especially vibration and ground heave that may result from the pile design proposed. The Magic Circle building has been established and agreed by HS2 as a particularly sensitive receptor, more especially given the form of building construction and the current uses within the property including the theatre, museum and club spaces.

Finally, our clients wish to be kept advised of any changes in the proposed design which might be made as a consequence of the consultation on this application. They also remain available for discussion on any of the points raised in these representations.

Yours faithfully



HENRY CLARKE MSc DIC FRICS
Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Henry Clarke', written over the printed name and extending to the right.

