

Ms Lisa Webb
Gerald Eve
72 Welbeck Street
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Our ref: PA01100765
Your ref:

9 March 2020

Direct Dial: 020 7973 3774

Dear Ms Webb

Pre-application Advice

BELGROVE HOUSE BELGROVE ST, LONDON WC1H 8AA

Thank you for presenting your emerging proposals for the redevelopment of Belgrove House. In summary, we have no objections in principle to the redevelopment of the building. However, the proposed increase in scale will cause some (less than substantial) harm to the significance of the surrounding conservation area, and we therefore urge you to mitigate this harm as far as possible and to work with LB Camden to ensure that the public benefits of the scheme outweigh the harm in accordance with paragraph 196 of the NPPF.

Significance

King's Cross/St. Pancras Conservation Area is dominated by the monumental Victorian railway stations, but it also includes a number of sub-areas of smaller scale, finer grained buildings. The part of the CA along the south side of Euston Road where the development site is located is mostly characterised by larger footprint buildings from the 20th century that replaced Victorian residential terraces and commercial buildings that still survive further to the east. The buildings along Euston Road either side of Belgrove House vary in their form and character, and include the Grade II listed early 20th century classical Camden Town Hall and its much larger Brutalist 1974 Annex (with a recent roof extension) to the west, and group of much altered Victorian terraces to the east.

Belgrove House itself is a low 1930s brick building with a flat roof and large floor plate located directly across from the Grade I listed King's Cross Station and adjacent to the Grade I listed St. Pancras Chambers. The building was

originally designed as a bus depot, but has been used as a storage facility for several years. It is a three storey utilitarian building in brick with stone window surrounds in its principal facade to Euston Road. It is a robust building with some decorative embellishment fronting Euston Road, but overall it is architecturally uninspiring. Its contribution to the character and appearance of this part of the conservation area is primarily in its scale, which reflects that of the adjacent early Victorian terraces which it presumably replaced. The building presents a simple brick elevation to the south, which fronts the much quieter and domestically scaled Argyle Square (within Bloomsbury Conservation Area).

The proposals and their impact

The proposals are to demolish the existing Belgrove House and replace it with a new building of nine storeys to Euston Road, stepping down to four storeys (with a fifth storey set back) to Argyle Square. The building is expressed in brick with large areas of glazing, and a green roof terrace on the fourth floor. The building is designed as the headquarters for a pharmaceutical firm and will include research labs that will contribute to the emerging 'Knowledge Quarter' that is developing in this part of London. The architects are AHMM.

The principal impact of the proposed building will be on the character and appearance of this part of King's Cross/St. Pancras Conservation Area.

Relevant policy framework

Section 16 and 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 makes it a statutory duty for Local Planning Authorities to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the listed building or its setting. Government guidance on how to carry out this duty is found in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). At the heart of the framework is a presumption in favour of 'sustainable development' where protecting and enhancing the built and historic environment forms part of one of the three overarching interdependent objectives (economic, social and environmental). Section 16 of the NPPF sets out how the historic environment should be conserved and enhanced, and makes it clear at paragraph 190 that local authorities, when considering proposals that affect a heritage asset, should seek to avoid or minimise any conflict between the conservation of the heritage asset and any aspect of the proposal.

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Paragraph 193 states that when considering the impact of a proposed development on a heritage asset (which includes its setting), local planning

authorities should give 'great weight' to preserving the asset's significance. Any harm or loss should require clear and convincing justification and substantial harm or total loss should be exceptional. In the case of Grade II* or Grade I listed or registered assets or World Heritage Sites, substantial harm or loss should be wholly exceptional (paragraph 194).

Where harm is caused to a heritage asset, the NPPF requires decision makers to determine whether the harm is substantial, or less than substantial. If the harm is deemed to be less than substantial, paragraph 196 of the NPPF requires that harm to be weighed against the public benefits of the proposals.

Historic England position

We have no objection in principle to the redevelopment of the existing Belgrove House building, which for the reasons set out above makes a neutral contribution to the character and appearance of this part of the conservation area. We recognise the potential for a range of public benefits (including improvements to the townscape through the removal of the London Underground entrance on the pavement in front of the building) resulting from the proposals. We note, however, that the proposed new building will result in an appreciable increase in scale along this generally low rise stretch of Euston Road, erasing a legible element of its historic scale and therefore causing some (less than substantial) harm to the significance of the conservation area. In our view, this harm is low. We therefore urge you to work with LB Camden to ensure that the proposals deliver a range of public benefits that would decisively outweigh this harm as required by paragraph 196 of the NPPF.

Next Steps

This concludes Historic England's 'one free cycle' of pre-application advice. If you wish to pursue further advice from us on a cost recovery basis, please let me know and I will provide you with a cost estimate. I hope you find this advice useful, but do not hesitate to contact me should you have any further queries in the meantime.

Yours sincerely

Michael Dunn
Principal Inspector of Historic Buildings and Areas

BELGROVE HOUSE
BELGROVE ST, LONDON WC1H 8AA
Pre-application Advice

Information Provided
24 February presentation



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