

## **Planning application 2022/1041/P and 2022/1320/L Land North of the British Library, 96 Euston Road, London NW1 2DB**

Somers Town Neighbourhood Forum has had several meetings and presentations on the above applications and has the following comments.

### **Land use**

The forum doesn't object to the extension of the British Library. We welcome the library's ambition to be more welcoming to local people, and particularly those in Somers Town, and to provide spaces and activities that are attractive to residents of all ages. But we do object to the quantum, height and some uses of the enabling development. We are disappointed that there is no housing in the scheme, particularly social housing, which is a priority need in Somers Town. We are concerned about the amount of new space being taken by the science sector within the Knowledge Quarter and think it is important that the knowledge economy is a balanced one. Whilst we welcome new jobs and opportunities, particularly for young people, workspace suitable for start-ups is appearing in multiple local planning applications and consultations and we question who this workspace is for and whether any of it will be affordable to local people. We welcome the community garden on the western end.

We understand that the site is safeguarded for Crossrail 2, and that the applicant needs to futureproof the site in case Crossrail 2 goes ahead by incorporating essential infrastructure into the design. However, by constructing that infrastructure before any Crossrail 2 Bill is put before Parliament, local people are being cheated of the opportunity to petition Parliament before any works begin. They are also being deprived of the kind of protections given in both the Crossrail 1 and HS2 Bills, including noise insulation to those living closest to construction sites. Those residents living closest to the site, in Levita House, Hadstock House and Chamberlain House, will be considerably disadvantaged by the application. Similarly, spoil from the site will have to be removed by road and not through the tunnel, as envisaged during an earlier Crossrail 2 consultation, increasing congestion on roads and worsening local air quality.

### **Viability assessment**

From the viability assessment, the construction of Crossrail 2 infrastructure is costing £59.2M, meaning CIL and S106 payments are massively less than they should be for a development of this size. Whilst Crossrail 2 may bring advantages to the city as a whole, it does little for Somers Town. The idea that our deprived community should receive a massively reduced CIL and s106 offer for this development, which will last a decade and put pressure on existing roads, parks, estates and services, is manifestly unfair. The fact that there is no housing on site and a much-reduced pot to fund housing elsewhere is a double impact that ignores local priorities and does nothing to address local homelessness and overcrowding. At the very least, there need to be clawback measures from central and city government should Crossrail 2 go ahead.

### **Design**

The development doesn't appear to respond to its local context, and instead looks like a large office complex that will occupy Midland Road, leaving little space and dominating the existing library. We welcome that the building is set back on its western edge, but the building's height and design will increase a feeling of being "hemmed in" along Ossulston Street.

### **Heritage, townscape and views**

The application doesn't appear to respond to its local context and will have a negative impact on the exceptional group of listed buildings in the area: The British Library (grade I), St Pancras Station and Midland Grand Hotel (Grade I) and Ossulston Estate (Grade II). Important skylines will be lost – we are particularly concerned about the Levita House skyline – as well as local views in and around the estates. We note that there is no plan for artefacts unearthed during any construction, and ask that, should the development go ahead, a relationship is developed with the recently opened Museum in Somers Town so that discoveries can be shared to give life to our understanding of local history.

### **Overshadowing and light**

There is an assumption that light loss within homes on Ossulston Street will not be too bad as living rooms come off walkways and are already overshadowed. This is not true of many living rooms in Levita and Chamberlain houses that are likely to lose light, and it is certainly not true of Hadstock House. Residents are concerned about loss of daylight, but they also fear they may be kept awake at night by lights in the new development.

### **Landscape and public realm**

This development is happening at a time when Euston has seen unprecedented local losses of public open space, both temporary and permanent. It is disappointing that the planning application didn't show the losses to the west of Somers Town, of Euston Square Gardens and St James's Gardens, for example, that have put so much pressure on remaining open spaces. As a meanwhile use, the Story Garden has become a much-needed refuge for people, plants and wildlife, particularly during the later lockdowns. It is also a knowledge resource for local gardeners and a source of fresh food. Its loss will be felt keenly, and all measures to mitigate that loss should be explored, through local greening and gardening projects, and perhaps a new "pop up garden" in Somers Town during construction. We welcome the community garden at the western end of the development and are keen to understand how it would develop and be managed.

There are mixed views about the new landscape and public realm. We welcome new spaces to recreate and planting for increased biodiversity, but we are concerned about how the public realm will be managed. There is a balance between designing out antisocial behaviour and spaces being open and welcoming to local people. We were very frustrated that for much of the pandemic the existing library piazza was shut as it is the nearest public open space for thousands of people in south Somers Town. This experience has highlighted the need for all public open spaces in the development to be identified and a management plan put in place to ensure that they are accessible to the public daily.

There is a need to mitigate against construction impacts along Ossulston Street, with new planting within the Ossulston Estate, particularly the eastern edges and the north courtyard of Levita House.

### **Transport**

We welcome the reduction of car parking spaces at the library and the priority given for wheelchair-accessible car parking. We are concerned that on-street parking will be lost on Ossulston Street to make way for a new car parking area within the library complex. The drop off point off Midland Road seems unnecessary and dangerous, given that drivers will have to cross the CS6 cycle lane counterflow. Any off-road drop-off point is likely to be used by station traffic (Ubers), particularly at night. There is a lost opportunity to improve Midland Road, and particularly the eastern edge of Midland Road, with this application. Coaches are likely to be hired to visit the new exhibition spaces and these should be planned for.

There will be a much-increased footfall east-west, with a “desire line” through Levita House courtyard. Residents would prefer commuters and station users to travel along Phoenix Road, and this should be signposted.

However, if Levita remains open to non-residents then this increased footfall should be mitigated against, for example by putting down sound-absorbing surfaces.

### **Operational management plan**

There is concern about night-time activity on site, including noise pollution from night-time events, and light pollution from night-time working. There are also concerns about security – will the public feel safe in the new public realm? Conversely, will private security guards make people feel uncomfortable, particularly if they are some of the more vulnerable people currently encouraged to leave the King’s Cross estate? We would like to be consulted on any operational management plan to ensure those coming and going late at night don’t disrupt local residents.

### **Construction management plan**

We are gravely concerned about Ossulston Street being used for construction traffic. This is a residential road and a cycle quietway. Whilst we understand that occasionally and later in the programme construction vehicles may need to access the site via Ossulston Street, this should be by exception, residents should be warned in advance via newsletter and, if Brill Place is opened up, it should be for the vehicle only and manned at all times. We cannot open up roads and invite rat-running into our community. Working hours are also a concern, as is air and noise pollution (see below). The neighbourhood forum and Ossulston TRA would like to be included on any construction working group.

### **Cumulative impact**

It was disappointing to see no mention of HS2 in the planning application documents. The works in and around Euston Station are having an enormous impact on our community, in terms of noise and air pollution, traffic and disruption, and loss of space including open space. They should have been taken into consideration and need to appear in any future construction management plan.

### **Social value**

We welcome the social compact that encourages future occupiers of the site to make a positive contribution to Somers Town, including creating new educational, jobs and training opportunities, enhancing the health and wellbeing of the community, and encouraging wider community participation and inclusion in local initiatives, and supporting the creation and maintenance of accessible and sustainable spaces. It is important that this work begins during the construction phase of the project, should planning permission be granted. There is a need to support those who perhaps did not do well at school but who have lots to offer with jobs and training opportunities.

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