



London Borough of Camden Design Review Panel

Report of Formal Review Meeting: 247 Tottenham Court Road

Friday 24 April 2020

Video conference

Panel

Catherine Burd (chair)

Michal Cohen

Scott Grady

Robin Nicholson

Peter Studdert

Attendees

Edward Jarvis	London Borough of Camden
Laura Hazelton	London Borough of Camden
Nick Baxter	London Borough of Camden
Alastair Crockett	London Borough of Camden
Angela McIntyre	Frame Projects
Kiki Ageridou	Frame Projects

Apologies / report copied to

Richard Wilson	London Borough of Camden
Bethany Cullen	London Borough of Camden
Kevin Fisher	London Borough of Camden
Deborah Denner	Frame Projects

Confidentiality

This is a pre-application review, and therefore confidential. As a public organisation Camden Council is subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOI), and in the case of an FOI request may be obliged to release project information submitted for review.

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1. Project name and site address

- 247 Tottenham Court Road, London, W1T 7HH / W1T 7QZ
- 3 Bayley Street, London, WC1B 3HA
- 1, 2 - 3 and 4 Morwell Street, London, WC1B 3AR / W1T 7QT

2. Presenting team

Mike Stiff	Stiff + Trevillion
Dan Campbell	Stiff + Trevillion
Jason Warren	Stiff + Trevillion
David Hutton	CO-RE
Peter Stewart	Peter Stewart Consultancy
Lisa Webb	Gerald Eve LLP
Liam Lawson Jones	Gerald Eve LLP
Ashley Bateson	Hoare Lea
Jason Plant	Avison Young

3. Planning authority briefing

Proposals include demolition of the existing building and redevelopment of the site for mixed uses including: office; residential; retail; and flexible business / non-residential institution floorspace; and public realm enhancements.

The existing building is ground plus six storeys with a basement floor, and contains retail, office, residential, and education uses. It is located on the east side of Tottenham Court Road, with Bayley Street to the north and Morwell Street to the east.

The site is located in the Central London Area, where policy H2 requires development involving additional floorspace of more than 200 sqm to provide 50 per cent of all additional floorspace to be self-contained housing. This is as well as any existing residential floorspace, which must be re-provided. Policy CC1 requires all proposals that involve substantial demolition to demonstrate that it is not possible to retain and improve the existing building.

The Fitzrovia Area Action Plan specifically notes that buildings should be designed to avoid harm to views from Bedford Square and Fitzroy Square. The existing building is not visible from Bedford Square, apart from the north west of the square, here the rear elevation forms a muted background to the listed square.

The Council has maintained the position that the impact on views from Bedford Square should not be worsened as doing so would result in harm to the setting of Bedford Square. During pre-application discussions, the applicant has submitted a number of revisions to the proposals and the latest iteration has reduced the height of the building creating limited views of two lift shafts over the Bedford roofline. The Council seeks the panel's views on the impact of the latest proposal on the setting and significance of Bedford Square, and whether the detailed design is appropriate in this location. The Council also seeks the panel's views on the sustainability proposals put forward and the principle of demolition.



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4. Design Review Panel's views

Summary

The panel finds much to admire in the proposals for this prominent site which sits near the edge of one of the finest examples of a Georgian Square in London. It does however recommend a number of adjustments, and would encourage the design team to finesse proposals to ensure they are of an appropriate scale and quality required in this sensitive location. While the panel welcomes the design team's thorough sustainability analysis to justify the demolition of the existing building, it emphasises that the new building should operate in a light touch way, for instance with natural ventilation where possible. The scale of proposals facing onto Tottenham Court Road is viewed as acceptable. However, the panel consider a step down in scale towards Morwell Street is necessary, to avoid compromising the character of this mews street. The elevation to Tottenham Court Road is well considered, but has scope for refinement. It recommends the design team continue to look at references along Tottenham Court Road, which provide clues to giving more gutsiness and rhythm to the proposals. As part of this process, the panel suggests consideration of how the verticality of the facades could be strengthened, and how the chamfered corners are detailed to enhance views from Bedford Square. A change in materiality could be considered where the building faces onto Morwell Street. The panel is has concerns about the quality of residential accommodation currently proposed and feels the floor plans require a rethink. The design team should ensure that all habitable rooms have adequate access to light and space, and ensure that amenity space enhances residents' wellbeing. Thought should be given to the wide pavement facing onto Bayley Street and if this can include planting and have a social function. These points are expanded below.

Sustainability

- The panel commends the design team's thorough sustainability analysis which has generated a credible argument for demolishing the existing building.
- While demolishing the existing building may be acceptable, the panel insists the building that replaces it should operate with as light a touch possible, e.g. avoiding the need for air conditioning, with scope for natural ventilation and natural lighting.
- When considering how the building can be naturally ventilated the design team must consider the impact this will have on the building façade with the inclusion of openable windows etc. Similarly, it should ensure the façade is designed to minimise solar gain.



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Scale and massing

- As proposed the building height on the Tottenham Court Road elevation wraps around the flank of the building and onto the rear elevation onto Morwell Street.
- While the panel feels the proposed massing sits comfortably on Tottenham Court Road, it suggests that the massing should respond more sensitively to the smaller scale of Morwell Street.
- The panel are less concerned with the height of the lift overruns, which will be partially visible from Bedford Square, than the height of the building where it faces Morwell Street.
- The panel feels the proposed bulk here compromises the quality of the mews street, and is also concerned about the impact on the inhabitants of the properties on the other side of the Morwell Street.
- The panel suggests the massing should reduce along the majority of Morwell Street, possibly to four storeys.
- If adjustments are made to the massing on Morwell Street, this will require further thought about the Bayley Street flank elevation – and its presence in views from the Bedford Square approach.

Architectural articulation

- The panel commends the design team's analysis of the existing architecture along Tottenham Court Road.
- However in comparison to its immediate context the proposed architecture appears quite plain, and the panel feel there could be scope for some of the gutsiness and rhythm found in the nearby buildings to be incorporated.
- The panel suggests extra detail at cornice level would improve the roof profile, which as proposed ends quite abruptly.
- While the design team describes the scheme as having a strong vertical rhythm, the panel suggests that the elevations are read horizontally due to the hard sill line across the elevations. Further consideration should be given to how the elevations are articulated to ensure their vertical rhythm is easily read.
- There could also be more variation between the different facades. For example, the panel notes that the gable end of the existing building has a different architectural expression and materiality, and that distinctive gables are a theme in the local context. Similarly the Morwell Street elevation could have a distinctive character that responds to the architecture of the mews.



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- The panel would like to further understand the impact of the whole life carbon analysis on the proposed architecture.
- The panel suggests that solar shading could be an integral part of the architecture, and help give character to the building's façade.

Materiality

- The panel recommends the materiality could change at the rear of the building, where it faces onto Morwell Street. In the panel's view glazed terracotta is not the right material for this more intimate location.
- The panel also suggests further thought about the materiality and architecture of the residential accommodation to give it a more a domestic appearance.
- The panel is supportive of the dark base to the building with a lighter material above.

General layout

- The panel commends a well resolved ground floor plan and the location of shopfronts facing onto Tottenham Court Road.
- The active office lobby onto Bayley Street, which will activate the edge of the building that addressed Bedford square, is welcomed.
- The ground floor plan shows a drop off area outside the residential lobby. This appears to interrupt the pavement and should be removed.

Residential proposals

- The panel is concerned with the quality of residential accommodation currently proposed, particularly the flats which face onto the heavily trafficked, polluted and noisy Tottenham Court Road.
- While the all the proposed residential accommodation is technically dual aspect, the bedrooms face into a lightwell which is likely to be quite dark. The panel suggests residential layouts should be reconsidered to ensure that homes receive ample daylight.
- The panel recommends that the residential accommodation could take up a greater proportion of the buildings frontage to allow for outward facing bedrooms.
- The panel suggests further consideration should be given to residential amenity space and its value to residents' well being. Alternative balcony locations should be tested to ensure they are habitable and attractive to residents, particularly those at first and second floor facing onto Tottenham Court Road.



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- The panel urges the design team to ensure that residential balconies are depicted accurately in drawings and images, specifically whether they are inset balconies or winter gardens.
- The panel suggest that the design team explore stacking residential accommodation above the office floor plates, which may allow for better resolved residential layouts.

Public realm

- The panel suggests that the wide pavement at the building edge onto Bayley Street could create an exciting piece of public realm which gives back to the area and responds to the outdoor seating at Gail's café opposite. This location could provide some outdoor space for the proposed café and create a green pocket at the edge of the site.
- Across the site the panel would like to see the inclusion of street trees where possible.

Next Steps

The panel is confident that the detailed design issues it raises can be resolved in conversations with officers.

