

Brill Place Tower, planning application [2019/2475/P](#)

Somers Town Neighbourhood Forum objects to this minor material amendment, which worsens an already terrible masterplan, one that erects unnecessary, inappropriately scaled buildings on public open space, cutting down mature trees and worsening local air quality.

Increased footprint

It seems that the amendment would massively increase the footprint of the tower, making it more dominant in the park. We have asked for clarification of the footprint of the consented scheme and the modified scheme, but this has yet to be forthcoming. What we do know is from the application description: “Plot 7: 54no. residential units over flexible A1/A2/A3/D1 floorspace at ground level (approximately **70sq.m**)” and the current planning application requests “inclusion of 24sqm (GEA) substation at ground level resulting in an **increase** in footprint area of **31sqm.**”

Much was made of the building’s “minimal footprint” in the original planning application and in the planning officer’s report: “This compact ground level form allows the building to touch the ground in a minimal way - and maximises the open space.” [Design & Access Statement] “The double height ground floor is designed to have a minimal footprint”; “The compact building footprint of the tower offers further advantages to the public realm over lower, linear building forms. It opens up views and pedestrian movement around it on the ground floor, maintaining permeability between the park and Brill Place. This is an important consideration given the existing condition of openness and the future aspirations to encourage greater use of the park and movement through it.” [Planning Officer’s report]

Increasing the building footprint undermines one of its fundamental principles of design.

Reduced transparency

The consented scheme uses pillars where possible rather than walls at ground level, increasing views across the park beneath the tower. The application seeks to fill in much of the space that the original application stressed as opened up by this use of pillars, further reducing transparency. Increasing the area of the glass tower at grade in itself reduces views, but the introduction of an electrical substation to the ground floor would block them entirely. Finally, the increase in mezzanine ‘back of house’ (ie solid) floorspace would reduce transparency still further. The picture below shows the approved scheme.



Comments about transparency from the original application:

“3. The base of the tower is lifted to create a sense of transparency at grade level and an attractive frontage for the lobby and public use, in order to activate the facade whilst promoting passive surveillance across the park - and suggest a dialogue of scale with the adjacent houses.” [Design & Access Statement]

“At grade the building is elevated onto a transparent double height plinth with slender columns maintaining visual transparency across the open space.” [DAS]

The planning officer’s report picks up on this:

“In combination with the degree of transparency provided by the fully-glazed, double height ground floor, the tower would allow clear sightlines into the renewed park on approaches from the east and west and should contribute to providing a welcoming entrance to it.”
[Planning Officer’s report]

Loss of private open space

The increased footprint of the tower would at the expense of private open space within the scheme, and would add to the appalling overall loss of private open space resulting from the Central Somers Town CIP (currently 1,395sqm). In the image below, dark green is public open space; light green is private open space. The loss of private open space applied for – 31sqm of the light green area - would mean building arrivals and departures, bins, venting, etc. would have a greater impact on the neighbouring public open space, as there will be little or no space left for these functions within the scheme.



Impact on public open space

The area around the tower on all sides is to be public open space. Immediately to the east and west is an area planned for children’s doorstep or incidental play – a suggestion welcomed in the GLA report. Incidental play areas replace existing playground space and are an important part of the masterplan. Moving the service entrance to the western side would bring park users, and particularly children, into

conflict with deliveries, bin movements and the 86 cyclists who will be parking their bikes in the basement. The refuse presentation area is on public open space, as are the southern basement vents.

Loss of active frontage and passive surveillance

Brill Place/Phoenix Road is a key route between Euston and St Pancras stations. A blank façade with substation grilles will have a negative impact on this route. The revised design is less permeable; opportunities for passive surveillance are lost.

Electrical substation

An electrical substation would be a source of noise and vibration in the area (park). The noise assessment does not specify the size of the substation, so permission is being sought without knowing how much noise or vibration would be introduced. The assessment estimates the probable internal noise and vibration levels. It does not assess the impact on the surrounding open space or neighbouring residents.

Much of the ground floor of the tower would be taken up by the substation. The size of commercial/café space on the ground floor would be reduced, leading to legitimate questions about its viability. (It looks as if the residential lobby would be more spacious.)

The Council was always aware that the tower would require an electrical substation. The design and access statement for the original application stated: "The electrical demand for the Brill Place tower is too significant to be covered by the local grid - and so a dedicated substation will be required." Provision should have been made in the original application, rather than gaining planning permission and then applying for the approved scheme to be modified.

In summary, the Forum objects to this material amendment on the following grounds:

- Increase in footprint
- Loss of transparency
- Loss of private open space
- Impact on public open space
- Inactive frontage on Brill Place
- Loss of passive surveillance
- Introduction of noise and vibration into the open space
- Inadequate noise assessment

Slaney Devlin
Somers Town Neighbourhood Forum