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bloomsburylives.co.uk

23rd September 2020

2020/3881/P

Gavin Sexton
LB Camden
5 Pancras Square
King's Cross
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N1C 4AG

Consultation response for the total redevelopment of Belgrove House: demolition of existing building and replacement with part five, part ten storey mixed use development.

The BCAAC have been engaging with the developer and LB Camden on this highly important development since the pre-consultation period began earlier this year. We have given detailed and thorough feedback on this application but it is clear that despite this, the application is not materially different from the initial application and for this reason, we **object** in the strongest possible terms.

The principal causes for concern are the **scale** and **design** of the proposed development.

Scale

As reiterated by ourselves, the Victorian Society, the Georgian Group, and LB Camden officers, the site is characterised by the scale of the Grade I listed stations towering over the smaller scale development to the south, which is predominantly of **three to six storeys**. Despite the scale of Euston Road to the west being much larger on occasion, the immediate context of the site acts as a 'gateway' to the smaller scale development of Gray's Inn Road, King's Cross Road, and Argyle Square, while providing an appropriate setting for the grand stations to the north. Belgrove House is immediately surrounded to the west, east, and south by predominantly Georgian and early Victorian terraced development, of **three to six storeys**. For this reason, the proposed scale, of **part ten storeys** and **part five storeys** is inappropriate, and causes harm both to the historic environment and the wider townscape as a whole. The argument that this is an appropriate site for a 'marker building' we find to be unconvincing, given the above arguments.

Design

The exceptional prominence of this site calls for a building of the very highest architectural quality. On all sides the site is surrounded by national and international exemplars of particular forms of

development throughout the past two centuries, including King's Cross Station, St Pancras Station, Argyle Square, and the British Library to the west. Any comprehensive redevelopment of the site should aim for nothing less than a **future Grade I listing** for architectural significance. However, as expressed by ourselves, the Victorian Society, Georgian Group, and Camden's own Design Review Panel, the 'heroic' nature of the architecture employed is not subservient to the surrounding area, and pays no regard to the surrounding historic landscape, or wider townscape. For this reason, we find the design of the development to be inappropriate, and to cause harm to the historic environment.

Conclusion

In our view, **this development fails every test which should be applied to any development in a conservation area**, and is perhaps the most harmful development we have seen proposed for our conservation areas over the 52 years of our service. Given the exceptional significance of the site and the status of the conservation areas affected, this failure should be afforded particular weight. It is clear however that the development team have adopted a strategy of undermining commitments to the historic environment while emphasising the public benefits of the proposals, to outweigh the harm caused to heritage. While this strategy may be judged to be acceptable in law and policy, it is our view that it is an irresponsible and outdated approach to planning, and one which should be strongly discouraged by LB Camden. While it is not our place to judge the public benefits of development proposals, we see no clear reason why such a significant amount of harm should be permitted in this case.

Recommendation

Given the above points, and the number of points raised in the preapplication advice which we gave, our recommendation is strongly that this application be **refused**.

Bloomsbury Conservation Areas
Advisory Committee

23rd September 2020

Widespread concern regarding development proposals at Belgrove House

We write regarding the highly concerning nature of development proposals at Belgrove House on Euston Road, opposite King's Cross Square.

The site is of national significance, being one of the most historically and architecturally sensitive sites in London, and certainly in Camden. Development proposals here should be a national exemplar in terms of contextual and sympathetic design in the historic environment.

However the development proposals as they stand are of an entirely inappropriate scale and design, causing significant harm to numerous aspects of the historic environment.

It is clear to us following the Development Management Forum held on the 25th June 2020 that the developer plans to ignore heritage concerns in favour of pushing the public benefits of the proposal. It was explicitly stated that the scale seeks to imitate the number of large scale inappropriate modern buildings along Euston Road, while the design pays no regard to the architectural context because it '*represents the tech revolution, just as the stations represented the industrial revolution*'.

We are calling for a significant redesign of the proposal. In line with Camden's draft policies for the site, the development should be of three to six storeys, informed by a robust understanding of the historic environment.

The possibility of retaining and refurbishing the existing building should be explored, considering it makes a positive contribution to the conservation area and has clear ties to the history and architecture of the wider area. A sensitive roof extension could better reveal the architectural quality of the existing building, while removal of the blocked-up coach entrances along the side streets would add activity to the area, thereby improving public safety issues and better revealing the significance of the existing building.

We along with other local and national interest groups are willing to open a dialogue with Camden and the developers on the proposals if they are willing to consider a redesign.

Owen Ward
Bloomsbury CAAC

Bill Reed
Friends of Argyle Square

Debbie Radcliffe
Bloomsbury Residents' Action Group

Matilda Harden
The Georgian Group

Stephen Heath
Bloomsbury Association

Ernest James
King's Cross CAAC



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12th August 2020

Belgrove & Acorn Houses

Gavin Sexton
LB Camden
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Final response to pre-consultation on Belgrove and Acorn Houses before application submitted.

Dear Mr Sexton,

During the initial stages of pre-consultation on these proposals, the BCAAC wrote a short criticism of Belgrove House and Acorn House, hoping to refine the design of Acorn House, and to reign in the scheme at Belgrove House which was clearly of an inappropriate scale and design.

Following a lack of engagement from the developer, we wrote an extensive six page critique of Belgrove House in conjunction with Friends of Argyle Square. We also signed a petition calling for a redesign of Belgrove House, with five other key groups, including the Georgian Group.

We conducted our own research into the history of Belgrove House revealing a significantly new perspective on its historical importance, overlooked by the developers and LB Camden, therefore helping all involved to better understand the historic context of this site.

We also engaged the Victorian Society and the Georgian Group with pre-consultation discussions as they had not been notified by the developer about their proposals.

We also engaged with the developer during their Development Management Forum.

Following this, we have now been presented with the 'refined' proposals which are in no way materially different from those initially presented to us. We therefore still hold to our original objections to this application.

Bloomsbury Conservation Areas
Advisory Committee

12th August 2020



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22nd June 2020

Gavin Sexton
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Full objection to development plans at Belgrove House.

This objection has been prepared by the BCAAC in conjunction with other local groups, including the King's Cross CAAC and Friends of Argyle Square.

This objection goes into considerable detail, and will form the basis of any further objections made to this development. We hope this objection can influence the development proposals at a formative stage.

Executive Summary

This site is one of the most historically and architecturally sensitive sites in London, and certainly in Camden. While the scale of Euston Road is predominantly large and modern, the fact that it is modern means that this does not provide an historic context for large scale development on the site. The area immediately to the south of the stations surrounding the site has historically been of a small scale, typically of three to six storeys, and a fine urban grain. The stations to the north of the site were deliberately designed to tower over their surroundings, providing a focal point in the historic landscape and a dramatic step up in scale from south to north. There are a number of unifying elements in the area, including materials, vertical hierarchy, vertical emphasis, solid-to-void ratio, and strong relationship to the street.

The proposed development does not pay any regard to this context, looking only to modern and historically detrimental development along Euston Road to justify a dramatic increase in height, while ignoring the proper historic context. The decision to take precedent from development which causes harm to the historic environment will clearly lead to development which itself is detrimental. Our main concern relates to this dramatic increase in scale. An increase in scale of the proposed extent would diminish the special character of all the immediately surrounding heritage assets. It would diminish the setting of King's Cross and St Pancras stations, would dwarf the immediately surrounding buildings to the west and east, and cause significant disruption to the Georgian uniformity of Argyle Square to the south, while blocking some of the last views of the stations from Bloomsbury. The design response also fails to take any cues from the historic environment, and in our view would be a poor addition to any area, and would therefore be especially harmful to this particularly sensitive site.

Our immediate recommendation is that the scale of the development be reduced to the recommended three to six storeys contained in Camden's own draft policy for the site. Given the highly sensitive setting, the design response should be an exemplar of contextual design, drawing from the local materials, vertical hierarchy, vertical emphasis, solid-to-void ratio, and strong relationship to the street, which are all a number of unifying elements of historic development in the area.

The Site

Belgrave House

Belgrave House is the current name for the former King's Cross Coach Station, built c.1930 to serve commuters at King's Cross and St Pancras. Initially intended to be of six storeys with a link to the stations for convenience, the final building was of two storeys, with multiple entrances and exits along the side elevations for coaches to arrive and depart. The main pedestrian entrance was on Euston Road, with a more detailed architectural treatment on this façade to match its significance. Office spaces were provided on the second floor. The design has clear Art Deco influences and is not dissimilar from nearby contemporaneous buildings in its appearance and use of dark red brick, Portland stone, and steel-framed windows. Two nearby examples are the BT Openreach building at 123 Judd Street, and Clare Court, also on Judd Street.

Most likely after the building ceased operations as a coach station in the 1950s the large entrances which punctuated the side elevations were bricked up, and a single opening on each side was reduced in height but remained open. This has led to a rather bleak appearance on Crestfield and Belgrave Streets. Over years the building has diminished in appearance through neglect with the King's Cross CA Appraisal noting in 2011 the front façade being blighted by inappropriate signage, which still remains in 2020. Despite this diminishment in appearance, the building has clear historical and architectural links to the surrounding area, particularly the defining characteristic of this area which is that of a major transport interchange. It therefore clearly contributes positively to the special character of the area, although a significant error in the King's Cross Appraisal means that it is not listed on the positive contributors list.

Context

The site falls within the King's Cross Conservation Area, and is surrounded to the rear by the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. These are two conservation areas of high significance, reflected in their early designation dates and high proportion of listed buildings. In particular, the area to the rear of the site forms part of the original designation of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area of 1968, making it particularly significant.

The rear of Belgrave House faces directly onto Argyle Square, a largely intact Georgian square. On all sides except the north it is surrounded by full Georgian terraces in good condition, characterised by consistent materials, plot-width, vertical hierarchy, vertical emphasis, proportion, parapet lines, and relationship to the street. The terraces are all of three to five storeys, with an open basement and railings demarcating the plot boundaries. These railings match those of the square itself in appearance. The roofscape of these terraces is also of note as it has been preserved remarkably well, with butterfly roof forms and slate tiling, expressed party walls, chimney stacks and chimney pots. All these features are mentioned as being of note in the Bloomsbury CA Appraisal, and contribute to a striking uniformity around the square. Argyle Square ranks among the most well-preserved Georgian squares in Bloomsbury as a result, and this is reflected in the Grade II listing of all terraces around the square. All buildings are currently in hospitality or residential use.

Argyle Square itself is a fairly small Georgian square, with the open green space and trees providing a welcome break from the surrounding dense urban environment. There is an important view of the St Pancras clock tower looking north from the square, and glimpses of King's Cross Station down Crestfield Street.

Belgrave House contributes neutrally to this environment. Its rear elevation is of no note with a very plain and unremarkable architectural treatment. However its scale and materials are appropriate, helping it to sit comfortably in this context.

The Georgian uniformity of Argyle Square extends along the sides of Belgrave House before stopping short of Euston Road, with a small interruption at the southern end of Belgrave Street with a later larger scale building which sits comfortably in its context. The scale of building as one approaches Euston Road remains fairly consistent at three to six storeys although the architectural treatment departs from the uniformity of Argyle Square, with stucco and paint introduced with a particularly flamboyant frontage to the west of Belgrave House. This increase in architectural detail reflects the greater importance of the facades facing onto the historically busy Euston Road. Belgrave House itself contributes neutrally to this environment, with its side elevations earlier noted as being bleak due to the entrances being bricked up.

As one arrives at Euston Road from the south there is a dramatic step-up in scale with the stations of St Pancras and King's Cross dominating the skyline, providing a strong contrast from the character of restrained Georgian uniformity to Victorian confidence and exuberance. The two stations, by means of their immense scale, architectural quality, and strong relationship to the street, coupled with the relatively open space before them provide a rare sense of immensity and gravity. The stations were deliberately designed to have such an architectural effect, reflecting Victorian confidence, self-assurance, and enthusiasm for the 'Steam Age' and steam travel. When built, they towered over the area to the south, which still largely comprised three to five storey Georgian terracing.

The St Pancras clock tower is a particular feature, with the highly ornate Gothic revival treatment of the entire building being particularly of note. One of Gilbert 'Great' Scott's most well-known buildings, it is the only Gothic revival station built in London, and ranks among one of the most impressive and largest Gothic revival buildings in London, and certainly in Camden. Its high significance is recognised in its Grade I listing and sensitive restoration carried out in recent years.

King's Cross station, constructed some ten years earlier, represents London's simplest and most restrained architectural treatment for a railway terminus. Designed by the Cubitt brothers, who also contributed to significant tranches of Bloomsbury's development, its restrained and functional classical appearance derives its design from the earlier railway termini in Paris, whose train sheds were expressed on the facade (particularly the Gare du Nord constructed in 1846). Its high significance is also reflected in its Grade I listing.

The architectural quality and scale of these buildings combine to create a world-class architectural impression on King's Cross Square and the surrounding area. Their large scale as compared to buildings to the south provide important views of the stations from miles around, with glimpses of the St Pancras clock tower afforded from a number of sites in the Bloomsbury Conservation Area.

Belgrave House itself sits comfortably in this context. The buildings to its immediate west and east are of a small scale, three to six storeys, largely reflecting the scale of the original development in the area. The facade is restrained and classical, with clear Art Deco influences. The only contrast is provided by the departure in plot width - Belgrave House occupies an entire block, whereas the surrounding buildings comprise plot widths of about five metres. This horizontal emphasis makes the building appear a little stout, but is remedied by the vertical emphasis provided by the facade's architectural treatment.

The contrast in scale from the south of Euston Road to the north in this location is a particular feature, and a reminder of the original architectural effect that the scale of the stations had upon the surrounding area. While all along Euston Road there has been a strong and often inappropriate tendency to build upwards, this corner of Euston Road has retained a surprising tranche of small scale development providing an appropriate setting for the stations to the north, and an appropriate step-down in scale from Euston Road to the predominantly small scale King's Cross and Gray's Inn Roads to the east.

Looking farther, the main detractor from the historic appearance of the immediate area is the Standard Hotel, which along with its rooftop extension presents an unwelcome intrusion into the historic environment. Its scale is entirely inappropriate considering the predominant scale of development to the south of Euston Road, and its unremarkable massing, lack of detailing and architectural quality, and bright white concrete facade significantly diminish the historic appearance of the area. The large building blocks many important views from the Bloomsbury Conservation Area towards St Pancras and King's Cross stations, which has only been further exacerbated by the recent rooftop extension. The scale of this building entirely dwarves its immediate neighbours, and competes in an unwelcome face-off with St Pancras station to the north.

Overall, the area surrounding the site represents one of London's most important but also varied historic landscapes, and presents a unique challenge for an appropriate contextual design. The contrast between the fine and densely developed urban grain to the south of Euston Road with the dramatic scale-up to the north is a particular feature, especially emphasising the drama of the Gothic facade of St Pancras. Views of King's Cross and St Pancras from the surrounding area are particularly important, many of these being from surrounding buildings and not only from the public realm, and to the south, west, and east extend many miles. The space created by the presence of the Grade I listed stations is one of the most important in London and would no doubt be an important and popular public space if it were not for the unfortunate blight of traffic on Euston Road, and to some extent the presence of the Standard Hotel.

The area is host to a number of different uses. To the north, the railway stations dominate the scene and are an essential feature of the area. To the south, the uses are mainly hospitality and residential. Argyle Square itself is mainly in hospitality use, while further to the west, east, and south of Argyle Square lie predominantly residential uses.

There are also some commercial uses at street level along Euston Road itself, and the nearby Gray's Inn and King's Cross Roads.

The Proposal

The proposal is to demolish Belgrave House and construct a ten-storey office block, of a similar scale to the Standard Hotel, which steps down to four storeys at the rear on Argyle Square.

The decision to demolish Belgrave House should not be taken lightly. It is an historic building with clear architectural and historic links to this area, and sits comfortably in its context. Our preferred option would be that of a sensitive restoration and possible rooftop extension, which would represent the most historically respectful and sustainable development of the site.

However the proposed development, in our view, fails every test which should be applied to any development in a conservation area. This failure should be taken with especial gravity given the nationally significant conservation areas which the site falls within.

Scale

The scale of the building is entirely inappropriate given the historic context. It is the inappropriate scale of the building which is of most concern to us.

The area to the south of Euston Road surrounding the site has historically always been of a small scale, and a fine urban grain. The only exception to this rule in the immediate locale is later inappropriate post-war development, such as that represented by the Standard Hotel. While the Standard Hotel indeed represents large-scale development and a precedent of sorts, it does not represent any sort of *historic* context or precedent, as indeed it detracts from the

historic environment by means of its scale. It is therefore quite clear that to take precedent from a building which detracts from the historic environment will lead to a building which itself detracts from the historic environment.

Not only does the scale of the building in itself represent a dramatic departure from the historic context, but it would also block important views from the Bloomsbury Conservation Area towards the stations to the north. From Argyle Square a view of the St Pancras clock tower would be lost, while views of the stations from nearby housing blocks would also be lost. These are extremely valuable and should not be parted with lightly, for once they are lost it is very unlikely they will ever be regained.

The important historic environment afforded by King's Cross Square would also be diminished. The most important historic feature of the square is the dominance of the Grade I listed stations upon it, while buildings to the south are all of a small and fairly insignificant scale in comparison. The openness to the south is also an important historic feature of this area, providing the necessary contrast to emphasise the enclosure afforded by the immense scale of the stations. However the proposed building appears to be of a greater height than King's Cross station, and would therefore also compete for height with St Pancras. This would significantly diminish the architectural effect of these stations - indeed the main architectural effect that these stations were designed to achieve - and therefore diminish the setting of these Grade I listed heritage assets, and the architectural importance of King's Cross square.

While the building steps down in height to the rear to better relate to the scale of development on Argyle Square, the proposals appear to still be of too great a height. We would ideally expect any development to follow the consistent parapet line of the Georgian terraces. The side elevations, while at the rear are of four storeys, for the northern half are still of ten storeys, significantly overshadowing and entirely dwarfing development upon these streets, some of which is Grade II listed Georgian.

Design

The design of the building is inappropriate and fails to take any precedent from the historic environment. It is clear from our long experience with development in our conservation areas that the design is one of the most historically intrusive to date, and would present a significant disruption to the historic landscape of the area.

The most important features which we take into account in the design of a new development are:

- Materials
- Massing
- Solid-to-void ratio
- Vertical hierarchy
- Plot width
- Relationship to the street
- Vertical emphasis
- Roofscape
- Proportions

The proposals fail on all of these points, and fall so far wide of the mark that it is difficult to offer more detailed criticism on what exactly is problematic.

The facades appear to be mainly of glass and steel, with some stock brick. The overwhelming impression is that of a glass block - for which no precedent can be found in the environment, not even that from nearby negative development. The solid-to-void ratio is therefore entirely inappropriate, both for the historic environment and the wider environment itself.

Every building in the historic environment is built mainly in brick, perhaps with some stucco, with small and regular openings for windows. The surrounding terraces from which this building should take precedent follow a vertical hierarchy of window openings with height signifying the varying importance of different storeys. The proposal however does not offer any sort of vertical hierarchy and is essentially a monolithic glass structure with brick used as a feature, entirely inverting the precedent set by the historic environment.

The building entirely fails to take into account the vertical emphasis and plot widths of the surrounding terraces, the frontage onto Argyle Square essentially being one large horizontal glass wall.

The building fails to relate appropriately to the street given the historic context. Every historic building in the area is set back from the street with a basement level and railings, while the ground floor level is given a stronger architectural treatment - usually in stucco or stone. The proposed development however again simply offers a glass wall to the street.

The building fails to take into account any precedent set by the historic environment, and makes absolutely no reference to the important heritage assets by which it is surrounded.

It is also an important point that this building is visually very displeasing. Development in Bloomsbury to the south is famed for being beautiful, while King's Cross and St Pancras rank among some of the most aesthetic buildings in the capital. The proposed development, simply put, is ugly, and would disrupt the architectural landscape significantly as a result. The starting point for the design of any building in this location should be to reflect the beauty of the surrounding architecture, rather than to contrast with it.

We would also question the proposed use of this building. It appears that the developers are proposing a '*life-sciences laboratory-enabled*' office block. While Bloomsbury is well-known for its scientific 'knowledge quarter' uses, these uses are clustered around Gower Street, characterised by UCL and the British Museum. Further health-related research use is found around Queen Square and on Great Ormond Street. These areas are some distance from the site of Belgrove House, and cannot be argued to fall within its immediate context.

The site itself is characterised by hospitality uses to the south, with some residential uses further afield, and the stations to the north. While the British Library can be found further to the west and the Francis Crick Institute to the north-west, these simply cannot be argued to fall within the immediate context of the site. Furthermore, those sites represent much more recent development, and so their uses cannot be argued to relate to the historic uses in the area.

The proposed use of the building therefore also fails to take into account the immediate context of the site, and certainly fails to take into account the historic context of the site.

In total, we would judge this development to significantly diminish the special character and appearance of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area and surrounding heritage assets.

Conclusion

The development fails to pay any regard to the context of the site, historic or not. While the developer claims to seek to respond to the scale of the stations to the north and the Standard Hotel to the west, it is quite clear that the developer is simply intent on building as big as possible, and makes reference to these buildings only in a post-hoc manner. The context of the site is clear, and there are no links which we can see between the proposed development and this context.

And while the spurious claim has been made that the proper context is modern development along the stretch of Euston Road far to the west, it is not reasonable to cherry-pick context simply to justify a dramatic increase in scale. The primary context for the site is King's Cross Square to the north, and Argyle Square to the south. These are two high quality historic environments, in stark contrast to the low quality modern environments represented by development further west on Euston Road. Allowing the developer to take precedent from poor quality development will clearly lead to further poor quality development in the area, creating a disruption to the high quality environment which the site finds itself within.

King's Cross Square also acts as a gateway from the large scale Euston Road to the west, to the small scale Gray's Inn and King's Cross Roads to the east. The small scale development surrounding the site provides an appropriate step down in scale to these roads, and so to permit a dramatic increase in scale here would disrupt this transition in scale and could set an unwelcome precedent for further large scale development in this area and further east.

We would therefore strongly recommend that the scale of this building is decreased. Precedent should be taken from the predominantly three to six storeys of the immediate historic context, as recommended by the draft policy for the site.

There are also many examples throughout London of excellent contextual design for development within sensitive historic settings, from which this development could take inspiration. The design of the British Library to the west is a notable example, while Portcullis House to the north of the Palace of Westminster is another excellent and appropriate example of contextual design in a highly sensitive setting. The UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies is another notable example of contextual design within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area.

We sincerely hope that the developer can heed our advice and take a much greater account of the historic environment.

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22nd May 2020

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Our response to the initial pre-consultation for redevelopment of Belgrove House and Acorn House.

The BCAAC is the advisory committee for Camden's Central London conservation areas, with the exception of Hatton Garden. This application concerns a large redevelopment scheme at Belgrove House, on the border of Subarea 13 (King's Cross) of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area, and redevelopment at Acorn House, within Subarea 14 (Calthorpe Estate) of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area.

We would first like to express our disappointment at the decision taken by the applicant to begin consultation at such a late stage. We are an expert committee which has been advising on developments since the designation of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area in 1968, and as such we do not spend time engaging in token consultation exercises where a development is presented to us as a *fait accompli*. Our role is to engage with applicants at a formative stage of proposals.

Belgrave House

The proposed redevelopment of Belgrove House is entirely inappropriate for this extremely sensitive historic site in terms of its appearance. To the south lies one of Bloomsbury's most well-preserved Georgian squares, while to the north lies one of the most architecturally significant places in London, and certainly in Camden. Redevelopment of this site should be *exemplary* in terms of contextual design within the historic environment.

Our view is that the proposed development is of an entirely inappropriate **scale** and **design**. The scale of the development in our opinion should certainly not exceed that of its immediate neighbours on all sides, and it should certainly not compete for height with the Grade I listed stations to the north. This still gives scope for intensification of use without causing harm to the historic environment. It appears that the current building is of a similar height to King's Cross Station, which in our view is entirely inappropriate.

The architectural quality of the development is in our opinion poor and fails to pay any regard to the historic environment. Given the setting of this development, the architectural response should be of an exemplary standard, and should be entirely

subservient to its historic neighbours. In our view, it fails to pass any of the tests which should be applied to *any* development in a conservation area, never mind to this sensitive site bordering two of the most significant conservation areas in the country.

As the proposals currently stand, we cannot do anything but oppose this development. We sincerely hope that Camden can impress upon the developer the importance of the historic setting of this site and the need for an approach led by a robust understanding of the historic environment.

Acorn House

This site offers an excellent opportunity to enhance the Bloomsbury Conservation Area.

The proposed development appears to be far more appropriate in terms of scale than its cousin at Belgrave House, and we welcome its use as affordable housing. In terms of its design response we believe there is much to improve upon.

In keeping with the surroundings, we believe that higher storeys should be set back from the main façade to lessen the negative impact of the increased height. The solid-to-void ratio is appropriate, but the horizontal emphasis is not. Almost every building of note in the conservation area has a strongly vertical emphasis. The use of red brick we believe also clashes with the immediate surroundings where London Stock, stucco, and stone are the preferred materials.

In general the design response of the façade could be improved if it is to contribute positively to the area. In this regard, it should draw upon the symmetric nature of almost every building in the vicinity, and pay better regard to the proportions of its neighbour to the north. The ground floor could also have a stronger relationship to the street, a common feature of buildings in the conservation area.

If the developer could heed this advice, we would surely consider this development to make a positive contribution to the conservation area.

Conclusion

We believe that Acorn House requires some minor modifications for it to successfully enhance the conservation area, while Belgrave House requires significant rethought. We are not opposed to redevelopment and intensification of the site in principle, but the highly significant historic setting of this site must be a prime consideration in any redevelopment scheme.

Bloomsbury Conservation Areas

Advisory Committee

22nd May 2020