

THE REGENTS NETWORK

secretary@regentsnetwork.org

St Pancras Hospital, London NW1 9PF

LB Camden Planning Application Ref: 2020/4825/P – OBJECT

MOORFIELDS NEW EYE HOSPITAL IN DISGUISE

The development is 'very large'. But it is also bulky and unappealing, and a gross dominating structure like this is not the sort of community building that would make people welcome, especially as it is a hospital which should be more familiar and an integral part of the community and neighbourhood.

It is most welcome to have a new eye hospital, and it is well past its time to move from City Road. It will be an important building and I think it should have the appearance and character to go with it, as a public building rather than just another unsightly pile.

And look what it does to the established Victorian brick buildings which are of heritage importance and characteristic of the Camden Town brick terraces.

Purpose built?

'Purpose built' only applies to the internal space of the proposed hospital – but not the external appearance which is a confusion and a put-off rather than a visual introduction to the use of the building – and with an invitation to enter. The profusion of conspicuous panels on the building exterior creates an uncomfortable and far too busy chequerboard appearance, when it should be more comfortable and steady.

I do not much like the excesses of the interior, and do not find it 'exciting'. However, I think it seems to be well enough set out and competently designed internally.

Out of scale

The locality has already been blighted by unsuitable and very ugly over-developments with 101-103 Camley Street, promoted very strongly by the LB Camden Council and their planners, and in direct opposition to the established borough planning requirements and the Local Plan. The Planning Department seems to have been out of reliable control, as their Draft Camley Street SPD 2020 also clearly demonstrates.

Bad example

The closest planned development to the Hospital is the Ted Baker proposed building. But the intended Ted Baker building cannot be used as an example – except as an example of what not to build, and for destroying the open space of the area and the Regents Canal – by contravening London's ALGG and many other planning policies, mainly to do with its bulk and height.

Anyway, the redevelopment of the Old Post Office will not be built for a very long time since Ted Baker went down the spout, sold the existing building and rented the building back for office use. It is seriously delayed, and if the application is resurrected in the future, a completely different scheme may result.

In any event, built or not, Ted Baker cannot be used as a model and a precedence, because precedence does not appear in any planning laws or policies. It is not a planning consideration, and each development must be determined on its merits, which are directed and controlled by planning policies. Anyway, precedence can be used in both ways – rather than a tall building means you can have more tall buildings, equally it could be said that if there are tall buildings then you have quite enough and do not need any more.

In this context, 'on its merits' clearly means that it should be in accordance with planning laws. It of course means that the conservation area policies and heritage issues must be closely followed. The proposed building must be in accordance with all planning considerations including the NPPF, the London Plan,



environmental policies and the like, as well as the Camden Local Plan. And LB Camden Planning must not go out on a limb in their current wayward manner, but comply with their requirements as public officers to serve the public and community. It looks very much like the applicants for the hospital may have been seriously misled by LB Camden, and encouraged to plan an overdevelopment of their Camden Town site.

More than Development Creep

The St Pancras Hospital site is NOT in an Opportunity Area, and is widely separated from the Kings Cross Opportunity Area where urban regeneration is more extensive, by embankments and many railway lines connecting Kings Cross and St Pancras stations. The appearance of bulky multi storey buildings thrust across the wide divide into the Regents Canal Conservation Area and dominating St Pancras Hospital heritage site is most disturbing, and very difficult to justify – especially the malign 101-103 Camley Street developments as well as the possible overdevelopment of the Ted Baker Site.

This is characterised (although not under control by LB Camden) as Development Creep which in many other circumstances is frowned upon and solidly rejected in planning terms.

There is even an outline in this application of an excessively tall Kings Cross Central building placed next to the proposed Eye Hospital development in a deliberate attempt to justify that very large out-of-place buildings should be accepted in this protected and heritage area of Camden Town.

This non-existent phantom building is more than development creep, and is blatantly subversive. What a deception!

Quality of life

The special local character and heritage of this section of Camden Town is being ruined by overdevelopment and clutter of unsuitable structures, and the loss of openness and community. Soon Camden Town will no longer be described as a neighbourhood if its character and scale are allowed to be transformed out of all recognition. Any development should have regard to the form, function and structure of an area (London Plan Policy 7.4), rather than being dismissed by developers, planners and investors (off-shore probably).

Visual Impact

I have scant regard for the Visual Impact Assessment report (from KM Heritage) in the applicant's planning documents. I wish I had not read it – it is most uncomfortable and too disturbing.

In page after page of assessment of the visual effect and impact of the massive proposed building on the historic and heritage surroundings and the conservation areas, the conclusion by the consultants is “the magnitude of the cumulative effect with the scheme will be *Major*”.

However, it then adds in the next sentence in all cases that “the effect will be *Beneficial*” - which is unbelievable! How could the negative effect be said to be beneficial, unless the consultants are saying what the applicants have expected them to say.

This falsehood comes from so-called professional consultants staffed with well-paid personnel, who are of course highly trained, qualified, white collar experts, experienced and accomplished – like doctors? – and ophthalmologists!

This assessment report is so unprofessional, but all too common in planning applications with reports from ‘consultants’.

Conclusion

This application is for an inappropriate ‘eyesore’ – and does a disservice to Moorfields Eye Hospital.

DEL BRENNER
Regents Network and
associate of London Forum and Just Space and
member of the Regents Canal Conservation Area Committee

December 2020