

King's Cross Development Forum

Planning reference number 2011/4347/P

“Erection of a 7-storey building with basement to provide a hotel with 167 bedrooms (Class C1) with reception off Crestfield Street and ancillary bar/restaurant in basement; commercial floorspace on ground floor for flexible retail (Class A1), financial/professional services (Class A2) and restaurant/cafe (Class A3) uses on Euston Road frontage; 7 residential units (6 x 2 bed, 1 x 3-bed Class C3) on Birkenhead Street; plus associated highway and hard landscaping works (following the demolition of existing buildings).”

Response by the Forum

The King's Cross Development Forum is registering an objection and recommends that the plans be rejected. The Forum outlines the reasons for this below.

1. *Plan co-ordination.* There appears to be nothing in the planning application that relates to the Camden place shaping report "Shaping the future of the wider King's Cross area" or the plan for King's Cross Square. Moreover, the developer has made no attempt to engage with the public in developing their proposals. The planning application mentions "involvement in the Council's Development Control Forum held on 5th March 2006", almost six years ago. This is unacceptable for such an important site in the conservation area.

2. *Building height.* The building is much taller and bulkier than the surrounding buildings. It is described as having seven storeys, but these are the storeys above the ground floor; its near neighbours in Euston Road and Pentonville Road have between two and four storeys above the ground floor (including the mansards). The Camden Town Hall Annexe, cited by the developer as a precedent, is too far away to suggest a continuous line or to constitute part of King's Cross Square. There should be a consistent policy on building heights for this stretch of Euston Road that to relate any new building to the (currently lower) buildings nearby on the south and east sides of the Square, including the Islington part now regenerated in the highly successful "Regent's Quarter".

3. *Building set back.* The application mentions setting back the front of the building to accommodate an extra lane of road traffic. However, the plans show that with this extra lane the footway, which is already overcrowded, would be no wider than at present; it could even be narrower, as the application does not rule out seating or landscaping outside the hotel. Pedestrians would feel hemmed in by the overhanging upper storeys which, of course, would be counter to any attempt to give King's Cross Square an open aspect. By contrast, the footway to the west is about twice as wide and the footway to the east is about three times as wide (as observed in the Transport Appraisal). There is also

great concern about cyclist safety at the junction; yet the scheme as proposed would severely limit the scope for the better provision of cycle lanes.

4. *Building scale and massing.* The Design, Planning and Access Statement states that CABA has endorsed the scale and massing of the building; in fact CABA comments (under the heading “Scale and Massing” in a letter appended to the Design, Planning and Access Statement) “We questions whether the width of the pavement in front of the building will be sufficient for a building of this scale”. The Forum shares the view of CABA and suggests that any new building should be set back to the same extent as the buildings on either side. In that position it would still protrude beyond and above the upper storeys of the existing houses, so its financial viability should not be in doubt.

5. *Demolition of existing façades.* The planning application puts forward arguments for the non-viability of retaining the house façades and removing the single storey front extensions which were built over the front gardens and 'areas' of the original houses. The arguments have only been available on the Camden web site for a few days, but on a first examination they appear debatable, because:

- They assume a 10% yield, which is rather high. The valuers should be pressed as to why they have not used the much lower yields reported from the Regent's Quarter; the effect of doing so would be to increase the capitalisation value on the application site.
- They make rental assumptions that seem equally pessimistic. Again comparable figures should be drawn from the Regent's Quarter.
- They show an apparently arbitrary 'site value' of £7 million for the land.

6. *Replacement by new façades.* The Forum also echoes the words of CABA that “We are not convinced, from the information provided, that this concept will be successful and of sufficient quality appropriate to this prominent location opposite King’s Cross Station and within the King’s Cross Conservation Area”. If the eighteenth/nineteenth century houses are demolished they should at least be replaced by something worthy of the site.