



24 November 2022

2021/2954/P One Museum Street

## OBJECTION by Bloomsbury Residents Action Group

### Introduction

The Bloomsbury Residents Action Group was formed in 2016 to remind decision makers that the concerns and aspirations of residents' "matter". Our area of engagement with local people comprises the three wards of South Camden, in particular the historic streets and squares south of the Euston Road.

We fully support the detailed, well-researched, professional work that has been carried out by the Save Museum Street campaign group to justify their ongoing objection to the current proposals for the redevelopment of Selkirk House. The owners may have changed, but the principle of development in this location is still fundamentally unsound.

### Sustainability

In 2019 Camden Council declared a climate and ecological emergency. It is inconsistent with these well publicised intentions to permit the demolition and reconstruction of a building whose scale and massing is much greater than the existing Travelodge tower and whose impact on the local community is completely unsustainable.

Where is the option to refurbish, to retrofit for a purpose more suitable for the existing building?

The existing tower is only 55 years old, a mere 'child' in the context of neighbouring Georgian and Victorian buildings that create the historic context of the site. To actively promote demolition seems absurd.

### Residential Need

In this One Museum Street application, in order to justify significant uplift (the proposed building being 74m high, an increase of 21m) we understand 18 homes will be demolished to be replaced by a total of 48, i.e. what is actually only 30 'additional' homes. These include 9 for social rent and 9 so-called "affordable", the rest being allocated for market sale.

This may go a little way to fulfilling Camden's 'mixed use' policy - but is this sufficient in the context of acknowledged residential need? At a planning committee meeting for another site, (105 Judd Street, the former RNIB building) Councillor Danny Beales pointed out *"the desperate need for affordable housing south of the Euston Road."*

### The Future of Work

Why create a brand-new office block on this massive scale? Where is the justification, the real **need**? Don't forget the tower at Centre Point was built for office use, a short distance away. In less than ten years (2015-2018) it was converted to residential flats.

The world of work has changed. The pandemic has shifted expectations of how and when we work. And, in particular: WHERE. The 'Future of Work' is now the focus of debate in many countries.

### **Respect for heritage**

The hugely important Bloomsbury Conservation Area was first designated in 1968, just a year after conservation areas were created with the Civic Amenities Act 1967. Bloomsbury is so often referred to as an internationally significant example of town planning, with its garden squares, Georgian terraces, and grand, world-famous buildings such as the British Museum. Residents matter, but heritage matters too.

The proposed new tower will be clearly visible from the steps of the British Museum, however cleverly the designers try to manipulate the computer-generated images. It will be equally visible from historic Drury Lane, and provide a grotesque background to the Shaftesbury Theatre, a popular tourist venue built in 1911. It will create an incongruous symbol of 21st century aggrandisement in the context of historic fine grain streets that make up most of the nearby urban landscape.

### **Residential Amenity**

The lengthy demolition and construction process, including the presence of construction traffic negotiating its way through local streets will have a huge negative impact on the health, well-being and quality of life of the many residents who live nearby.

Camden has been running a 'Safer streets for schools programme', removing motor vehicles from certain streets; many streets are now cut off to reduce through traffic; Camden promotes active travel, with residents urged to walk or cycle. Yet, in the same breath, more and more large-scale developments are receiving planning permission whose demolition and construction require a flow of HGVs and articulated lorries. Construction materials do not get delivered by cargo bike.

It is these inconsistencies of approach to local roads which lead to residents' cynicism and despair.

### **What about the impact on tourism?**

In this vibrant part of central London, tourists rub shoulders with residents on a daily basis: they too will be inconvenienced. As London's theatres and commercial enterprises struggle to gain momentum following the Pandemic Years, is making such an important part of the West End an ugly building site for years, really such a good idea?

### **Conclusion**

Should the development go ahead in its current form, the question will be asked in years to come. How was this possibly allowed? And why?

We trust that Camden Officers' and Members have enough common sense and integrity to see for themselves that the developer's justification for demolition and rebuild for office accommodation, on this scale, in this location, is simply not acceptable in an age of austerity, in an age of climate change, in an age when residents matter.

BRAG objects strongly to the proposal.

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