

100 Avenue Road, NW3 3HF
Submission of Details: Facade Materials
Heritage Assessment

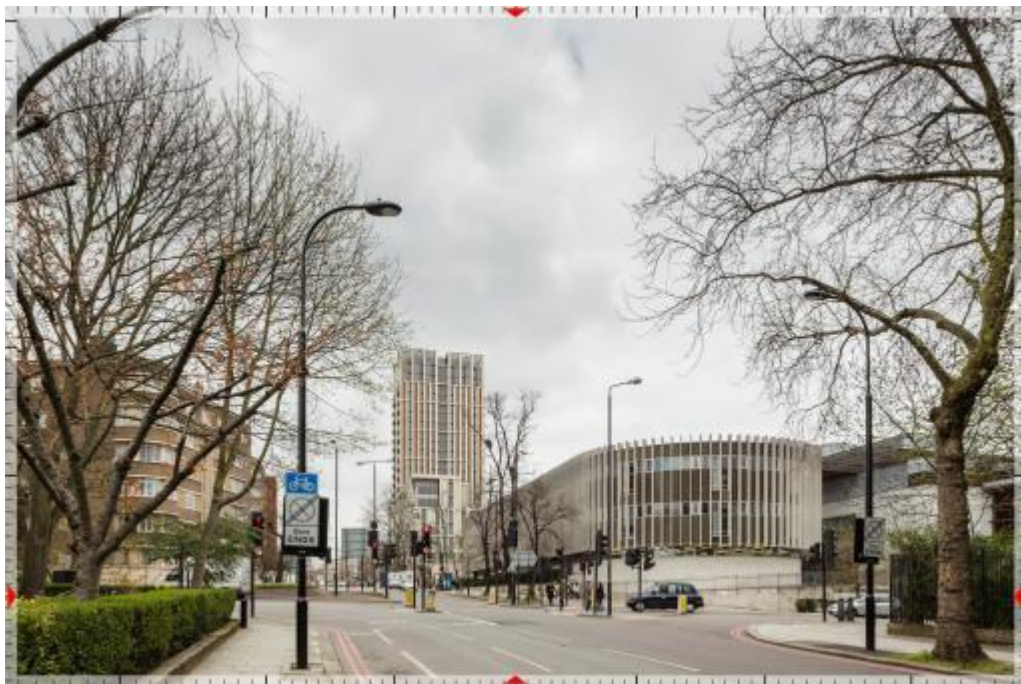
June 2021

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1. Introduction and Context

- 1.1 This report is prepared by Turley Heritage on behalf of Essential Living to consider proposals submitted to London Borough of Camden (LBC) for materials (2021/0022/P) pursuant to the grant of planning permission for development at 100 Avenue Road by the Secretary of State following planning appeal (APP/X5210/W/14/3001616 dated 18th February 2016).
- 1.2 Turley Heritage acted for the client at the planning appeal providing evidence to the Planning Inspector and the Secretary of State on the relative impact and acceptability of the development proposals now being implemented, on the significance of adjacent and nearby heritage assets. In granting planning permission, the Secretary of State supported the Planning Inspector's conclusions¹ regarding the impact of the development scheme on the setting of the grade II listed Swiss Cottage Library building:



Photograph 1: View 13 from the TVIA that supported the appeal proposals

"The illustration in View 13 shows the juxtaposition of the library with the new building. I consider that this demonstrates a very complementary relationship between the two buildings, particularly the horizontal emphasis of the library with the tall tower structure and appropriate spacing between. The panel and frame arrangement of the new building, while not copying the library, is reflective of it and would work well together."

- 1.3 Here, we specifically consider the proposals submitted in relation to planning condition 18 (amended wording agreed as a NMA with LBC in May 2019) to require:

¹ APP/X5210/W/14/3001616, para 279

Development works above ground (other than demolition) shall not take place until details of the following have been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the local planning authority:

- a) Material samples and detailed drawings (scale 1:10) for typical external materials;*
- b) 1:1 mock-up of typical elevation bay, including windows and cladding surrounds for either the north or south elevations of the tower building;*
- c) Detailed drawings (scale 1:10) of the structural grid, in terms of its proportions and thickness of elements and the technical detail of these elements;*
- d) Detailed technical drawings of all types of walls and external features (scale 1:10), showing in detail the interface and joints of all different materials and features;*
- e) Detailed drawings (scale 1:10) including typical sections at 1:10 of external windows and door frames; and*
- f) Material samples of typical balconies and roof terraces.*

1.4 With respect to (a) material samples and detailed drawings for typical external materials, the applicant has submitted proposals for the use of glass reinforced concrete (GRC) (in combination with other materials) for the facades of the new building (2021/0022/P). Full details and background to the selection of this material is fully set out in the document prepared by GRID Architects, Condition 18 GRC Proposals, December 2020.

1.5 In response officers from LBC have commented as follows, regarding the perceived impact of the proposed materials on the heritage significance of the adjacent listed building of the Swiss Cottage Library:

“We still have fundamental concerns with the quality of GRC and its visual appearance.

We are concerned about the use of this material close to the listed library. The section of the lower building facing the Library would be predominantly GRC. Given the reservations around the material quality of GRC, we consider that it would affect the setting of the listed building which has a predominate material of Portland stone. The use of the material (GRC) on the lower building would therefore harm the designated heritage asset. We would encourage you to consider an alternative material for both buildings, but you could consider improving this specific impact to reduce the harm of your proposals.”

1.6 Officers perceive that harm would be caused to the significance of the listed Library building through the proposed façade material being used within its heritage setting.

1.7 We therefore consider the significance and relative contribution of setting to the significance of the grade II listed building and the nature of the proposed materials in this context and in turn the resultant impact. This assessment is made in light of

prevailing legislation² and national policy and guidance³ in respect of the historic environment.

- 1.8 Further context is provided by the evidence submitted at the planning appeal regarding heritage significance of the Library building and the impact of the development proposals, in light of the Planning Inspectors and Secretary of State's reasoning and decision to grant planning permission.

² s.66(1) Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

³ National Planning Policy Framework, February 2019, Chapter 16 Conserving and enhancing the historic environment, paragraphs 189 to 197; National Planning Guidance (revised).

2. Swiss Cottage Library – Significance & Setting

Background

- 2.1 The heritage asset at issue here is the grade II listed Swiss Cottage Library building. The full list entry description for the listed building prepared by Historic England is provided at Appendix 1. As a listed building it is a designated heritage asset for the purposes of national policy and guidance and its significance derives from special architectural or historic interest⁴. The setting of the listed building is the surroundings in which it is experienced, noting that its extent is not fixed and may change and that elements of setting may make positive or negative contributions to significance⁵.
- 2.2 The framework for assessing significance of such a listed building is well-defined⁶.



Photograph 2: Swiss Cottage Library – raised south end with vertical concrete fins, pre-cast concrete aggregate spandrel panels, aluminium strip windows and Portland stone plinth.

⁴ NPPF Annex 2 Glossary

⁵ Ibid

⁶ s.1 Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990; DCMS Principles of Selection for Listed Buildings; Historic England Listing Selection Guides (Culture and Entertainment Selection Guide).

Significance

- 2.3 In context of that framework for assessing significance, with reference to the list entry description and based upon visual assessment the special architectural or historic interest is clearly definable.
- 2.4 The building dates from the mid-1960s, before the general decline in funding for such projects and is noted as both one of Sir Basil Spence's most accomplished civic buildings and one of the most ambitious designs for such a building.



Figure 1: Swiss Cottage Library – internal arrangement as originally completed

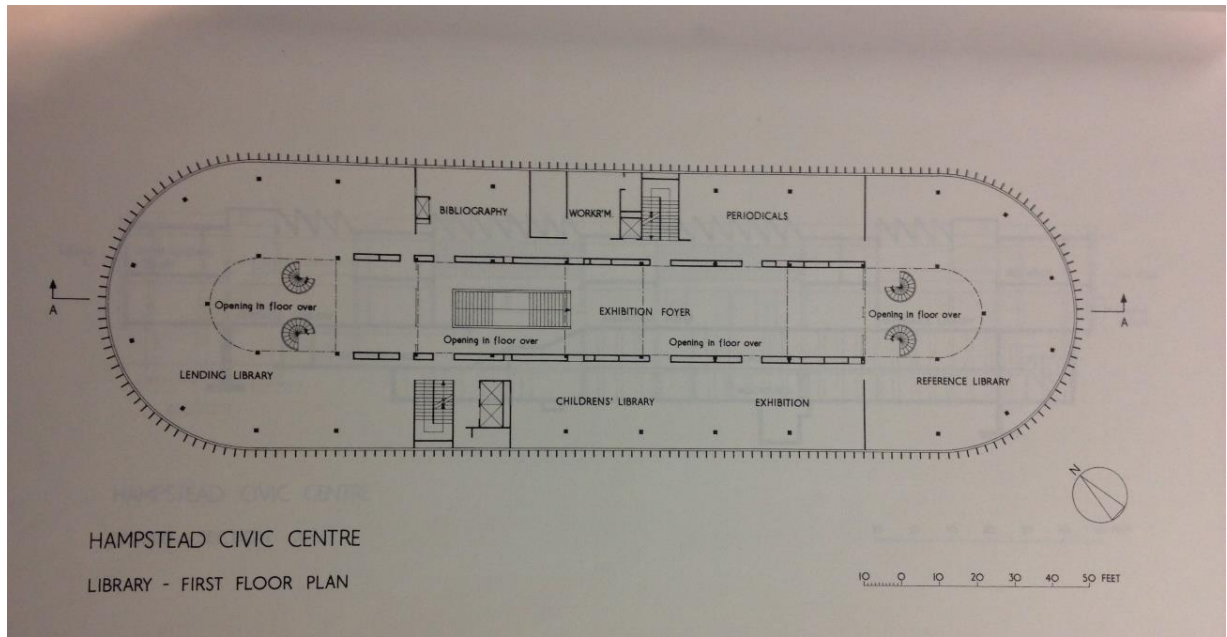


Figure 2 Swiss Cottage Library – drawing of first floor plan

- 2.5 As to be expected for a progressive library building of the time it incorporates a range of facilities and interest derives from how these are cleverly arranged within a complex cigar-shaped plan. This comprises a double-height foyer at first floor accessed by stairs, with lending and reference libraries on two levels to the north and south and a children's library to the side with music library above. Internal finishes include aluminium used in vertical divides and ceilings and slender steel balustrades to the reference and lending library balcony fronts.
- 2.6 Externally, most notable is the concrete frame clad in a striking combination of pre-cast black basalt concrete panels between vertical concrete fins with Portland stone aggregate defining and emphasising the curved north and south ends of the cigar-shaped plan. This is set over a raised basement and ground floor of Portland stone and painted concrete which increases in height across the sloping site so that the building is considerably higher than Adelaide Road.



Photographs 3 & 4: Swiss Cottage Library – external façade details; concrete fins, pre-cast basalt concrete aggregate panels, board-marked concrete soffit, aluminium windows and ashlar Portland stone base.



- 2.7 Writing at the time before the adjacent swimming baths also by Spence, were demolished, Pevsner⁷ noted:

“Both library and baths delight in their use of concrete, as was fashionable at the time, and are distinguished externally by powerful geometric contrasts (Spence created a similar effect at his contemporary science buildings at Exeter University)”

- 2.8 The listed building is therefore of special architectural interest for its design comprising significant plan form and complex internal arrangement accommodating a range of library facilities and for its striking external architectural character, designed by a notable C20th architect.



Photograph 5: Swiss Cottage Library (centre) and setting on Adelaide Road

Setting

- 2.9 Today, the building's striking and robust presence is notable within the experience of the varied surrounding townscape comprising a number of larger-scaled buildings and the busy gyratory road system, which together comprise its setting. In these terms there are no particularly notable or positive elements of setting that contribute to the building's significance (noting that the contemporaneously designed swimming pool building has since been demolished).
- 2.10 The development of the adjacent 100 Avenue Road site provided the opportunity to enhance the present setting of the listed building.

⁷ The Buildings of England, London 4: North, Bridget Cherry and Nikolaus Pevsner (1998)

Planning Inspector and Secretary of State's Consideration of Significance

- 2.11 At the planning appeal into the now consented proposals for the site the Planning Inspector specifically considered both heritage significance and setting of the Swiss Cottage Library building (Appeal decision APP/X5210/W/14/3001616 paras. 277-278):

"I consider that the special interest and significance relates to the design and designer of the building, its materials and location. The design results in a very attractive civic building. The arrangement of fins on the upper elevations shield the windows from view when seen at an angle. This means that the windows that give some scale to the building cannot be seen in some views and it gives the impression of a large scale building and this is very apparent when looking along Avenue Road.

The scale of the building is appropriate to the town centre location and is a robust modern piece of architecture appropriate to having large buildings around it. These currently include the civic centre, Visage Building and Regency Lodge opposite. The swimming pool/leisure centre is also a large building and this has been built very close to the library, and is acceptable because this is a civic and town centre area."

- 2.12 This assessment was carefully considered by the Secretary of State in reaching the decision to allow the appeal and grant planning permission (Secretary of State's letter 18th February, paras. 18-22).

- 2.13 Furthermore, in relation to the now consented scheme and its impact on the Library building, the Planning Inspector concluded (para. 279):

"The proposed building would be the same distance away from the library as the existing building. The illustration in View 13 shows the juxtaposition of the library with the new building. I consider that this demonstrates a very complementary relationship between the two buildings, particularly the horizontal emphasis of the library with the tall tower structure and appropriate spacing between. The panel and frame arrangement of the new building, while not copying the library, is reflective of it and would work well together. The fact that the low element of the proposal is taller than the old building and steps from front to back works well and is not out of scale with the library. It can be seen in the photograph that there is Regency Lodge, a large scale building, on the opposite side of the road. I consider the proposal would enhance the town centre setting and therefore also the significance of the listed building. The special architectural and historic interest would be enhanced."

- 2.14 Similarly, the Secretary of State agreed (para. 20):

"As to the Swiss Cottage Library, the Secretary of State agrees with the Inspector that the proposal would enhance the town centre setting and therefore also the significance of the listed building and its special architectural and historic interest would be enhanced (IR279)."

Summary

2.15 The significance, in terms of special architectural or historic interest, of the listed Swiss Cottage Library building derives from:

- The design and designer (Sir Basil Spence);
- Reinforced concrete frame, clad in pre-cast black basalt concrete spandrel panels between finely-finished concrete fins with Portland stone aggregate, set over a smooth basement and ground floor;
- Cigar-shaped plan form and internal layout; and,
- An accomplished civic building among the most ambitious architectural designs for a library.

2.16 In terms of setting, the Library is:

- Of a scale appropriate to its town centre location; and,
- A robust modern piece of architecture appropriate to having large buildings around it (including the immediately adjacent swimming pool/leisure centre of modern materials and design).

2.17 The significance of the listed building therefore resides in its special architectural interest as an ambitious public library building with complex plan accommodating a range of library facilities. Externally, the building has a striking appearance and robust architectural character embracing the use of concrete and was intended as part of a larger complex incorporating powerful geometric contrasts.

3. Heritage Considerations

Legislation and policy

- 3.1 When considering applications that may affect a listed building or its setting, section 66 (1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires special regard to be paid to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.
- 3.2 The Framework notes that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. The Framework describes the setting of a heritage asset as the surroundings in which it is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral.
- 3.3 In enacting section 66(1), Parliament intended that the desirability of preserving the setting of listed buildings should not simply be given careful consideration by the decision-maker for the purpose of deciding whether there would be some harm, but that it should be given 'considerable importance and weight' when the decision-maker carries out the balancing exercise.

Significance, setting and application site

- 3.4 In this case the significance of the listed building therefore resides in its special architectural interest as an ambitious public library building with complex plan accommodating a range of library facilities. Externally, the building has a striking appearance and robust architectural character embracing the use of concrete and was intended as part of a larger complex incorporating powerful geometric contrasts.
- 3.5 The development for which the discharge of planning condition regarding façade materials is within the setting of the listed building. As noted above (and at the time of the planning appeal) its setting is the surrounding townscape with variety of building styles and dates, generally of significant scale and comprising a range of materials including brick, glass, steel and metal cladding.
- 3.6 The design of the new building has a verticality, emphasised by the vertical 'ribs' and contrasting panels of the taller element and strip glazing and narrow framed panels of the south elevation of the lower element. Together, these both reflect and complement the vertical emphasis of the Library building derived from its vertical fins and contrasting panels – in effect restoring a geometric contrast which resonates with Spence's masterplan. Whilst the lower element is taller than the library, it is set apart from it with the landscaped entrance to the public open space between. Given the robust form and architectural character of the Library building itself, it maintains a strong presence in the street scene.

Proposed materials

- 3.7 Glass reinforced concrete (GRC) is a fibre reinforced precast concrete material where the use of fibres rather than steel reinforcement allow for significantly lighter panels without the risk of rust formation. As GRC is available in a range of colours and textures which are controlled by variation to the mixing and finishing of the material, the applicant has sought to develop a sample appropriate to the new building and its context. To add interest and depth small grey inclusions reminiscent of the shell and fossil fragments found in Portland stone have been added which together with a rough textural finish will give a natural feel to the material.



Photograph 6: Fully-scaled sample panel with GRC panels and detailing



Photograph 7: Close-up detail of surface finish to GRC panels

4. Impact on Heritage Significance

Selection of Materials

- 4.1 Important context for the selection of façade materials is the overall design quality of the new building, noted (Planning Inspector⁸) as having a “very complementary” relationship with the listed building. This relationship has provided context for the selection of materials to ensure that their use will further enhance that relationship.
- 4.2 The selection of GRC for the new façades utilising the essential make-up and characteristics of the material and the associated ability to vary its constituent elements, especially its finish, results in a material that is particularly well-suited to use in the context and setting of the listed Library building
- 4.3 Specifically, a reinforced concrete with surface finish as proposed, will through its nature and appearance respond positively to the use of concrete and concrete aggregate elements used in the construction of the listed building. Through selection of a finish with small grey inclusions (reminiscent of those found particularly in fossil-bed limestones), a further resonance with the Portland stone elements, insofar as used in the Library building, is also created.
- 4.4 The positive relationship with the inherent visual qualities and characteristics of the materials used in the Library, which are important elements of its design and thereby architectural interest, is strengthened. In wider terms, use of a concrete-based material also clearly resonates with its use by Sir Basil Spence’s as a characteristic of his work at Swiss Cottage and indeed, elsewhere.
- 4.5 Review of the full-size GRC panel samples on site, where the form and finish of the material is evident, confirms this approach is entirely appropriate to the architectural character and special interest of the listed building. In essence, matching the predominant concrete material of the Library building, with a modern form of reinforced concrete, is an informed and rational response for a new building in its setting.
- 4.6 The proposed use of GRC for the elevations of the development at 100 Avenue Road also accords with the wider palette of contemporary materials used in other buildings also in the immediate setting of the Library (particularly the immediately adjacent swimming pool/leisure centre building). Use of such materials more widely in the setting of the listed building has been deemed acceptable and does not affect the heritage significance of the Library.

Officers’ Comments

- 4.7 Officers’ comments regarding the proposed use of GRC appear to stem from concerns regarding perceived visual appearance and its use close the listed building, also implying that Portland stone is the dominant material of the Library building.

⁸ APP/X5210/W/14/3001616 Paragraph 279

- 4.8 However, as noted above, inspection of the material samples on site, their visual appearance and the specification for its make-up and use developed by the architects, illustrate that it is an entirely appropriate material for use in this context.
- 4.9 Use of the material 'close' to the listed building is an informed decision, based upon understanding of positive relationship between the two buildings, an important consideration at planning appeal, and through understanding of the full palette of materials used on the Library. As set out in the list entry (Appendix 1) and confirmed by visual inspection, the materials used are:

“pre-cast black basalt concrete spandrel panels between projecting and finely-finished concrete fins with Portland stone aggregate, all set over smooth raised basement and ground floor of Portland stone and concrete – painted”

- 4.10 The visual appearance of the listed building mainly derives from the cigar-shaped form and the striking appearance of the tall concrete fins with pre-cast basalt concrete spandrel panels between. Other than the ashlar plinth or base of the building, Portland stone is used as an aggregate in a concrete matrix, and otherwise within a predominant context of concrete, used in a variety of different forms including pre-cast and board marked (and painted). Notably, the ashlar Portland stone base where closest to the new development is at its lowest (increasing in height further away to address the gentle slope of the ground) and dominated by the over-sailing first floor with concrete panels and fins.
- 4.11 Put simply, the Library is not a Portland stone building but rather a result of the imaginative and striking use of concrete in different forms, over a Portland stone base. Visually, the pattern and vertical emphasis of the concrete fins and concrete spandrel panels are the prominent and characteristic feature of the listed building, cladding its double height foyer and library space. Where Portland stone has been used it signifies, and is appropriate to, the civic stature and use of the Library building.
- 4.12 In these terms, the choice of GRC is entirely appropriate to the special architectural interest of the listed building, drawing upon strong elements of its character, to further strengthen the relationship between it and the new building.

Conclusion

- 4.13 **In conclusion the proposed materials are appropriate to and will not detract from, or in heritage policy terms, harm, the significance of the listed building which is of noted robust and strong architectural design and character. Use of GRC is based upon understanding of the predominant concrete elements and detailing of the listed building, critical to its special interest.**
- 4.14 **The special architectural and historic interest of the listed building will be preserved. Furthermore, its significance will be enhanced through the use of the proposed complementary façade materials, meeting the objectives of primary legislation and national policy.**

Appendix 1: Swiss Cottage Library: List Entry

Location

Statutory Address:

SWISS COTTAGE LIBRARY, AVENUE ROAD

The building or site itself may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County:

Greater London Authority

District:

Camden (London Borough)

National Grid Reference:

TQ 26777 84180

Details

- CAMDEN

TQ2684SE AVENUE ROAD 798-1/61/1895 (East side) 02/12/97 Swiss Cottage Library

II

Public library. 1963-4, for the Borough of Hampstead by Sir Basil Spence, Bonnington and Collins. Reinforced concrete frame on 10' grid clad in pre-cast black basalt concrete spandrel panels between projecting and finely-finished concrete fins with Portland stone aggregate, all set over smooth raised basement and ground floor of Portland stone and concrete - painted. Asphalt on concrete roof slab. The cigar-shaped plan is a complex one, the entrance at ground-floor level on the highest, northern end of the site, the ground floor and basements otherwise housing offices, services and bookstacks, whilst stairs lead to a double-height central foyer at first-floor level. Children's library to side of this; to north and south respectively lending and reference libraries on two levels each with two pairs of spiral stairs to balcony. Music library over children's library on second floor, reached through reference library which also includes work rooms for private study and offices. The projecting fins of Portland stone aggregate at 2'6" intervals are the dominant feature of the building, contrasted with the darker panels in between. Aluminium windows. INTERIOR: aluminium also used extensively internally in the vertical divides to the glazed screens preferred to solid walls through most of the public interiors. This verticality is repeated in the slender steel balustrades to the reference and lending libraries' balcony fronts and internal stairs. White perforated aluminium ceilings with recessed fluorescent light fittings a

necessary complement to the extensive use of diffused, borrowed light through the building; terrazzo floors. Original bookcases and fixed desks, the latter notably in reference area; some original signage survives on ground and first floors. Swiss Cottage Library and the adjacent baths were all that were built of an intended new civic centre for Hampstead, the scheme abandoned because of local authority reorganisation in 1965. It is one of Spence's most accomplished civic buildings, and amongst the most ambitious architectural designs for a library found anywhere. (Architects Journal: 29 January 1959; Architects Journal: 25 November 1964; Architect and Building News: 11 November 1964; Opening Brochure of the Queen's Visit: November 1964).

Listing NGR: TQ2677784180

Legacy

- The contents of this record have been generated from a legacy data system.

Legacy System number:

476629

Legacy System:

LBS

Sources

- **Books and journals**

'Architects Journal' in 29 January, (1959)

'Architects Journal' in 25 November, (1964)

'Architect and Building News' in 11th November, (1964)

Legal

- This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest.

End of official listing.

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