

Comments from Bloomsbury CAAC on application 2020/3583/P

247 Tottenham Court Road, 3 Bayley Street and 1-4 Morwell Street.

The Committee made a site visit on 7 July.

This application sits in an unfortunate hole between conservation areas.

We object to it strongly.

We could envisage an acceptable replacement for 247 Tottenham Court Road, but this application becomes highly objectionable in the way that it demolishes and replaces the existing low buildings in Morwell Street, overrides the existing set-back at the corner of Morwell and Bayley Streets and makes no concession in its design to the view down Bayley Street from Bedford Square.

It is not much taller than the existing 247 TCR, but by extending full height almost to the Morwell Street building line **it becomes visible over the top of the Grade 1 houses on the West side of Bedford Square** as viewed from the NE corner of Bedford Square (see view 7 of Townscape, Visual Impact & Heritage Statement - and in this view, as in view 6, the proposed building is not even shown in its proposed green cladding!).

Please note this northern part of 247 TCR/3 Bayley Street is in an exactly equivalent position in relation to Bedford Square as the British Museum's new exhibition and conservation building on the east side. English Heritage gave much attention to the views of this BM building from Bedford Square (though at the same time ignoring the views of it from other directions, including from Malet Street!).

Camden officer – **please insist** that Historic England fulfil their responsibilities to Bedford Square, the only 18th century London square to survive complete, and comment on this aspect of the current application.

Morwell Street at present is a pleasant and characterful street especially towards at its northern end. There may be anti-social behaviour there, but there are simpler ways of dealing with this than a massive overdevelopment.

It is clear that an increase in floor area is the driver behind this application and that this is achieved by sweeping away the smaller buildings in Morwell Street.

Numbers 2-3 Morwell Street are well preserved examples of the sort of modest commercial development typical of Fitzrovia in the later 19th century and should be included in the Local List.

The Bedford Hotel, on the opposite side of Bayley Street, is a very well preserved mid-19th century hotel, altered externally only on the ground floor, and ought to be listed, at very least included on the Local List. And it and the northern part of Morwell Street should be included in the CA.

We note that the application is biased in its presentation of the existing buildings. There is no photo of 2-3 Morwell Street and the present 247 TCR is described as of 'exposed concrete cladding with infill of aggregate panels' when in fact it has extensive areas of Portland stone, especially the elevation of 3 Bayley Street facing towards Bedford Square.

The dismissal of the existing buildings as 'piecemeal', as in the accompanying letter, seems to assume that London should consist of large monolithic structures of boringly uniform design and not a mixture of smaller plots with buildings of different heights and periods. People who live in London, as opposed to investors abroad looking at images on small computer screens, have no wish for monolithic uniformity.

The design of the replacement building, while of some interest in its detailing, like so much new architecture in its bland repetition gives the impression it was designed by a computer. The repeating panels would no doubt be very economical to produce.

Since the impact of the coronavirus has removed the need for new office developments of this sort, we recommend that Camden in the first place ask the applicants to withdraw their application. If they do not, Camden must refuse it.

Hero Granger-Taylor on behalf of Bloomsbury CAAC, bcaac@hughcullum.com, 21 September 2020.