

2023/2510/P and 2023/2653/L ONE MUSEUM STREET

BCAAC OBJECTION TO CAMDEN. 27 July 2023, 19.37

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Dear David Fowler

Bloomsbury CAAC objects strongly to the application referenced by Camden's planners as 2023/2510/P and 2023/2653/L. This application treats two different sites as one entity, despite the fact there is little that links the buildings in question, other than ownership.

The Selkirk House tower was constructed in 1965, to become the headquarters of Trust House Forte. It is noteworthy that the Bloomsbury Conservation Area was designated in 1968, three years later, with the implication that Bloomsbury was, and remains, a very special area, significantly low-rise and with large numbers of important heritage buildings. The intention at the time was surely to prevent further tall buildings from destroying such an important area of central London.

Selkirk House lies on the very edge of the Bloomsbury CA, and near to the conservation areas of Covent Garden and Soho. The British Museum, St George's Church and Bedford Square, all Listed Grade 1, are close by. The applicant's decision to demolish and rebuild the tower with even greater height and mass shows total disregard to the immediate context of the historic urban neighbourhood.

The planning application includes proposals for the adjacent historic block bounded by New Oxford Street, Museum Street and West Central Street. Some of the buildings within this site have recently been given Grade II listed status. As with the tower, the proposals for these buildings are utterly insensitive to their historic setting.

Camden's own document, [Bloomsbury Conservation Area Appraisal](#) refers to the buildings within West Central Street as being "*adjacent to the southern boundary of Bloomsbury Conservation Area*" and clearly states, "*the neighbouring buildings immediately outside the boundary are of a scale and design which harms the setting of these buildings and the wider Conservation Area.*" (5.128)

One of these buildings is Selkirk House.

There is no justification for compounding the harm by permitting the construction of a tower that is even larger and bigger than its predecessor, nor for the intensification of development of the adjacent historic block, lying as it does within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area.

There is in fact no justification for the demolition of Selkirk House at all, in view of the Secretary of State's recent judgment on the proposal for demolition and redevelopment of M&S in Oxford Street. Michael Gove refused permission largely based on heritage reasons, to which he gave significant weight, as well as embodied carbon impacts. Regarding the latter (meeting the challenge of climate change) NPPF paragraph 152 now means that there should be a strong presumption in favour of repurposing and reusing buildings. Where buildings are structurally sound and in a location with the highest accessibility levels, a strong reason would be needed to justify demolition and rebuilding.

Referring again to the Bloomsbury Conservation Area Appraisal, *"the Museum Street area has a very distinctive grain and street pattern consisting of a tight grid of streets containing small, intimately-scaled blocks of development. The area was developed in the later 17th century and retains its early street pattern."* (5.102)

This is the setting within which the application should be judged, along with cumulative harm and the negative impact on local distinctiveness.

We note the response by Historic England to another application site, further east in Judd Street:

"...substantially increasing the size of historic buildings set within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area, in order to accommodate demand for development, could bring a lot of incremental change to its character and appearance, such that it would risk cumulative harm to its significance."

It is only by refusing applications such as this at one Museum Street that Camden can prevent the cumulative harm caused by erosion of the character of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area, which is a large and highly significant historic place, and one of the most important in London.

The Advisory Committee urges Camden to refuse the application for demolition and rebuild of Selkirk House; and to insist that the alterations (including part demolition) to 10-12 Museum Street and 35 and 37 New Oxford Street are re-considered; in view of the unacceptable harm to the Bloomsbury Conservation Area, caused by increased height and over-intensification of the site.

Kind regards

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