

Belgrove House, Belgrove Street

Local Planning Authority: Camden

local planning authority reference 2020/3881/p

Strategic planning application stage 2 referral

Town & Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended); Greater London Authority Acts 1999 and 2007; Town & Country Planning (Mayor of London) Order 2008.

The proposal

Redevelopment of Belgrove House as a part 5, part 10 storey building (plus 2 basement levels) for use as office, research and laboratory space, a café, an auditorium, new step-free entrance to Kings Cross St Pancras London Underground station, cycle storage and facilities, refuse storage and other ancillary and associated works.

The applicant

The applicant is **Precis Advisory & Access Self Storage Limited** and the architect is **AHMM**.

Key dates

GLA pre-application meeting: 26 February 2020.

GLA stage 1 report: 26 October 2020.

LPA Planning Committee decision: 25 February 2021.

Strategic issues summary

Principle of development: The proposed redevelopment of this site within the CAZ and the locally designated Knowledge Quarter Innovation District to provide research laboratories, office space, a publicly accessible auditorium and step-free access to King's Cross London Underground station complies with Policies SD4 and SD5 and Good Growth Objective GG1 (paragraphs 8-9).

Heritage and urban design, Transport and Sustainable development: The issues raised at Stage 1 have been satisfactorily addressed either by way of additional information and/or secured through conditions or legal obligations (paragraphs 10-).

The Council's decision

In this instance Camden Council has resolved to grant permission subject to planning conditions and conclusion of a Section 106 legal agreement.

Recommendation

That Camden Council be advised that the Mayor is content for the Council to determine the case itself, subject to any action that the Secretary of State may take, and does not therefore wish to direct refusal, or direct that he is to be the local planning authority.

Context

1. On 7 September 2020, the Mayor of London received documents from Camden Council notifying him of a planning application of potential strategic importance to develop the above site for the above uses. This was referred to the Mayor under the following category of the Schedule to the Order 2008:
 - **Category 1C:** *“Development which comprises or includes the erection of a building of (c) more than 30 metres high and is outside the City of London.”*
2. On 26 October 2020, the Mayor considered planning report GLA/2020/6420¹ ([link to report here](#)) and subsequently advised Camden Council that whilst the proposal is supported in principle, the application does not fully comply with the London Plan and the then Intend to Publish London due to the following:
 - **Principle of development:** The proposed redevelopment of this site within the CAZ and the locally designated KQID to provide research laboratories, office space, a publicly accessible auditorium and step-free access to King’s Cross London Underground station is supported, subject to the applicant demonstrating that the B1b floorspace is designed to accommodate B1c industrial uses.
 - **Heritage and urban design:** The appearance reflects the intended use of the building for life sciences research and is different to the architecture dominant in the area; although there would be some enhancement to the townscape, GLA officers concur with Historic England that there would be less than substantial caused to the significance of the King’s Cross St. Pancras Conservation Area. This less substantial harm, however, would be outweighed by the public benefits of the scheme.
 - **Sustainable development:** Further information including on the proposed heat pump, PV array size and wider district heating. A carbon offset payment to the borough of £570,000 should be secured via a Section 106 agreement.
 - **Transport:** Detailed interfaces with TfL’s surrounding infrastructure must be agreed; further details on the proposed step-free access to the Kings Cross St Pancras LU station is required; and, a financial contribution towards delivery of Healthy Streets improvements on Euston Road is sought to mitigate the uplift in trips and cater for key pedestrian desire lines to and from the site.
3. The essentials of the case with regard to the proposal, the site, case history, strategic planning issues and relevant policies and guidance are as set out therein, unless otherwise stated in this report.
4. On 25 February 2021, Camden Council decided that it was minded to grant permission for the application subject to planning conditions and conclusion of a Section 106 agreement, and on 1 March 2021 it advised the Mayor of this decision. The Stage II referral was validated complete on 3 March 2021. Under the provisions of Article 5 of the Town & Country Planning (Mayor of London) Order 2008 the Mayor may allow the draft decision to proceed unchanged; direct Camden Council under Article 6 to refuse the application; or, issue a direction to Camden Council under Article 7 that he is to act as the Local Planning Authority for the purposes of determining the application and any connected application. The Mayor has until 16 March 2021 to notify the Council of his decision and to issue any direction.

¹ <https://gla.force.com/pr/s/planning-application/a0i4J000002ScicQAC/20206420>

5. The decision on this case, and the reasons, will be made available on the City Hall website: www.london.gov.uk

Update

6. Since consultation stage GLA and TfL officers have engaged in discussions with the applicant and the Council with a view to addressing the above matters. Furthermore, as part of the Council's draft decision on the case, various planning conditions and obligations have been secured. An update against the issues raised at consultation stage is set out below.

Relevant policies and guidance

7. The London Plan 2021 was published and became part of the statutory development plan on 2nd March 2021.

Principle of development

8. The application site is a non-designated industrial site that is within the Central Activities Zone, as well as the locally designated Knowledge Quarter Innovation District (KQID). At Stage I, the proposal to redevelop the site to provide research laboratories with office space, a publicly accessible auditorium and step-free access to King's Cross London Underground station was supported. This support was subject to the applicant demonstrating that the laboratory floors could also be used for industrial purposes, so as to avoid the permanent loss of industrial activity on the site. Since the Stage I, the applicant has submitted a response demonstrating the potential use of the research laboratory floorspace for light industrial use, namely adequate loading bays to accommodate deliveries, suitable storage space at basement level with two goods lifts and floor to ceiling heights of 4 metres.
9. In addition to demonstrating the suitability of the laboratory floorspace for industrial use, access and use of the proposed publicly accessible spaces in the building needed to be robustly secured. The Council has secured in the draft Section 106 agreement an auditorium facilities management plan, a community education/innovation space management plan, an education and outreach strategy, appointment of an Education Liaison Manager and STEAM School Leaver and selection of a local education champion. These obligations would ensure that these spaces and any educational/outreach programmes are accessible to a wide cross section of the local community in accordance with Objective GG1 of the London Plan.

Heritage and urban design

10. Policy D9 of the London Plan makes clear that tall buildings should only be developed in locations identified in local plans as being suitable for such buildings. Policy D9 further states that development plans should define what is a tall building but this should not be less than 6 storeys or 18 metres, measured from ground to the floor level of the uppermost storey. Where there is an absence of a local definition, the above guidance of 6 storeys/18 metres is applied.
11. Camden Local Plan Policy D1, in addressing tall buildings, states that all of the borough is sensitive to tall buildings. The supporting text at paragraph 7.35 states that tall buildings are those which are substantially taller than their neighbours or significantly change the skyline. Considering the guidance on tall buildings set out in London Plan Policy D9 and Policy D1 of the Local Plan, the proposed 10-storey building meets the definition of a tall building. In terms of suitable locations for tall

buildings, paragraph 2.10 of the Local Plan sets out where tall buildings can be appropriate for some uses, subject to excellent design, protection of strategic views, access to good public transport and impact on the surrounding area. This criteria is further expanded in Policy D1 of the Local Plan and aligns with the visual, functional, environmental and cumulative assessments required under Policy D9C of the London Plan.

12. Visually, the proposal would have no adverse impact on any local or strategic views and enhance mid-range to long-range easterly and westerly townscape views along the southern side of Euston Road. As stated in the Stage I report, GLA officers concur with Historic England's assessment and consider that any harm caused to the nearby heritage assets, namely the King's Cross St Pancras Conservation Area, by the proposed development would be less than substantial and would be clearly outweighed by the public benefits of the scheme, which include step-free entrance to King's Cross London Underground station; expansion of the life sciences research sector and of London's economy; off-site affordable housing as well as a financial contribution to the Council's affordable housing fund; off-site affordable workspace; a publicly accessible auditorium; and, public realm improvements. Though taller than most of the buildings (3-6 storeys) on the southern side of this eastern end of Euston Road, the proposed height is comparable with that of the recently extended The Standard Hotel and steps down to the south in response to the residential properties along Argyle Square and the Argyle Square Gardens. The St Pancras Clock Tower within the Grade I listed St Pancras Chambers remains the tallest structure in the area. At street level, there is good visibility into the building as well as improved active frontages along Crestfield Street, Belgrove Street and Argyle Square and a new north-south public route through the building connecting Euston Road to Argyle Square. The architectural quality of the building would be of a high standard, with the use of brick reflective of the predominant material evident in the area and the glazing a nod to its intended use as a pharmaceutical research facility.
13. Regarding functional impacts, a fire strategy has been submitted with the application with acceptable measures to ensure the safety of future occupants. Notwithstanding, the Council has secured through planning condition the submission of a fire strategy for approval through the Building Regulations process. In addition, to ensure the building functions without causing disturbance or inconvenience, a service management plan and construction management plan have been secured. The application site is highly accessible to public transport, with a public transport accessibility level (PTAL) of 6b, the highest possible level; and given this accessibility and car-free nature of the proposal, the impact on the public transport would not be significant. In fact, the proposed step-free access to King's Cross station would have a positive impact on public transport. Given the site's location within the Knowledge Quarter and the intended knowledge economy use (with its generation of jobs, auditorium and improved public realm), the scheme would contribute positively to the regeneration of the area. The proposal therefore does not raise any adverse functional impacts.
14. No significant adverse environmental impacts in relation to overshadowing, wind, microclimate, daylight and sunlight are expected. The Daylight and Sunlight report submitted with the application shows that the development would not have a significant impact on neighbouring buildings. In terms of wind and microclimate, the assessment submitted with the application concludes that there would be some change to the local wind environment, which would be mitigated by the stepped

massing and planting of deciduous trees creating a safe wind environment. To address light pollution, the Council has secured details of the lighting strategy by planning condition.

15. Cumulatively, the proposed development does not raise any significant adverse cumulative functional and environmental impacts.

Transport

16. Matters relating to the proposed step-free access, London Underground (LU) infrastructure and healthy streets were raised at Stage I.
17. On the step-free access, the development will include the delivery of a new step-free entrance to King's Cross LU station, replacing the two existing station entrance boxes on Euston Road adjacent to the site. This will have the combined benefit of delivering step-free access from the south side of Euston Road and creating enhanced street space and public realm. The station entrance will be delivered via a Development Agreement with London Underground, which has been secured in the draft Section 106 agreement, to which London Underground is required to be a signatory. All costs associated with this including the design, delivery, fit out and maintenance of the new entrance will be met by the developer. The necessary LU infrastructure protection requirements have also been secured. The details of timing for entering the DA and delivery of the new entrance are yet to be agreed between the parties and this must be finalised to LU's satisfaction in order to ensure that LU assets and operations are properly safeguarded.
18. On Euston Road itself, the developer has committed a financial contribution of £350,00 to be paid to TfL towards pedestrian crossing improvements to mitigate the additional trips that will be generated by the proposals, improve road safety and reduce severance at this location. The developer is also obligated through the draft S106 agreement to enter into a S278 agreement with TfL for the delivery of highway works on Euston Road, including reinstatement works where the station entrance boxes will be removed.
19. As requested at Stage 1, an additional public transport impact assessment has been undertaken and no further mitigation is required. Provisions for cycle hire, construction logistics, delivery and servicing and travel plans, alongside local improvements to pedestrian and cycling facilities have also been secured by the Council by way of planning obligations and conditions.
20. In conclusion, the matters raised at Stage 1 have been satisfactorily resolved and the application is acceptable in strategic transport terms.

Sustainable development

21. At Stage I, issues relating to aspects of the energy strategy, including PV provision, the efficiency of the heat pumps and connection to a district heating network were raised.
22. The applicant has confirmed that the provision of PV has been maximised. A roof layout has been provided, which shows how this has been achieved, and the applicant has clarified that the development would deliver 45kWp of installed PVs. With regard to the heat pumps, further information on the approach to modelling for the seasonal coefficient has been provided, which fully addresses the queries raised at the initial consultation. The applicant has also confirmed that no additional technology would be required for topping up the heating system. Drawings

demonstrating how the site is to be future-proofed for a connection to a district heating network have been provided, as requested. A schematic showing that all non-domestic building uses will be connected to the central heat system has also been provided.

23. In addition to the above, the applicant has submitted the GLA's Carbon Emission Reporting spreadsheet and confirmed that there are no nearby underground ventilation shafts to allow for heat extraction. 'Be Seen' (energy monitoring) requirements to monitor, verify and improve the development's energy performance post-construction and a carbon offset payment of £570,000 have been secured in the draft Section 106 agreement; and the submission of the post-construction Whole Life-Cycle Carbon (WLC) Assessment to the GLA has been secured by planning condition.
24. The outstanding matters raised at Stage I have been satisfactorily addressed and the application as it relates to sustainable development is acceptable in strategic planning terms.

Local consultation process

25. Camden Council publicised the application by issuing site and press notices. The relevant statutory bodies were also consulted. Copies of all responses to public consultation, and any other representations made on the case, have been made available to the GLA.

Responses to neighbourhood consultation

26. Following the neighbourhood consultation process Camden Council received a total of 24 responses (11 in objection and 13 in support). The 24 responses received include representations from local businesses, conservation and amenity groups, as well as regional/national industry representatives. These groups/organisations are: London and Middlesex Archaeological Society (LAMAS); Camden Railway Heritage Trust (CRHT); Friends of Argyle Square & King's Cross CAAC; Bloomsbury Conservation Area Advisory Committee (BCAAC); Camden Cycle Campaign; Victorian Society; MedCity; London Bioscience Innovation Centre; BioIndustry Society; Wellcome Trust; Confederation of British Industry; The Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry; Francis Crick Institute; Campaign for Science and Engineering; and, Crosstree Real Estate Partners (on behalf of The Standard Hotel).
27. The reasons for objection and support raised by individuals as part of the neighbourhood consultation process are collectively summarised below:

Neighbourhood objection

- Council should determine whether the proposed amount of affordable workspace at Acorn House (476 sqm) is the maximum viable;
- Council needs to closely vet the application to determine that housing on site is not practical and would be more appropriately provided off-site, and also be satisfied that exceptional circumstances exist, which allow an affordable housing payment-in-lieu;
- hideously out-of-context and keeping with the architectural designs that dominate the south side of Euston Road;
- the vernacular of the area, showing more respect to the building in situ and subscribing to a height of no more than 6 storeys;
- wrong location, should be on the north side of Euston Road;

- too tall;
- dwarfs the historic stations and Georgian squares;
- unfamiliar with the term 'Knowledge Quarter';
- negative impact on views of the St. Pancras and King's Cross stations;
- step-free access to the stations already exists on the north side;
- brutalist 10-storey building will spoil the existing harmony;
- Belgrove House should be retained;
- inappropriate scale;
- loss of sunlight and daylight;
- loss of privacy;
- increase in sense of enclosure;
- harm to outlook from habitable rooms;
- poor quality design;
- too 'glassy' and too obtrusive and adds nothing to the townscape in this area;
- the argument of 'public gain' is fatuous; and,
- talk of "Public Benefit" appears to be a diversionary tactic - "whole life carbon approach" has no scientific basis and is little more than PR spin.

Neighbourhood support

- Redevelopment of what is currently a "wart" on the Euston Road and a very poor use of a prime location is good to see;
- ideal site for a new HQ, especially for an occupier from the life science industry as the site sits at the heart of the Knowledge Quarter, close to the Crick Institute as well as higher education institutions;
- significant improvements to the public realm, including a new entrance to the Underground;
- contribution to affordable housing within the Borough; and,
- excited to see the redevelopment of Belgrove House into a new science and research centre in Camden and the step-free entrance to Kings Cross underground station.

Responses from statutory bodies and other organisations

Historic England

28. No objection in principle to the redevelopment of the existing Belgrove House building, which would make a neutral contribution to the character and appearance of this part of the conservation area. Recognises the potential for a range of public benefits (including improvements to the townscape through the removal of the London Underground entrance on the pavement in front of the building) resulting from the proposals; however, notes that the proposed new building would result in an appreciable increase in scale along this generally low-rise stretch of Euston Road, erasing a legible element of its historic scale and therefore causing some (less than substantial) harm to the significance of the conservation area. This harm is low.

Thames Water

29. No objection, subject to conditions relating to piling and wastewater network upgrades which have been appropriately secured.

London Underground Limited

30. No in principle objection, subject to securing the need for a development agreement (DA) with LUL via the Section 106 agreement and an informative advising the applicant to contact London Underground Infrastructure Protection in advance of preparation of final design and associated method statements. The requirement for a DA and associated infrastructure protection agreement with LUL have been secured in the draft Section 106 agreement and, which addresses the informative requested.

London Fire Brigade

31. No observations regarding the Local Enactment and await the detailed consultation in respect of the building regulations.

Bloomsbury Conservation Area Advisory Committee (BCAAC)

32. Objects to the proposal because of its scale and design, which causes harm both to the historic environment and the wider townscape as a whole.

Victorian Society

33. Objects to the proposed development citing an objectionable amount of harm to several heritage assets (with no “clear and convincing justification”) due to height, overshadowing and incongruity in the context of the historical townscape.

LAMAS – London and Middlesex Archaeological Society

34. this south side of the main road would be swept away to create an extremely high and bulky ‘landmark building’ in an aggressive modern style that is neither interesting nor original.

Camden Railway Heritage Trust (CRHT)

35. Objects to the scheme owing to the significant harm that would be caused to the Grade I listed King’s Cross station. Welcomes the development of the Knowledge Quarter but this does not justify the creation of a large, alien, aggressive, statement building opposite one of the most important stations in the country. There is not only no need for a ‘statement’ building on this site, but a real and paramount need to avoid such architectural excess.

Friends of Argyle Square & King’s Cross CAAC

36. Welcomes the redevelopment of the site but objects to the proposal because it is entirely out of context in terms of size and appearance in its highly sensitive historic setting and no amount of public benefits can outweigh the harm the development would cause to the heritage assets.

Camden Cycle Campaign

37. Objects to the removal of contraflow cycling from Crestfield Street.

Francis Crick Institute

38. Supports the proposal, noting that there are many synergies and overlaps between their work and that of MSD researchers and having nearby HQ would support greater research collaboration and thus increased long term benefits to UK health through medical research. Moreover, the opportunity for a knowledge centre on the ground floor and events and conference space would add to the Institute’s own offering of activities and events supporting public engagement with science. High quality of design and improvements would also benefit the area.

MedCity

39. Supports the application for various reasons, including the creation of new highly skilled jobs, the acceleration of King's Cross growth as one of the leading life sciences hub in Europe as a result of MSD's location in the area (which is a natural fit given the company's collaboration with organisations such as UCL, Francis Crick Institute and London Bioscience Innovation Centre) and its benefits to the wider community.

London Bioscience Innovation Centre

40. Supports the proposal because the location of MSD (a valued partner and integral member of the research community) in the area would benefit the local economy and strengthen London's reputation as a world class centre of life sciences.

Wellcome Trust

41. Supports the application because it would strengthen the Knowledge Quarter as a world-leading research hub, with the new laboratory space creating desirable space for discovery and clinical researchers in close proximity to the existing research community in the Knowledge Quarter, which is needed to drive research forward.

BioIndustry Society

42. Welcomes the investment and supports for the local economy and life sciences and supports the application stating that it would bring another world leading laboratory to Camden and the Knowledge Quarter.

Confederation of Business Industry

43. Supports the application as it represents a positive investment for Camden and would advance science, improve business collaboration and create local jobs.

The Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry

44. Supports the proposed development. Contends that the development would make a significant contribution to UK's world-leading pharmaceutical industry, boost the reputation of the King's Cross Knowledge Quarter and cumulatively benefit the wider community of academics, scientists and higher education institutions.

Campaign for Science and Engineering

45. Supports the proposal because MSD, as a leading research-intensive organisation, would be a positive addition to the strong science and engineering community in the Knowledge Quarter.

Crosstree Real Estate Partners (on behalf of The Standard Hotel)

46. Supports the application given its delivery of a building that complements the area, step-free access, improvements on Argyle Square, regenerative benefits to Kings Cross south of Euston Road and the Knowledge Quarter and massive socio-economic benefit to London and Camden.

Response to public consultation - conclusion

47. Having considered the local responses to public consultation, Camden Council has sought to secure various planning obligations, conditions and informatives in response to the issues raised. Having had regard to these GLA officers are satisfied that the statutory and non-statutory responses to the public consultation process, do not raise any material planning issues of strategic importance that have not already been considered in this report, or in consultation stage report GLA/2020/6420.

Section 106 agreement

48. The Section 106 agreement will include the following provisions:

- housing contribution of £6,238,500;
- restriction on occupation prior to delivery of affordable housing and affordable workspace at the Acorn House development;
- knowledge economy occupier strategy;
- auditorium facilities management plan;
- community education/innovation space and specification;
- community education/innovation space management plan;
- construction apprentice default contribution of £280,000;
- construction apprentice support contribution of £68,000;
- education and outreach strategy;
- appointment of an Education Liaison Manager and selection of a local education champion;
- appointment of a STEAM School Leaver;
- employment contribution of £168,839;
- local procurement and employment;
- LUL Development Agreement, including step-free access;
- LUL Asset Protection Agreement;
- environmental and public realm contribution of £1,282,400;
- car-free development;
- s278 agreement with TfL;
- TLRN Highway Works contribution;
- construction management plan;
- construction management plan implementation support contribution of £22,816;
- construction management plan bond of £30,000;
- highways contribution of £347,000;
- service management plan;
- travel plan;
- travel plan monitoring contribution of £9,762;
- adoption of an energy efficiency and renewable energy plan;
- retention of architect;
- financial contribution of £144,720 towards public open space;
- carbon offset contribution of £570,000; and,
- sustainability plan;

Legal considerations

49. Under the arrangements set out in Article 5 of the Town and Country Planning (Mayor of London) Order 2008 the Mayor has the power under Article 6 to direct the local planning authority to refuse permission for a planning application referred to him under Article 4 of the Order. Mayor also has the power under Article 7 to direct that he will become the local planning authority for the purposes of determining the application. The Mayor may also leave the decision to the local authority. In directing refusal, the Mayor must have regard to the matters set out in Article 6(2) of the Order, including the principal purposes of the Greater London Authority, the effect on health and sustainable development, national policies and international obligations, regional planning guidance, and the use of the River Thames. The Mayor may direct refusal if he considers that to grant permission would be contrary

to good strategic planning in Greater London. If he decides to direct refusal, the Mayor must set out his reasons, and the local planning authority must issue these with the refusal notice. If the Mayor decides to direct that he is to be the local planning authority, he must have regard to the matters set out in Article 7(3) and set out his reasons in the direction.

Financial considerations

50. Should the Mayor direct refusal, he would be the principal party at any subsequent appeal hearing or public inquiry. Government guidance emphasises that parties usually pay their own expenses arising from an appeal.
51. Following an inquiry caused by a direction to refuse, costs may be awarded against the Mayor if he has either directed refusal unreasonably; handled a referral from a planning authority unreasonably; or, behaved unreasonably during the appeal. A major factor in deciding whether the Mayor has acted unreasonably will be the extent to which he has taken account of established planning policy.
52. Should the Mayor take over the application he would be responsible for holding a representation hearing and negotiating any planning obligation. He would also be responsible for determining any reserved matters applications (unless he directs the Council to do so) and determining any approval of details (unless the Council agrees to do so).

Conclusion

53. The strategic issues raised at consultation stage with respect to the principle of development, transport and sustainable development have been addressed, and having regard to the details of the application, the matters set out in the committee report and the Council's draft decision, the application is acceptable in strategic planning terms, and there are no sound planning reasons for the Mayor to intervene in this case. It is therefore recommended that Camden Council is advised to determine the case itself, subject to any action that the Secretary of State may take.

For further information, contact GLA Planning Unit (Development Management Team):

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