



November 2023 Update from Save Museum Street

On the 16th November Camden Planning Committee will meet to decide whether developers can demolish the Travelodge block on the corner of Museum Street and High Holborn and replace it with a much taller and fatter office block tower, demolish historically important buildings, cut down ten trees and construct grossly substandard housing.

Every indication is that Camden's planning officers will recommend approval. Save Museum Street has campaigned relentlessly to combat this climate-destroying, unnecessary office development in the midst of the unique environment of Bloomsbury and Covent Garden, damaging views from the British Museum, St George's Church and Bedford Square.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- **Urgently write in to Camden objecting to the scheme** if you have not done so already. You **must** state the reference numbers **2023/2510/P** and **2023/2653/L** and email to planning@camden.gov.uk (or post to Development Management, Camden Town Hall, 5 Pancras Square N1C 4AG)
- **Write to Sadiq Khan, The Mayor of London** and insist that he should call in the application for his own consideration and refuse permission. Quote the GLA's ref: **GLA/2023/0478/S1/01** and email to mayor@london.gov.uk. or post to Sadiq Khan, Mayor of London City Hall, Kamal Chunchie Way, London E16 1ZE.
- **Come to the Planning Meeting on Thursday 16 November 7pm** and make Councillors know that there is a groundswell of opinion against the proposals. The meeting will be held at The Council Chamber, Camden Town Hall, 5 Judd St, WC1H 9JE. We need a good turn out.
- **Help with expenses** - however small, we would be very grateful. Your donations should be sent to: Account name: The Bloomsbury Association. Account no: 42053560. Sort code: 30-96-26. Reference 'Save Museum Street'.

The Main Arguments Against the Development

Retaining old buildings is commercially desirable

Covent Garden was threatened by a similar proposal 50 years ago: highways and office blocks would have smashed through the historic area and the Market Hall would now be a carpark rather than a successful tourist destination if local resistance had not defeated the developers' plans.

Climate Change

The 'knock it down and start again' approach is no longer tenable due to the massive amounts of CO2 emitted. As the dangers of global warming become more urgent this alone is reason to turn down the proposal.

Contravention of planning policies

Planning Policies are written to protect us and our environment. SMS has submitted an 86-page dossier to Camden outlining how the proposal disregards numerous conservation area, climate change, housing standards daylight, protected views etc policies. Developer's desires apparently are more important than planning policies.

Financially unviable

Several reports highlight the proposal's financial risks. When costs and interest rates rise, developers ditch their social housing commitments. The scheme has 11 poorly designed, substandard flats at social rents that will not be constructed for another 3/4 years. When costs rise, as they inevitably will, how likely is it that they will be removed from the proposal?

Our views are supported by key organisations qualified to critique this planning proposal. Here are some of their comments:

Historic England

“We have objected and provided a robust critique of the scheme....the proposals would harm the recently listed buildings and an alternative solution needs to be found that avoids harm to the exceptional character of this part of central London.”

Camden’s own senior conservation officer

“I agree (with SMS) that the existing Selkirk House (Travelodge) causes harm, the increase in height of the new proposals exacerbates this harm. I consider the demolition of 16a/18 West Central Street harmful to the character and appearance of the conservation area and the existing building is more historically appropriate in regards the immediate context than the proposals.”

Independent climate change assessor Hilson Moran (appointed by Camden)

“There is no evidence showing that (sustainability) issues cannot be overcome through appropriate design measures, it’s difficult to argue that the (developer’s) proposal that involves substantial demolition of buildings above ground, is justified in terms of optimisation of resources.”

Westminster City Council

“The proposed building will be highly visible from many vantage points. A key view affected is from Drury Lane. It is here where the development would appear monolithic against the more modestly scaled terraces in the foreground. Due to its height the development would negatively impact upon views from within, and the setting of the Covent Garden Conservation Area.”

Right of Light Consulting specialist

“The numerical results confirm that the vast majority of proposed residential units fall far below their recommended daylight and sunlight targets. Furthermore, around 50% severely underperform and do not achieve their natural daylight targets to any area within the rooms at all.”

Save Museum Street’s Achievements

- Getting six buildings on the site listed as Grade 2 (which means they are historically important, contributing to the townscape, should be protected)
- Creating an alternative design for the site that preserves the valuable Victorian architecture, refurbishes rather than demolishes the existing Travelodge and produces housing whose rooms have daylight
- Commissioning Simon Sturgis, the UK’s best sustainable building expert, to report on the proposal. ***His critical analysis is now endorsed by Camden’s own independent assessor.***

The developer’s illustration shows how damaging the development will be to its surroundings.

