



**BLOOMSBURY
CONSERVATION AREAS**
Advisory Committee | Est. 1968

61B Judd Street
Bloomsbury
London
WC1H 9QT



16th January 2021

London Borough of Camden
5 Pancras Square
London
N1C 4AG

Formal Objection to Redevelopment of Tavis House

The Bloomsbury CAAC formally objects to certain elements of the scheme and sets out their assessment of this site and its objection below. We submitted pre-application advice on 4th December 2021 and given that no changes have taken place since that time, that advice is rephrased below as a formal objection.

Site Significance

The development site is considered a building of architectural and historic interest. It is an interesting example of large scale 1930s commercial development, despite having in fact been built in the 1950s following significant bomb damage to the east of Tavistock Square during the Second World War. The building has group value with the neighbouring Lynton House and 19-29 Woburn Place as large early c20 office buildings of red brick and Portland stone construction. The facades presented onto Tavistock Place, along with the Grade II listed Lutyens BMA House, offer a degree of uniformity and architectural interest onto the eastern elevation of Upper Woburn Place / Tavistock Square / Woburn Place. There are also interesting smaller scale early c20 buildings on the north of Tavistock Place, and a more uniform c20 cluster of buildings to the south.

As identified in the architect's site analysis, there are also interesting design links to the Grade II* western range of Tavistock Place, although these are less apparent.

The site presents a more uniform elevation onto Tavistock Place and a utilitarian rear elevation facing onto the Mary Ward Settlement .

The rear servicing area, along with the neighbouring servicing area for the Mary Ward Settlement, are considered some of the least well-maintained areas in the CA.

The Mary Ward Settlement is Grade I listed and is of exceptional heritage significance. It is the only Arts and Crafts building in the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. While being highly significant architecturally, it is also of high historic significance. The building serves as a monument to the birth of both the Arts and Crafts movement and the adult working class education movement through the Passmore Edwards and Mary Ward settlements in Bloomsbury. Morris & Co. was first set up at 8 Red Lion Square while many of the architects who both formed and trained the first generation of Arts and Crafts practitioners were based in Bloomsbury. The original Mary Ward Settlement rented rooms in Dr Williams' Library on Gordon Square, moving to Marchmont Hall and eventually the Mary Ward

Settlement building until moving to Queen Square in 1982. Mary Ward herself lived on Russell Square while William Morris lived in Queen Square for much of his life.

Overall, the site is considered to contribute to the CA through its external scale and design, and group value with surrounding c20 buildings. The rear of the site is considered to contribute negatively to the CA and setting of the Mary Ward Settlement building.

Principle of Development

The principle of development (scale, massing, location) is considered entirely acceptable and is not considered to cause harm to the conservation area or any listed buildings and their settings.

Entrance and Façade Alterations

Generally there is a presumption against alterations to the exterior of a building such as those proposed where the building is of architectural interest. It is however accepted that especially at street level, the building does not contribute strongly to the CA and certain elements of the design are unusually 'flat' and 'unexpressed', although this is generally typical of historic buildings of this scale throughout the CA (see for example nearby Victorian mansion blocks where detail is often only half a brick thick: Judd Street, Tonbridge Street). Alternatively, many buildings have received later alterations (such as Georgian terraces subject to Victorian decorations on Russell Square), and these eventually become an element of historic interest.

Overall, as the building is considered of relatively low architectural significance, we would allow alterations only if they are of a very high design standard and robustly justified. The proposed alterations are considered very much in keeping with the design of the building and the design intent to enhance the architectural expression of the existing detail is also considered acceptable. At this stage however, the committee feels that it is not overwhelmingly clear that the alterations are an improvement. Very detailed consideration should be given to proportions, massing, and detailing of the alterations and the improvements should be communicated well through appropriate visualisations and drawings at the next stage of consultation.

We therefore formally object to the alterations to the front elevation.

Return Elevation

The existing return elevation onto the Mary Ward Settlement is currently a plain brick façade and clearly reads as a typical side elevation. The proposal seeks to punctuate this façade with a large amount of fenestration. Consideration should be given to preserving, at least in part, the character of this elevation by reducing the amount of fenestration, perhaps to a single bay closer to Tavistock Place.

Rear Alterations

At the rear, the scale, massing, and design of the rear infill is considered acceptable and a vast improvement upon the current condition of the rear elevation. The detailing, general proportions, solid-to-void ratio are all considered positive. The committee however feels strongly that the green gloss colour of tile contrasts too strongly with the surrounding townscape and would impact negatively upon the setting of the Mary Ward Settlement. The green tile could alternatively be used for detailing with a more matte and neutral colour used for the majority of the elevation.

The alterations to the public realm at the rear are strongly supported and consideration should be given to whether this space can be unified with that of the Mary Ward Settlement to provide new high quality public space.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the proposals are considered to be acceptable overall, but some design work is required to refine the proposals. The most important concerns are the colour of the tile at rear, and the quality of alterations upon the principal elevation. As a minimum, a revision should be secured in order to alter the colour of the tiles at rear to a more neutral colour, or a condition attached to secure the colour of the tile.

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