

Proposed new university campus at 36-38 Fitzroy Square

L B Camden planning application reference 2019/3961/P

Dear Sir/Madam,

A planning application has been submitted, nominally by New College of Humanities (in reality American Northeastern University) to convert 36-38 Fitzroy Square into a university campus. This would have a considerable impact upon our local neighbourhood, and myself as well as many other local residents wish to oppose this.

In summary, our arguments are:

1. Although nominally a planning application by New College of Humanities (NCH), it is really by **Northeastern University** - a large private US institution with some 26,000 students, and global expansion ambitions - who are planning to acquire NCH.
2. In their publicity material, Northeastern refer to creating a new "**campus**". This is not appropriate for a quiet largely residential square.
3. NCH currently has approximately 200 students. They would immediately be joined by 600 Northeastern students. The proposed new facility at 36-38 Fitzroy Square would cater for **1,200 students**.
4. This is a very substantial operation. Northeastern/NCH have downplayed its scale. There was no mention of this scale of operation when a short perfunctory public consultation took place on 23 July - just **11 days** before the application was submitted, and with letters only sent to selected residents.
5. 36-38 Fitzroy Square has for many years been used as offices, employing about 200 people. Office use is benign, generally only operating during normal working hours on weekdays. Northeastern/NCH say they would operate every day of the week, up to 10pm on weekdays: a considerable increase in intensity.
6. Camden Council has a well established policy (Local Plan policy E2) to resist the loss of office space. This should be applied rigorously here. Arup only moved out fairly recently and Northeastern/NCH have made no convincing case that the space could not be reused for offices.
7. Northeastern's/NCH's representative - a Camden planning officer who has become a planning consultant - is saying that they are applying for change of use to "education and/or office", and so there is no loss of office space. This is disingenuous: the fact is that, by their own admission, the space would be used primarily for education purposes for at least 20 years - in effect, a permanent use.
8. They envisage there would be fewer than half the number of jobs the building has supported in the past.
9. It is being suggested that Fitzroy Square is part of the Kings Cross "Knowledge Quarter". This too is disingenuous: the Knowledge Quarter is not precisely defined, but is in any event focused on a location some 500m away, and Fitzroy Square is a residential environment.

10. The Fitzrovia Area Action Plan seeks to guide education uses to the area east of Tottenham Court Road and to the Howland Street Character Area; Fitzroy Square falls within neither.
11. Much of the Square is residential, and residential use is encouraged by Camden Council. 36-38 Fitzroy Square adjoins one residential property and is very close to others. It has windows that look directly in the property of neighbouring homes.
12. Students sometimes have unsociable habits, and when they congregate, there can be noise, boisterous behaviour, litter, inconsiderately parked bicycles, etc that would change the character of the Square in a very unwelcome direction.
13. It is claimed that NCH currently have 5-10 deliveries a day, and this would not be expected to increase. However, this is not credible, given the six-fold increase in activity proposed, and the fact that a "campus" is likely to develop other facilities (e.g. cafe, bar) over time.
14. The pedestrianisation of Fitzroy Square involved a great deal of work and expense, and it is maintained by a partnership between the Council and residents (with unemployed/homeless people employed); more deliveries/disabled access to this campus, together with large scale student activity, would reverse all that has been achieved.
15. This benefits office occupiers as well as residents. If the Square was to be taken over by this campus, they too would suffer.
16. Fitzroy Square is part of a Conservation Area, and planning policy seeks strongly to preserve or enhance the special qualities of such Areas. Their character depends upon how they are **used** as well as the built fabric.
17. In particular, Council policy would require nearly 900 sqm of outdoor space to support a university facility of this size, and none is proposed. Northeastern/NCH have audaciously suggested they could **use the garden** within the Square, but this is private property.
18. Council policy would also require up to 130 cycle parking spaces, whereas only 42 are proposed. Surplus bicycles would be left in and around the Square.
19. 36-38 Fitzroy Square is a **Grade 1 Listed building**, designed by Robert Adam. Grade 1 Listed buildings are very rare and very special. Although the interior of this building was created through post-War reconstruction, and the applicants are not proposing any changes to the facade, the proposed high-intensity use is more likely than office use to lead to pressure for external changes in the future.
20. It is claimed the proposed development would be a "community facility", and so should be looked upon favourably by the Council. A private university campus, to which no public access is proposed, is not a community facility.
21. The campus would be a **global outpost** for US students, and it would do nothing to widen access to education for Camden people.
22. Northeastern/NCH are offering **no public benefits**. When NCH opened in Bedford Square, they made much of planning to offer scholarships to local young people, but there is now no mention of anything like that.

I trust that this planning application will be denied unless serious changes are made by the applicant.

Yours sincerely,

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