

Gordon Mansions Residents Association

Please reply to: Clive Henderson, Chair, Gordon Mansions Residents Association,
5 Gordon Mansions, Torrington Place, London WC1E 7HE.
email: [REDACTED] mobile: [REDACTED]

Regeneration and Planning,
Development Management,
London Borough of Camden,
Town Hall, Judd Street,
London WC1H 8ND.

17th December 2020

For the attention of Matthew Dempsey, Planning Officer.
By email to: matthew.dempsey@camden.gov.uk

Dear Matthew Dempsey,

Re: University College London (UCL), 1-19 Torrington Place, London WC1E 7HB:
*UCL's proposal: at East vehicle entrance: creation of pedestrian access with reconfiguration of vehicular access and associated works, including **mechanically operated** metal drop-down full-height "curtain barrier"; etc. etc.*

Planning Application ref: 2020/3195/P

I am writing on behalf of Gordon Mansions Residents Association's (GMRA) Committee.

Gordon Mansions' building in relation to the UCL/1-19 Torrington Place building:

Gordon Mansions consists of two blocks of flats (77 in total) that are located in Torrington Place at the junction with Huntley Street. The long established residential community here in Gordon Mansions, which very much reflects the cross-section of the diverse population of Fitzrovia, having as it does a mix of different income, cultural and ethnic groups, including many families with young children, and elderly people.

The western block of Gordon Mansions, Block 1 (flats 1 to 30), **adjoins and is on the party wall with the UCL/1-19 Torrington Place building.**

Due to the coronavirus situation, we have not been able to hold our usual regular committee meetings (Camden will not allow residents/tenants associations to hold meetings in meeting rooms during this period). But, we did hold a one-off zoom meeting on 19th November 2020, at which this planning application was discussed as one of the Agenda items.

I myself declared an interest, because my flat is on the party wall next to the proposal's for UCL's vehicle entrance; and especially for the last few years have suffered from noise, smoking and disruption due to the way UCL uses and manages this East entrance.

Objections:

We wish to strongly object to the proposal, and especially the proposal to install the new full-height drop-down curtain barrier that will be mechanically operated. Because it will be mechanically operated, and will be positioned on the ramp and next to the party wall, this is likely to cause **structure-borne noise**.

The experience is that the existing concrete ramp and the party wall alongside the Gordon Mansions (where this proposed mechanical metal drop-down curtain is going to be located) easily transmit structure-borne noise to the immediate flats (including mine at 1st Floor level):

- (a). During 2016/2017, we experienced long periods of extreme structural-borne noise during the construction works of UCL's conversion of the basement carpark into UCL's Big Data Centre. The structure-borne noise was so bad that it set up strong vibrations that caused the individual flats here to "shake"; a detailed letter of complaint was submitted to Camden's Environmental Health dept. who investigated the matter.

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Re: University College London (UCL), 1-19 Torrington Place, WC1E 7HB:
Planning Application ref: 2020/3195/P - *continued*:

- (b). A few years ago, when UCL scaffolding on the party wall alongside the ramp was taken down, my experience was that the structure-borne noise was such as though someone was in your flat.
- (c). UCL often has deliveries from large lorries that park in the street outside in Torrington Place; goods are then transferred via this East entrance using a small fork-lift truck which has "hard" wheels; the noise of the "hard" wheels on the concrete ramp is transferred as structural-borne noise to the immediate flats, when a "rumbling" noise can be heard each time the small fork-lift truck goes up and down the ramp.

The experience is that the ramp and the party wall (with Gordon Mansions block of flats) at this East vehicle entrance easily transmits **structural-borne noise** to the flats; such structural-borne noise, especially on a regular basis, is particularly detrimental to the residential amenity of the flats here.

Structure-borne noise and air-borne noise:

The difference between **structure-borne noise** and air-borne noise in this case has to be fully appreciated.

- (a). With air-borne noise, you can often shut a window or door to mitigate or cut out the noise, and thus get away from it, at least to some degree.
- (b). With **structure-borne noise**, from our experience of the UCL building next door, you can not get away from it. The structure borne noise is not only through the party wall; it often seems to come out of every wall within the flat – you simply can not get away from it; you cannot go to another room to get away from the noise, because the structural-borne noise within a flat is often all pervasive – that is the nature of structural-borne noise.

UCL's proposed full-height drop-down metal curtain barrier, mechanically operated:

- (a). Existing concerted folding/sliding doors:

The existing concerted folding/sliding doors are opened and closed by hand; usually opened at the start of the day, and closed at the end of the day (usually late evening). Although relatively noisy, it should be emphasized that the noise is air-borne and **not structural-borne**. Thus this air-borne noise usually occurs twice a day.

- (b). Proposed mechanically-operated drop-down metal curtain barrier:

From the drawings, this metal full-height drop-down curtain barrier is going to be located on the concrete ramp and next to the Gordon Mansions party wall.

From our previous experience, this is very likely to cause structure-borne noise to the immediate flats, especially as the curtain will be operated mechanically.

This curtain barrier is going to be operated every time a vehicle enters the East entrance, and presumably each time a vehicle leaves.

Several vehicles a day come and go.

Thus, the disturbance to the immediate flats is going to be much worse compared with the existing situation:

- (1). With the existing situation, we only get air-borne noise twice a day (at the start, and then at the finish of the day).
- (2). With the proposed situation, we will get noise many more times each day and it will be structural-borne noise into the immediate flats – noise each time a vehicle enters or leaves the East entrance.

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Re: University College London (UCL), 1-19 Torrington Place, WC1E 7HB:
Planning Application ref: 2020/3195/P - *continued*:

Consultation:

From our Residents Association's point of view, UCL does not have a good record of consulting with us or the local residential community.

UCL has never held pre-consultation meetings with ourselves regarding their planning proposals at 1-19 Torrington Place, including the large and invasive project for the conversion of the underground car park into their Big Data Centre.

The previous occupiers of 1-19 Torrington Place was Phillips as their headquarters building, who were always good at pre-consultation on any planning application.

Also, the hospital (University College London Hospitals) as always been good at ensuring pre consultation meetings over the years, including about the new Dental Hospital on the other party wall of our Gordon Mansions block.

Again, from the residents point of view, UCL has not been good at generally managing its building contracts, and especially compared with the contractors used by the Hospital.

East vehicle entrance at 1-19 Torrington Place:

Over the years, I have tried to persuade UCL to use their other/West entrance for regular vehicle access in order to avoid the constant disturbance to our flats. The West entrance is further down the street, and away from our blocks of flats. They have never seriously considered this alternative; and in fact it is difficult to find who within UCL to speak to about any such these proposals. During the major building works (Big Data Centre) when I suggested this even for the construction traffic, UCL said the West entrance would not be feasible – and yet, I saw large construction vehicles using the West entrance.

Conclusions:

For the all above, reasons we would particularly ask that this planning application for mechanical drop down curtain barrier at the East Entrance be refused:

- (a). the situation is going to be **worse for the immediate residents compared with the existing situation**:
 - with the existing, the concertina doors are operated twice a day (at the start and finish), and the noise is air-borne.
- (b). **by contrast, the proposal** will mean that the mechanical drop-down curtain will operate **every time a vehicle enters and/or leaves** UCL's East entrance. In turn, the operation of this drop-down curtain will mean **structure-born noise several times a day** to the immediate flats at the party wall.
- (c). Also, from our experience, if there are no staff at the entrance, then drivers park their vehicles on the public forecourt (below our windows) of the East entrance, get out of their vehicles and shout into their mobiles, presumably to attract UCL staff – all immediately below our residential windows.

Our experience is that UCL is poor at managing these situations, and does not appear to give clear instructions as to how people can access their 1-19 Torrington Place building.

In this new proposal, the concern will be:

 - (1). Will drivers have received clear instructions as to how to use the new system ?
 - (2). If more than one driver/vehicle turns up at the same time, does this mean a noisy queue below our windows, especially if there are no UCL staff at the entrance to manage the situation.
- (d). We would also urge that Camden asks UCL to:
 - (1). Have consultation, and proper consultation, with GMRA;
 - (2). Properly consider using the **West** entrance as their main vehicle access to 1-19 Torrington Place; and thus away from the residential.

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Gordon Mansions Residents Association:

17/12/2020:

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Re: University College London (UCL), 1-19 Torrington Place, WC1E 7HB:
Planning Application ref: 2020/3195/P - *continued*:

Yours sincerely,

Clive Henderson,
Chair,
On behalf of Gordon Mansions Residents Association.

Copy: GMRA Committee.
Local Ward Councillors.

Gordon Mansions Residents Association

Please reply to: Clive Henderson, Chair, Gordon Mansions Residents Association,
5 Gordon Mansions, Torrington Place, London WC1E 7HE.

email: [REDACTED] mobile: [REDACTED]

Maya Rhodes,
Environmental Health Officer,
Supporting Communities,
London Borough of Camden,
7th Floor, 5 Pancras Square,
London N1C 4AG.

CONFIDENTIAL

22nd May 2016

By email to: Maya.Rhodes@camden.gov.uk

Dear Maya Rhodes,

**Re: University College London (UCL), at 1-19 Torrington Place, WC1:
Building works: conversion of basement carpark & new a/c building in Rear yard:
Camden's ref: Confidential: 71000074 - UCL**

- Complaints understood to have been lodged by Gordon Mansions

Further to your recent telephone conversation of 19/5/2016 with me, I set out below the information I have concerning the severe vibrations and "shaking" that residents have experienced in their flats, which is thought to relate to the building works next door at UCL's 1-19 Torrington Place (in existing sub-basement carpark and open Rear Yard).

You have asked me to mark my letter "Confidential" and not copy in the contractor or UCL, because it may contain personal information about individual flats.

Layout of Gordon Mansions:

Gordon Mansions consists of 2 blocks of flats, (total of 77 flats) on opposite corners of the junction of Torrington Place and Huntley Street.

They are 8 stories high: basement, ground and 1st to 6th floors.

Block 1 (western block: flats 1 to 30) consists of Stair 1 and Stair 2:

- **Stair 1:** (entrance with Torrington Place): flats 1 to 16.
- **Stair 2:** (entrance in Huntley Street): flats 17 to 30.

Block 2 (eastern block: flats 31 to 75) consists of Stair 3 and Stair 4:

Stair 3: (entrance with Huntley Street): flats 31 to 59; (flat 60 accessed directly from street)

Stair 4: (entrance in Torrington Place): flats 61 to 74; (flat 75 accessed from Chenies Mews).

Block 1 (flats 1 to 30) is the block next to & on the party wall of UCL site at 1-19 Torrington Place. Block 1's other party wall is next to UCLH/hospital's Phase 5 (new Head, Neck & Dental Hospital) site in Huntley Street where demolition of existing buildings is being carried out.

Resident's experience of severe vibrations and "shaking":

It is the residents in Flats 1 to 30 (Block 1: Stair 1 and Stair 2) who experienced this "shaking". After the initial reports of severe "shaking" of individual flats, I have since asked residents (somewhat at random when I would see them on stairs or in street) in about ten different flats. The initial reports are not exaggerated; each resident has described very similar experiences of severe "shaking" and vibrations in their flats. It occurred over several days; it is difficult for residents to put dates retrospectively, but it seems to have occurred during two particular weeks mid/late April 2016. I am not clear if the "shaking" has been continuous or intermittent throughout each day, but one resident told me that there would be a pronounced "thud". In one or two instances, older people were frightened, in one instance wondering if it was some kind of attack on our building.

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Re: University College London (UCL), at 1-19 Torrington Place, WC1 - *continued*:
Building works: conversion of basement carpark & new a/c building in Rear yard:
Camden's ref: Confidential: 71000074 - UCL

Resident's experience of severe vibrations and "shaking" - continued:

about every 15 to 20 minutes which produced the "shaking". One resident (Flat 15, top floor) described it as like an "earthquake" - she had lived in Japan for several months, and said the experience was similar to the earth tremors/earthquakes that she experienced within buildings when living there.

What is surprising is that this experience of "shaking" occurred in flats throughout the Block, not just those on either party wall, but also the flats remote from any party wall, (e.g. no. 16, which is on the "outside" corner of the Torrington Place/Huntley Street junction).

Here is the list of Flats, whose residents I spoke with, all of whom described similar experiences of their flat/building "shaking":

Stair 1:

- Flat 11: 4th Floor - daughter said her mother was frightened and had to be re-assured.
- Flat 12: 4th Floor - remote from party wall, on outside corner of our building; son described shaking (with thuds) occurring about every 15/20 minutes.
- Flat 12A: 5th Floor - in addition to shaking, described doors and windows rattling,
- Flat 15: 6th Floor - shaking similar to her experience of earth tremors/earthquakes when living in Japan for few months.
- Flat 16: 6th Floor - remote from party wall, on outside corner of our building; daughter had to re-assure mother.

Stair 2:

- Flat 21: 2nd Floor - son (Amzad, GMRA Committee member) reported in email dated Friday 22 April 2016 to our Residents Association's Secretary/Sandra Wheen that noise "so loud" that flat was "shaking, this is very concerning, its been since they started the demolition."
And in another email of 22/4/2016: "... experienced the same since UCL started work on Monday" (i.e. Monday 18th April 2016).
- Flat 23: 3rd Floor - reported shaking.
- Flat 29: 6th Floor - son (Mustakin); visited both the UCLH contractor (Erith on Huntley Street site) and UCL's contractor on Torrington Place site to complain about the severe shaking.
- Flat 30: 6th Floor - Sandra Wheen/Secretary, Gordon Mansions Residents Assoc (GMRA): wrote an email dated Friday 22nd April 2016, to a neighbouring resident to find out if they were experiencing the same: "This morning repeated blows coming from UCL or UCLH and the whole of the building seemed to shake at each blow ..."

Although I did not experience "shaking" in my flat (Flat 5, 1st Floor at party wall with 1-19 Torrington Place), I have experienced very intense and intrusive structure-borne noise throughout the flat on certain days/weeks. But, on Friday 22nd April, I experienced a much deeper/drilling type noise throughout the flat, one of the days when others describe the "shaking".

Dates of "shaking":

It would appear that this "shaking" of the building/flats occurred throughout the week of Monday 18th April; I am not sure if it continued into the next week of Monday 25th April.
At the time, residents could not tell which site (UCL/university at 1-19 Torrington Place; or UCLH/hospital in Huntley Street) was causing this shaking.

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Re: University College London (UCL), at 1-19 Torrington Place, WC1 - *continued*:
Building works: conversion of basement carpark & new a/c building in Rear yard:
Camden's ref: Confidential: 71000074 - UCL

I would like to briefly mention some other issues relating to the **UCL, 1-19 Torrington Place site**, but do not have time to go into detail in this letter:

- (1). **Extreme structure-borne noise**, due to removal of surface on concrete in Rear Yard, and concrete Ramp:
although we have to put up with such noisy building work within permitted hours, we only had forewarning in an email:
told it was for 1 week: Monday 9th May;
then told it would include Saturday morning 21/5/2016;
then told into a bit of the second week, Monday 23/5/2016: took place whole of second week, and then included Saturday morning 21/5/2016.
"drip-feeding" when noisy works going to occur is unsatisfactory.
Although allowed to work Saturday mornings, such extreme noisy works should not occur on Saturday mornings.
- (2). **Issue of Traffic Marshalls**:
Although they need to stand at UCL's eastern vehicle entrance (next to our party wall), the Traffic Marshalls continue to stand in corner immediately under our flat windows, thus causing even more disturbance (loud talking; constant ring tonnes of walkie-talkies). Have been woken at 7.30am (i.e. before 8.00am threshold) by such talking, and once by smoking (smell of smoking coming into flat). Despite re-assurances that the Marshalls will stand further away (but in the vehicle entrance), on Friday morning 20th May even worse: 2 or 3 Marshalls standing/leaning on front railings of flats (and thus immediately in front of/under ground floor & basement flat windows) and talking loudly amongst themselves – this contract runs until end of 2017 !
- (3). **Noise from UCL site also affects residents in Block 2 (Flats 31 to 75)**:
Now that the first building has been demolished on the UCLH site in Huntley Street, residents in Block 2 (flats 30 to 75) are receiving noise from the UCL site/Rear Yard, across the now empty site in Huntley Street. When I have walked down Huntley Street, my impression is that the UCL works in the Rear Yard are even noisier than the demolition works at UCLH/Huntley Street site.

Thus, I am suggesting the need of a joint meeting between the contractors of both sites, with Camden's EHO and ourselves GMRA, so that the hours of noisy works can be co-ordinated, so that the relatively quiet periods also coincide.

UCLH's contractor/Erith circulated a monthly Newsletter to residents, setting out the works for the next 4 weeks.
UCL/1-19 Torrington Place provide no such Newsletter. I would ask that this happens so that residents are forewarned well ahead, instead of drip feed via emails.
- (4). Because no planning permission was required for change of use of basement car park to UCL's big data centre at 1-19 Torrington Place, there is no condition to have a Construction Management Plan. Yet the costs of the works, and thus their scale, are probably similar to, if not more than, the cost of the works on the UCLH/Huntley Street site. The UCLH/Huntley Street site has Demolition Management Plan, fully consulted on with residents and Camden.

I also enclose our 2 MAPS (same attachment) showing relationship of flats to the building sites. If you have any queries, do please contact me on **my mobile 07967 856 167**.

Yours sincerely,

Clive Henderson,
Chair, On behalf of Gordon Mansions Residents Association.

Copy: GMRA Committee.

Gordon Mansions Residents Association

Please reply to: Clive Henderson, Chair, Gordon Mansions Residents Association,
5 Gordon Mansions, Torrington Place, London WC1E 7HE.

email: [REDACTED] mobile: [REDACTED]

Provosts Office,
University College London (UCL)

11th October 2017.

Dear Provosts Office,

**Re: University College London (UCL),
building works at 1-19 Torrington Place, WC1:**

I am writing directly to your office, somewhat in despair, at the on-going very unsatisfactory situation for residents, related to your building works at UCL, 1-19 Torrington Place.

On Saturday morning, a metal barrier was erected across your East entrance/site entrance, next to our block of flats. Your contractor's metal barrier not only crosses the boundary line but has been attached to and overlaps the front railings to our building. I was first alerted to this on Saturday morning when I heard structural-borne metallic noises in my front room due this work - **see my attached photograph.**

There has been no liaison nor party wall arrangement on this matter. This also reflects an on-going attitude by this site of disrespect to residents and our building, which has occurred throughout most of this contract (now 20 months).

If a builder in our block of flats were to similarly intrude on your UCL building and attach a barrier to your railings, no doubt UCL would (rightly) object.

In the circumstances, there is strong objection to this barrier being attached to our railings, and I would ask that this is rectified straightaway. The barrier should be independent and return along the boundary line (i.e. away from our building) - in the same that UCLHospital has done with its hoarding on our other party wall, relating to their Huntley Street site next to us.

I am writing to you directly because your contractor's site manager has never met us during these works, and thus has no appreciation of the impact of the works on residents. Also, unfortunately, calls to your project manager's office invariably go to answer-machine, with a slow subsequent response and usually with inadequate outcomes (see also below).

The flats on the party wall, next to your site's East entrance are particularly affected by the works – I myself live in one these flats immediately next to this site entrance.

Building work is inevitably often noisy and disruptive for residents. Thus, in order to ameliorate such interruption to residents' normal life, what matters is the attitude of the building owner, the contractors and their staff on the site. It should be said that, from the residents point of view, the attitude and site culture coming from the UCL site next to us has generally been unacceptable. This is in marked contrast to the well organised and highly-respectful attitude from UCLHospital's large building site next to us on our other party wall. In fact recently, at a meeting with their contractor/Mace, our residents, unusually, went out of their way to praise the friendly attitude of their staff.

Because I live in one of the flats immediately on the party wall, next to your main site entrance/East vehicle entrance, since the start of the contract (about 20 months ago) I have particularly drawn attention to, and complained about, various aspects that are particularly disturbing to us. (In addition, this is the main site entrance with the noise of vehicles reversing/noisy beepers throughout the day via this tight entrance). Despite promises to rectify, these situations still are taking place. They include:

- (1). Smoking is still taking place immediately below my window, 20 months later.
Previously, when I have asked the men not to smoke, they have laughed or argued.
- (2). Groups from the site, and especially the traffic marshalls (and now the site-gate keeper) often chit chat all day below my window
- (3). Vehicles have still been parking (illegally) in the cycle lane below our windows, and unloading. This includes before Camden's 8.00am guideline time, and thus waking me up.
- (4). Noisy works still being carried on outside permitted hours. This includes drilling at the west entrance until about 3pm on a recent Saturday.
- (5). Work is also being carried out on Sundays now; sometimes with muffled structure-borne building noise via my party wall, and/or men banging on the site door (next to our flats) trying to access the site.

From the residents point of view, I have the strong impression that there is no proper oversight or control of the various activities relating to this building site; this is in stark contrast to the UCL Hospital site which is very well controlled and managed, and with a very good site culture and attitude - this makes all the difference to limiting the impact on residents.

I understand that the residents group in Chenies Mews has recently made a written formal complaint to Camden about the behaviour of the building staff using your UCL Welfare Facility in Chenies Mews for your contractors and traffic marshalls.

In addition, I have recently heard of an incident where some building staff from your Facility laughed at one of the residents who was finding it difficult to walk due to illness – this is particularly unacceptable. But, this is similar to my experience of when I previously asked UCL's contractor's/men not to smoke below my window when they just laughed.

As a result, I am intending to write a similar letter of complaint about the UCL/1-19 Torrington Place site about the continuing matters of the last 20 months. In addition, our local Member of Parliament has recently written to our Residents Association asking if there are any local issues affecting us. In the circumstances, I am considering copying him in on the future correspondence relating to our complaints about and the behaviour on this UCL site.

In recent years, UCL students complained to the Camden New Journal about the unsatisfactory control of noisy building works next to them. Thus, we may also consider this option, including making the comparison with the well-controlled UCL Hospital site on other party wall.

Over the last few months, there have been several "last straw" situations relating to your UCL building site next to us (and especially those of us next to the East Entrance). This current situation really is the last "straw that broke the camel's back".

In order to help ameliorate the situation, I would particularly ask that your UCL barrier is removed from our railings straightaway and the situation rectified straightaway.

I would also ask that the various issues listed above (which have not been adequately dealt with for up to 20 months)

Yours sincerely,

Clive Henderson,
Chair, Gordon Mansions Residents Association. Copy: local Ward Councillors.