



247 TOTTENHAM COURT ROAD

WITH 3 BAYLEY STREET; 1, 2-3 AND 4 MORWELL STREET, LONDON W1T 7HH

PROPOSAL: Demolition of 247 Tottenham Court Road, 3 Bayley Street, 1 Morwell Street, 2-3 Morwell Street and 4 Morwell Street and the erection of a mixed use office led development comprising ground plus five storey building for office (Class B1) use, flexible uses at ground and basement (Class A1/A2/A3/B1/D1/D2), residential (Class C3) use, basement excavation, provision of roof terraces, roof level plant equipment and enclosures, cycle parking, public realm and other associated works.

Application for planning permission: 2020/3583/P

20 September 2020

The Bloomsbury Association objects to this application and wishes to make the following comments.

1 Development brief

Addressing the climate and biodiversity emergency

- The proposal fails to meet the ambitions of Local Plan Policy CC1e. The proposal's architects, Stiff + Trevillion, are signatories to *Architects Declare*, a network of architectural practices committed to addressing the climate and biodiversity emergency. The question was raised during pre-application meetings of how the low carbon ambition for this project relates to *Architects Declare's* agenda to "*Upgrade existing buildings for extended use as a more carbon efficient alternative to demolition and new build whenever there is a viable choice*". The same question is also relevant to Policy CC1e and has not been convincingly answered in the Sustainability: Whole Life Carbon Assessment submitted in support of the application.
- Fundamentally, we disagree with the base assumption for the refurbishment scenarios that "*the level of investment in M&E systems are commensurate with the commercial gains achieved through a refurbishment. This would typically include gas boilers etc, and likely to be the typical market response given the non-ideal building form that lacks adaptability and flexibility.*" It seems the wrong order of priorities to place short-term commercial gain and market response before climate issues. This is the cause of the problem we now face. In particular, to assume the only option is the continued use of fossil fuels for the coming 60 years seems an unsound rationale. Comparisons might be drawn with the adjoining buildings in Bedford Square, now over 240 years old as testaments to a non-ideal building form that has demonstrated considerable adaptability and flexibility over its extended life-span.
- As part of the design process, we understand options were appraised for the existing buildings including refurbishment and extension with new services and refurbishment with new facades. These were compared to new build and refurbishment was dismissed. An overview of this analysis has been included in the D&AS submitted with the planning application in justification for the approach taken. However none of the refurbishment scenarios considered have been included in the design evolution described in Section 4 of the D&AS, only massing studies for redevelopment of the larger, consolidated site. This is insufficient basis to discount refurbishment as a viable choice.
- In this context, it is ironic that The Met Building, a building of the same age and characteristics on the opposite side of Tottenham Court Road, was successfully retained and refurbished by

Great Portland Estates (since sold) as was the adjacent 227-233 Tottenham Court Road for the City of London Corporation. Both are experienced developers and the climate agenda was not as pressing then as it is now.

Flexibility of the proposed commercial space

- Six months ago, the West End commercial market was looking for nothing but large footprint headquarters office space to accommodate another Google or Facebook. Post-Covid that has all changed and developers are looking for other uses for such buildings, which are suddenly unviable.
- Fundamental changes are anticipated to the economy of city centers post COVID-19. Market changes are, as yet, unknown but the proposal reflects what might have been a conservative development brief appropriate for the West End 12 months ago. Things have changed dramatically since and we are sceptical of the future for large floorplate commercial office space in this location. Flexibility of use needs to be demonstrated beyond flexibility for subdivision of the 9,000 sq ft floorplate into two office tenancies. That office and residential floors are at the same level is encouraging but the D&AS should go further in demonstrating how residential and workspace can be better integrated and how the building can be adapted to different uses over its anticipated 60-year life span.
- We are told that existing uses are 'protected' by planning policy and their replacement has set the brief. That may be a risk-averse planning strategy and, while a mix of uses is encouraged, is the existing mix the best long-term development solution or could it be improved upon?
- It is acknowledged that, elsewhere in London, refurbishment and extension for a non-office use, probably residential, would be more attractive and add more value. Why has this not been considered here?
- From 1 September 2020, Use Classes A1, A2, A3 and B1 along with parts of Use Classes D1 and D2 are to be treated as Class E. The impact of this change on the proposed uses is not considered by the developer. This would effectively amalgamate all the proposed uses for the site, apart from residential, into a single use class. The effect is that it would be possible to change the use of the whole or part of the building from office to research and development, to retail, to financial or professional services, to sport, to recreation, to healthcare or to nursery without the need for planning permission, subject to the specifics of the change. With this in mind, we suggest the planning objectives sought through the mix of uses, such as active street frontages, may need to be secured by other means, either through condition or obligation.
- Clarification should be sought from the developer whether the proposal for flexible uses including D1 and D2 should now be interpreted as Use Classes F1 and F2 and, again, this may need to be secured either by condition or obligation.

Existing and proposed floorspace, by use and residential sector

- It is understood that 50% of the considerable commercial uplift is allocated to residential use in response to Local Plan policy H2. Added to the existing six residential units, this gives space equivalent to eight larger units of various sizes plus a cash contribution. This is a welcome addition to the residential enclave in this part of Bloomsbury. No affordable housing is proposed as the total is below the minimum number at which affordable housing policies apply.
- Clarification should be sought from the developer on whether this is to be accommodation for sale or for rental and on whether the residential component is stand-alone with potential for future asset sale or integrated with the larger development. If the latter, the future flexibility for office space to be converted to residential use (and vice versa) should be demonstrated along with the opportunity for environmental and energy efficiency through shared services.
- The developer has been urged to consider a joint venture with the local authority to deliver new social housing on site. Camden has recently done this successfully elsewhere.

2 Design

Other possibilities for the location on site of the residential use

- The proposed location of the residential use is at the southern end of the site with single aspect flats facing either Tottenham Court Road or Morwell Street. This seems to be driven by the location of the office entrance on Bayley Street. A different set of priorities would suggest that

Bayley Street would be a better residential frontage as flats could then be dual aspect.

- Bayley Street would also be a better location in terms of residential amenity.

Bulk and massing

- The bulk and scale is more suited to the scale of Tottenham Court Road. It is not appropriate to the smaller scale of Morwell Street where there needs to be a more sensitive architectural response. The comparative elevational profiles shown in Section 5.04 of the D&AS are misleading as they only show the profile of One Bedford Avenue facing Tottenham Court Road.
- The perceived height of the building on Morwell Street has been reduced by set-backs to ground + three floors. This is an improvement from what was shown in the 'consultation pack' but still appears too tall and out of scale with the street scene. This is clearly evident in the street sections through Morwell Street comparing existing and proposed massing in Section 5.05 of the D&AS. This is damaging to the character of this part of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area and, in particular, to the setting of the Grade I listed buildings opposite. The massing of One Bedford Avenue should not be regarded as setting a precedent for what is appropriate for the street.
- Impact on sunlight and daylight to neighbours has been appraised and is included in the submission. It is noted that there is an impact on the daylight and sunlight to residential uses on Morwell Street. No consideration is given to the impact on daylight to the studio spaces of the Architectural Association nor sunlight to the 'pocket park' proposed on Bayley Street as part of the West End Project.
- The elevational profile of the proposal set in the wider street context of Tottenham Court Road, from Great Russell Street to Store Street, is shown in the D&AS. There is a consistency in the roofline on the eastern side of this part of Tottenham Court Road that we would like to see respected. One Bedford Avenue is higher on the Bedford Avenue frontage in response to the St Giles Hotel but this should not be regarded as setting a precedent for elsewhere.
- Roofscape and the impact on the setting of Bedford Square is recognised as an absolute constraint to the height of the proposed building. The Visual Impact Assessment shows this to be generally respected but the views looking along the north side of Bedford Square from the northern side of Bedford Square are of particular concern (views 5, 6 and 7). These progressively reveal a particularly inelegant change of height of the building as it wraps around the corner from Bayley Street into Morwell Street (D&AS pages 95 and 98) and the limitations of an architectural vocabulary comprising what will probably be pre-cast, terra-cotta cladding units.
- Clarification should be sought from the applicant that parapet edge protection, window cleaning equipment, high-level M&E plant and tenants' plant, including that of retail tenants and noise mitigation screening, is included in the volume modeled.

Street level uses and frontages

- Retail is single aspect to Tottenham Court Road. This is welcomed but results in inefficient, shallow units that, in the current economic climate, may be unmarketable. What are the implications of the introduction of Use Class E?
- It is acknowledged there is a need to bring more activity to Morwell Street. A comparison has been made with another project by Stiff + Trevillion, successfully reinvigorating another unloved back street: Pavilion Road in Chelsea. The team has been asked to be mindful that there are two major landowners here, both with the same long-term ambitions. They are urged to consider the opportunities for working together, and with the AA to try to achieve something similar, to bring life back into the street using 247 Tottenham Court Road as the catalyst. This is likely to be a bigger challenge but hopefully it will take an important place on the agenda as the development progresses.
- The area around Morwell Street is one of London's foremost street markets for Class A drugs, something that Section 5.18 of the D&AS and the Police Design Out Crime Officer, in commenting on the application, fail to acknowledge. There are major problems with drug-related crime, anti-social behaviour and rough sleeping on Morwell Street. The opportunity for designing out drug-related crime and anti-social behaviour was stressed in our pre-application consultation, specifically by introducing active frontages, by avoiding recesses and alcoves at street level and, most importantly introducing more life into the street. Even the shelter of a

projecting pier can be attractive to crack users and those in need of a toilet or rough sleeping pitch for the night - a problem that is already experienced on the frontages to One Bedford Avenue. There is still too much blind, inactive façade and too many recessed doorways in the current proposal and, sadly, the development team appears unaware of these issues which, ultimately, could devalue the building.

- We are sceptical of the proposed café use on the corner of Bayley Street and Morwell Street. This would be ancillary to the office space, is therefore aspirational and could be lost if the office tenant(s) did not want it. There is no certainty it would ever happen. It is suggested that the s106 agreement should include provision for maintaining an active frontage to Morwell Street through uses such as this. Consideration should also be given to outside seating facing the 'pocket park' and enhanced street lighting.
- We are similarly sceptical of the viability of the proposed D1 use at ground and lower ground floors on Morwell Street unless a pre-let can be agreed. A D1 or D2 use does not necessarily mean an active frontage, as is evident at 90 Great Russell Street. Again, this should be secured either through condition or s106 obligation.
- Residential access from Morwell Street is welcomed, as this will bring much needed activity to the street.
- Street level servicing, air inlet/exhaust and substation will detract from the potential for a continuous active frontage on Morwell Street. The latter should be assessed for the impact of noise emissions on neighbouring buildings.

Typical residential floor plan

- Residential accommodation in the current proposal is single aspect with units either facing Tottenham Court Road or Morwell Street.
- The location of the office core and residential escape stair could constrain future residential use of what is currently proposed as office space. Further information should be sought from the applicant on how office could be rearranged as addition residential units.
- Some articulation to the facades is achieved with balconies to Morwell Street. We suggest winter gardens would be more appropriate facing Tottenham Court Road.

Elevational treatment

- The design appears a dreary, uninspiring, and monolithic box, extruded one storey higher than it should be, and that is likely to destroy the scale of Morwell Street. We are particularly concerned about the monolithic appearance of the building as seen from the corner of Percy Street. Tottenham Court Road may be characterized by big footprint buildings but their facades are finely articulated and modeled. This is not. Greater articulation would be desirable to give more of a vertical than horizontal expression to the facade to Tottenham Court Road and even more so on Morwell Street. We are not comfortable with a single expression and suggest that elements should be expressed differently in a way that goes beyond just adding balconies - perhaps different materials or different colours.
- The elevational composition to Tottenham Court Road and Bayley Street needs a 'top'. It has a classical 'base' and 'middle' but lacks any expression of its skyline profile. It just stops in a manner that is politely bad-mannered - as many other buildings on Tottenham Court Road - when there is the opportunity to be more adventurous.
- The terra-cotta cladding material is a welcome addition to the coarse-grained eclecticism of Tottenham Court Road. The design reference to the early 20c Holland House by Hendrik Petrus Berlage on Bury Street in the City, with its green-grey glazed terracotta brick facade is interesting. There are obvious parallels to 4 Percy Street and 40 Beak Street and we would like to see this approach developed further.
- The imagery suggested a consistent green/grey elevation to Tottenham Court Road when its dull streetscape perhaps needs livening up with a splash of colour, in the same way that red brick and faience livens up the elevation to the block north of Bayley Street. This needs more work.
- Brick is proposed for Morwell Street, referential to the rear of the buildings on Bedford Square. Again, we would like to see this developed further through condition.

Open space

- We welcome the interest shown in engaging with the West End Project team on the design of the proposed 'pocket park on Bayley Street and to making a contribution towards its improvement. It has been suggested this should also include maintenance and ongoing security management of these open spaces.
- While this is excluded from the current proposal, it has also been suggested that the project team talk with Bedford Estates with a view to deferring the West End Project plans and applying the s106 public open space contribution towards creating and maintaining enhanced parks at both ends of Morwell Street - real trees planted in the ground rather than potted plants - in both locations in perpetuity on completion of the project. We would like to see this suggestion developed further through obligation.
- It is understood the project is looking to remove the TfL cycle docking stand on Bayley Street. Comments on the application made by TfL suggest moving it to what is now known as Windmill Square, outside the Met Building on Tottenham Court Road. This does not seem to be in the public interest as Cabinet agreed that space would remain as public open space - another 'pocket park' - as part of the West End Project. It seems wrong to further clutter up a space that already has a tacky retail shed, four telephone kiosks and soon to come advertising totems from BT and Camden, leaving little space left for the public to use. Equally, it seems wrong to clutter up public space only to avoid cluttering up the entrance to a private commercial building. There should be a pavement build-out on Stephen Street, Morwell Street or Percy Street and the docking station should be relocated there. It should capture road space, not public open space.
- The artwork incorporated on the facade to One Bedford Avenue was a disaster in the way it was commissioned and caution is urged if Camden suggest something similar be incorporated on 247. Prior consultation with those affected is essential. There would be a preference for any civic benevolence to be concentrated on making the proposed 'pocket parks' work well for the West End Project.

Noise assessment

- We do not accept the Noise Assessment submitted in support of the application. It is based, in part, on historical surveys prepared for 112 and 112A Great Russell Street that have been found to be flawed and were challenged at the time by the Bloomsbury Association. These and others quoted, may be representative of Tottenham Court Road but are not representative of the quieter noise climate on Morwell Street.
- The Noise Assessment also fails to identify and consider the aural impact on adjacent residential, educational and hotel buildings, on the character of the Conservation Area and the impact of servicing, air inlet/exhaust and substation at street level.

Substructure

- We are uncomfortable with the proposal for a deeper basement and note the points made by Historic England.
- One Bedford Avenue was understood to have partly utilised the existing substructure together with new pad foundations, except on the perimeter retaining wall where sheet piling was used. TfL are thought to have precluded piled foundations because of the proximity to Northern Line running tunnels. There was also a risk of unexploded WW2 ordinance.
- Piles would be noisy to install and would be disruptive next to existing residential, hotel and educational uses. There should be a condition requiring that any piles should be bored rather than driven.

Servicing management

- It is understood there would be off-street, shared servicing provision for commercial and retail units with a goods lift connecting to waste storage at basement level.
- Residential and retail waste storage is contained within the building at street level on Morwell Street. Office refuse is at basement level 1 but only retail storage is shown on the submitted plan.
- All storage/holding areas appear too small to be usable. Evidence of the adequacy of provision should be sought from the applicant as what is shown on the drawings does not seem to

accord with the requirements assessed in Section 6.2.6 of the Delivery & Servicing Plan submitted in support of the application. The adequacy/flexibility of refuse storage areas for other uses in Use Class E should also be assessed.

- Morwell Street is narrow and waste from the Architectural Association is permanently stored on-street. This is not shown on the swept path analysis included on drawing M000431-2-1-TR-002 revision C in Section 4 of the Delivery & Servicing Plan. Limitations on storing waste containers associated with the proposed development on the public highway should be limited by condition.

3 Implementation

Procurement

- We understand that the development programme is based on vacant possession mid 2021 with demolition and enabling works 9 months and construction a further 2 year period. A two stage D&B contract with separate demolition contract is proposed.
- Given market uncertainty, we are concerned that construction may not proceed following demolition. We would then be left with a very large empty site for an unknown period, which could have an effect on the retail economy of Tottenham Court Road, as was seen during other large scale construction works such as Crossrail. We therefore suggest that evidence of a signed building contract for the construction of the (whole) development should be provided before demolition of the buildings takes place and this should be secure through condition or obligation.
- Once approved, design quality is easily lost through value engineering and minor material amendments, particularly with D&B. To ensure design quality is safeguarded, elevational details should be sought prior to construction of the building (not the relevant part) and the present architect should be novated to the D&B contractor with this confirmed through the s106 legal agreement.

Approach to demolition and construction management

- We do not accept the draft Construction Management Plan that has been submitted with the application. We note the requirement for a neighbourhood consultation process to have been undertaken prior to the submission of the CMP first draft. This has not happened. There are a number of errors in both the document's formatting and its content that need to be addressed and the document resubmitted.
- Camden does not seem to require a Demolition Management Plan, only a Construction Management Plan. For a project of this size, this is inappropriate. Given the sensitivities of the site and its location, and given that demolition is likely to have the greater impact and is to be a separate contract, we would like to see a draft DMP and a draft CMP submitted as separate documents with the application and we would expect to see these upheld in discharging s106 obligations.
- Access during both demolition and construction is a key issue. Indicative proposals are included in the Draft Construction Management Plan by Momentum Transport Consultancy, dated July 2020. These describe (on page 19) a proposal for access and egress from Tottenham Court Road, which we support.
- We understand that construction/demolition management advice has been received in support of the planning application but not to take advantage of the benefits of any two-stage contract arrangement so it cannot necessarily be relied upon.
- Any proposal for Bedford Square, a sensitive historic environment with several educational institutions and a primary school, being used for site access and egress during the demolition and construction stages will be resisted. Construction traffic should not use the north side of Bedford Square to gain access to/from Gower Street. Likewise Bedford Avenue, which is a predominantly residential street, should not be used to gain access to/from Bloomsbury Street.
- The construction of One Bedford Avenue was achieved with site access and egress entirely to/from Tottenham Court Road, via Morwell Street, which we would like to see repeated again. This is likely to be resisted by TfL and Camden's West End Project team but, given the period of construction and other sensitivities, is the only reasonable solution. An alternative might be access and egress from Tottenham Court Road via Bayley Street alone.

- Whatever access route is adopted, it is likely to impact on the yet to be realised 'pocket parks' proposed as part of the West End Project for the closed junctions of Tottenham Court Road with Bayley Street and Bedford Avenue. Consideration should be given to a construction bond and/or s106 contribution to safeguard their reinstatement.
- Schedules of Condition should be prepared for the Grade I listed buildings on the western side of Bedford Square and on Morwell Street, together with highways and public spaces affected in advance of any demolition or construction starting.
- The commentary on the cumulative impact of other construction projects in the area given in Section 5.1 of the Transport Assessment is out of date. Most of the development projects referred to are complete and other significant development projects, such as Crossrail, HS2 and the West End Project are omitted. Closer to the site, we are aware of 9 other construction sites either live or in the pipeline within the block bounded by Tottenham Court Road, Store Street, Gower Street / Bloomsbury Street and Great Russell Street. Similarly Sections 9 and 10 of the draft CMP, dealing with cumulative impact, fail to understand the significance of cumulative construction impact and, instead, comment on other things. Importantly, they fail to acknowledge the close proximity of a school.
- We endorse the views expressed by another resident during the consultation period that *"There has been way too much construction in and around Tottenham Court Road - the last thing us residents need is another new building going up."*

4 Community Involvement

- We are disappointed that the development team chose to only engage with interested parties at the last minute, at the end of a 9-month design process with planning officers. We feel that this last minute 'community involvement' seemed to be more to serve expediency than to accomplish any higher purpose. We are also disappointed there has not been the opportunity to express views earlier, hence the length of this representation. It would have been helpful if the drawings and images shown pre-application could have been uploaded to the project web site to reflect further on and share with a wider audience.
- We note from Section 2.12 of the Statement of Community Involvement that *"The Applicant is committed to ongoing consultation with the local community and will continue to engage with local stakeholders, businesses, residents and other interested parties following the submission of a planning application"*. To that effect we would like to be involved in further discussion on the DMP and CMP as they are developed.
- We would also like to see proposed conditions and obligations in draft, before they are finalised. Where appropriate, we would also like to see pre-commencement conditions and pre-commencement obligations under s106 to be prior to the commencement of demolition, not prior to the commencement construction.

The Association supports good quality design that will enhance Bloomsbury's streetscape. In principal, we are generally supportive of this development as it has the potential to add vitality to the surrounding streets. However, a number of significant concerns have been expressed about the proposal that prompt us to 'Object' rather than 'Comment' at this stage. Hence we look to the Council to refuse this application in its current form.

We would be grateful if you would let us know of any further modification to the application; the decision, if it is to be determined under delegated powers, or the meeting date if it is to be decided by Committee.

Stephen Heath
On behalf of the Bloomsbury Association

Copies to:

Councillor Adam Harrison, London Borough of Camden
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John Davies, Derwent London
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Anita Pfauntsch, Architectural Association
Bloomsbury Conservation Area Advisory Committee
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