



To whom it may concern

Pre-Application proposal for Argyle Square – Ref: 2020/3881/P & 2020/3880/P

The London & Middlesex Archaeological Society [LAMAS] promotes London archaeology, local history, and historic buildings. The LAMAS Historic Buildings & Conservation Committee reviews applications for listed building consent and seek to ensure a sustainable future for vital aspects of London's built heritage. During a recent (virtual) meeting, the Committee discussed the above planning application and made the following observations:

This proposal concerns principally the side of Argyle Square that fronts the south side of the Euston road, under the name of Belgrove House, currently occupied by a storage firm and a branch of McDonalds, essentially an inoffensive early 20th century block. It is not clear whether the proposed extremely substantial new construction would also involve the demolition of the ornate Victorian block adjoining it, a building currently defaced with inappropriate paint-work but well worth cleaning and restoring.

This side of Euston Road faces directly two of London's most iconic buildings, both listed Grade I – Kings Cross and St Pancras Stations. There are a number of other distinctive Grade II listed buildings in the immediate area and to all this Belgrove house and its neighbour provide a suitable setting of the right scale. Yet according to the plan (which has already been rejected by local residents, conservation groups, local and London newspapers and by the Victorian Society), this south side of the main road would be swept away to create an extremely high and bulky 'landmark building' in an aggressive modern style that is neither interesting nor original.

We would point out that the only other similarly obtrusive, over-sized and inappropriate modern construction in this part of the Euston road is the ex-Town Hall annexe, a 1970s block which did not even fulfil adequately the function for which it was supposedly designed (which is why the Council sold it) and which is now universally regarded as having been A Mistake. Its presence should on no account be regarded as a precedent for imposing a further piece of architectural misjudgement in this sensitive and celebrated environment. As the chairman of the Bloomsbury CAAC says, the proposed building 'fails every test that should be applied to any development in a conservation area.'

It would also appear that the proposed construction is not destined for any use that might conceivably justify its invasion of this site. The spuriously moral rationale for its presence offered by the developers is that it will be used for 'life science research' as if there was not already the huge modern medical research facility suitably sited away from the listed frontages of stations, up the Midland Road. It is also claimed that it will be used for 'storing vaccines' – which we take to be a specious Covid-fear reference: Why should anything be

built in such a prominent place just for storage? There are also the usual sweeteners about including a small number of 'socially rented homes nearby' [whatever that exactly means], a shop, and an 'auditorium for public use'.

We very much hope that this proposal will be rapidly dismissed.

Vicki Fox (Hon. Secretary)

LAMAS – Historic Buildings & Conservation Committee

12 September 2020