

PLANNING APPLICATION PUBLIC COMMENT

Application number: PP/18/05313
Site Address: Heythrop College, 23-24 Kensington Square, LONDON, W8 5HH
Proposal: Reinstatement of three townhouses (Class C3), (part of 23 and 24 Kensington Square); refurbishment of college building (part of 23 Kensington Square) and use as an extra care facility (Class C2). Demolition of all other buildings on site. Erection of deck over adjacent London Underground line and construction of 5 buildings (ranging between 1 and 8 storeys in height) for use as an extra care facility including units, communal facilities and services areas, community hall and on-site affordable housing and associated access parking, servicing and landscaping. (MAJOR DEVELOPMENT)

Comment received: This proposal, which does not appear to be in any significant respect an improvement on the one that was withdrawn earlier, is objectionable on many levels.

The density of development is wildly excessive (3 times the existing floorspace on the site), and pays no heed to the over-supply of top-end luxury units in the vicinity (for instance, the Candy development on the corner of Victoria Road, which remains largely vacant), and no heed to the undesirability of developments which, even if fully sold, will be largely unoccupied for most of the average year.

In addition, this proposal includes a rather repulsive emphasis on health tourism, catered for by the 1-year lease option that has been devised to encourage this class of tenant.

The proposal embodies a cynical attempt to escape from regulations requiring affordable housing by way of a "Social & Community" exemption. Access to this loophole is achieved by cosmetic amounts of health-care provision, and extra-care luxury housing. At the same time, the low value social and community uses of the present arrangement are eliminated, such as the college and hall of residence. It was one of the conclusions of the planning consultation that a successful planning application would emphasise uses of this type, not expunge them.

It remains the case with this application, like its predecessor, that the ideas about traffic management in the demolition and construction phases are contemptuously negligent of the impact on the neighbourhood. We are dealing here with a period of 5 years or more, in which it is proposed that 60 heavy trucks will run daily in and out of a long and narrow series of residential streets that barely support two way car movement. No amount of traffic marshalling can make this acceptable. It is essentially a proof of the absurdity of the development proposal that it involves this degree of disruption of local communities that will derive no benefit from the development. A project that was about half as ambitious might also be achievable with less intrusive traffic management.

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