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THE VICTORIAN SOCIETY

The champion for Victorian and Edwardian architecture

Consultant
Alan Baxter Ltd
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31 October 2018

Dear Kit,

RE: Eastman Dental Institute, including the buildings of the former Royal Free Hospital; proposals to demolish most of the rear parts of the former Royal Free Hospital and to construct a new Institute of Neurology/Dementia Research Institute for UCL; alterations to the parts facing Gray's Inn Road.

Thank you very much for consulting the Victorian Society about these proposals at the pre-application stage. They have been considered carefully by members of our Southern Buildings Committee and I write now to offer their comments.

The Victorian Society has no objections to the proposed demolition of the buildings to the north, east, and south sides of the principal courtyard of the former Royal Free Hospital. We agree with the judgement set out in the *Assessment of historical and architectural interest* that the most significant part of this complex is the elevation to Gray's Inn Road. Whilst we regret the loss of the ranges to the rear and the principal courtyard we accept that the needs of the proposed Institute of Neurology/Dementia Research Institute are a strong argument for this loss and the harm that will be caused. The elevation to Gray's Inn Road forms an important part of the streetscape and contributes to the character of the conservation area; the committee members agree that it should be retained. They felt that the proposed demolition of the infill blocks between the southern end of this composition and the north wall of the Eastman Dental Hospital building is very positive, as are the broader associated proposals to make the site more permeable.

The committee members support in principle the proposal to reinstate the south pavilion of the former Royal Free frontage to its full height; they had concerns, however, over the currently proposed detailing. The Gray's Inn Road frontage of the Royal Free Hospital is a striking composition, which has been marred both by wartime damage and by subsequent partial rebuilding and alteration. The formality and symmetry of the façade are principal aspects of its design; currently the impression from the street is that the building is simply incomplete. If any kind of completion is to be attempted we think it important that the clearly existing architectural intentions are fulfilled. We therefore urge you to undertake a full scholarly restoration of this part of the façade.

Finally, the committee members objected to the proposed additional storey to the Gray's Inn Road frontage. The existing building offers a striking prospect of slightly odd proportions — the central block and the flanking pavilions are high in comparison to the linking blocks between them — and to add an

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extra storey would be to normalize this prospect. The existing building is clearly intended to be read as three independent pavilions linked by subservient ranges. To increase the height of these linking ranges would also obscure the clear articulation of the massing, presenting the passerby with a building that will read more as a single block. We think that an important aspect of the special character of the building would be lost by this normalization of its elevations and its massing, and urge you to reconsider this part of the proposals.

We would be very grateful to be informed of any changes you make to the proposals.

Yours sincerely

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of the Conservation Adviser.

Conservation Adviser