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5 Pancras Square
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Formal Objection **Major Redevelopment at Great Ormond Street Hospital**

1. The Bloomsbury CAAC has reviewed the application documents and discussed the proposals across two meetings. It decides to object on the basis of excessive scale and poor design, and subsequent harm to the conservation area and surrounding listed buildings.
2. This application is complex and considerable in scope. The grounds for objection are, however, relatively simple. In the interests of brevity, our main concerns are set out below. There may be many other features of the scheme considered harmful, and this response does not prejudice our ability to comment further on specific aspects of the proposals at a later date.

Background

3. The Bloomsbury Conservation Area is dense in development and has a very varied character and appearance. The initial development of the area spans from c.1680-1840, with its main significance deriving from remaining Georgian development and its influence on the spatial town planning of the area, including layouts of streets, squares, and gardens.
4. Paragraph 3.8 of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area Appraisal 2011 states: *'The quintessential character of the Conservation Area derives from the grid of streets enclosed by mainly three and four- storey development which has a distinctly urban character of broad streets interspersed by formal squares which provide landscape dominated focal points.'*
5. A considerable part of the conservation area's special character and appearance derives from subsequent Victorian and Edwardian development, mainly of a grander and more institutional character. It is considered, however, that the original Georgian development and influence on the spatial planning of the conservation area is of far greater significance.
6. This is reflected in the fact that almost every surviving Georgian building, square, or garden in the conservation area is statutorily designated, and therefore considered of more than usual significance. Most surviving buildings beyond this date are not listed, unless of an exceptional character.

Demolition

7. The existing buildings are considered of very little merit and no objection is raised to their replacement.

Scale

8. The primary question relates to the scale and massing of the proposed development. It is recognised that the immediate block is of an institutional character, with very little of original domestic development surviving. However, the row of Georgian terraces directly opposite the development site are of a domestic scale. These terraces are listed, and of more than typical significance in the conservation area as representing some of the earliest Georgian development of Bloomsbury.
9. As set out above, it is considered that the larger, institutional character of the building site is subservient to the older, finer, domestic character of these terraces, and of lesser importance in its contribution to the significance of the conservation area.
10. It is the opinion of the committee that the 'Paul O'Gorman Building' (shown below left) represents a useful baseline for the scale of development that might be acceptable, and that which is commonly found throughout the conservation area in direct juxtaposition with Georgian terraces. Subject to appropriate design, a building of this scale could be considered acceptable, with a potential for improved design to enhance the appearance of the conservation area.



11. The proposed scale of the development is however of almost twice the height of that building, and rises to a height far higher than any other building in the immediate block. The building line has been brought forward to the street boundary, and rises in a sheer vertical line with no appreciable set-back at any level.
12. In our view, a building of this scale would have a very considerable negative effect upon the immediate townscape, and in rising to approximately three times the height of opposing Georgian terraces, would clearly dwarf and overwhelm them. Indeed, the building is of the same height as the nearby Tybalds Estate tower block, which even in post-war planning, was set back many metres from the surrounding townscape to reduce its impact upon the small scale of the surrounding development.
13. It is our view that no building of this scale can be acceptable on this site.

Design

14. It is recognised by some members of the committee that attention has been paid to the general materiality, massing, and roofscape features of the conservation area's distinctive domestic and institutional buildings. This is reflected in solid-to-void ratios, the use of brick panels, large expressed chimneys, 'bay windows', and chimneys.
15. However, it is the universal opinion of the committee that the design of the building is of an exceptionally poor character, and would appear highly unusual and discordant in any setting.
16. Given these circumstances, it is difficult to comment further on specific aspects of the design or to offer guidance, but the following informal comments are offered below.
17. On a basic level, the design lacks any architectural cohesiveness, character, or identity, and instead appears to be a 'Frankenstein' of different architectural elements found throughout the conservation area at different periods in its development. The balconies, for example, appear to derive from nearby twentieth century housing blocks, while the chimneys appear to derive from Georgian terraces. These two 'styles' are fundamentally incompatible.
18. The design lacks a basic grasp of proportion. The chimneys for example, are of such a small scale compared to the building below they appear to be 'stuck on' rather than integral to the building itself.
19. The large, horizontal, silver element sitting across the top of the building is considered to be especially poor in terms of design. Spanning the entire breadth of the building, it acts to undermine any attempt at breaking up the façade through its bays, balconies, and detailing, and is reminiscent of a high-level airport runway or railway station.



Conclusion

20. The committee recognises the planning department's general presumption in favour of approving large developments in the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. The committee is fundamentally opposed to this *de facto* policy. Nevertheless, where large developments are proposed, it is the committee's policy to advocate sensitive and considered design. Appropriate design can considerably reduce long-term negative impact upon an area, and can bring benefits which offset harm caused by increased scale or intensification in use.
21. The current proposal is of manifestly disproportionate scale, but also fails to provide any mitigation in terms of appropriate massing, design, or other heritage-related benefits. Heritage assets are recognised by the NPPF as being an irreplaceable resource. Development of this kind, which causes significant and arguably irreversible harm to heritage assets, is of a fundamentally unsustainable nature.
22. We therefore object.

Bloomsbury Conservation Areas
Advisory Committee