

Gwyn Richards
Director of Planning and Development
Environment Department
City of London Corporation
[REDACTED]

08 September 2024

Dear Mr Richards,

RE: 24/00176/FULL: Partial demolition, extension and change of use of existing office building to co-living accommodation with associated internal and external amenity spaces (sui generis) including cycle storage, landscaping, servicing and all other associated works. Please note this is a re-consultation following the submission of amendments comprising the following: - Addition of an accessible car parking space within the courtyard; and - Addition of a flue to the courtyard elevation, serving an emergency generator (“the Application”)

I read your report to the Sub-Committee after watching the live presentation of the second Grenfell Tower Inquiry Report. That, of course, made salutary viewing which should now be resonating around Guildhall.

In the light of the Inquiry’s recommendations, what guarantee is there that the Application and other applications, whether determined or in the “pipeline” don’t fall foul of any of those recommendations? Certainly, we know that there are significant problems with City Corporation’s HRA Black Raven Court – still unoccupied after planning permission was granted in 2018.

As you know, Black Raven Court is a multi-storey City residential tower adjoining the Golden Lane Estate but located in LB Islington. Even though consented after the Grenfell disaster and despite City Corporation’s former Town Clerk and Chief Executive, John Barradell, leading the aftermath response, that building only has one stairwell.

Building Research Establishment (BRE), whose daylight and sunlight guidelines have caused much distress and discomfort to City Corporation’s inconsiderate residents, features in the Inquiry Report. Below is an extract from The Guardian website on 04 September:

The Building Research Establishment, a now-privatised former government facility that runs full-scale fire tests, was involved in checking the insulation provided by Celotex and Kingspan. But the inquiry concluded its work on fire-testing walls had been “marred by unprofessional conduct, inadequate practices, a lack of effective oversight, poor reporting and a lack of scientific rigour”.

Its weaknesses “exposed it to the risk of manipulation by unscrupulous product manufacturers”, the inquiry found.

As far as fire safety is concerned, I appreciate that the consultants, Artec Fire, may well meet all the requirements of the Inquiry’s relevant recommendations, as well might HSE. In this respect, the location of the accessible flats in relation to the stair wells on each floor is concerning. It may be the intention to provide flats with 60-minute fire resistance but will it be the case in practice?

Fire safety in residential blocks is paramount, so prudence would demand that consideration of the Application be delayed until an independent third-party assessment of the proposals has been obtained and, if necessary, acted upon.

In the absence of prudence, I have the following comments on your report:

1. It is, of course, “Ben Jonson” and not “Ben Johnson” as appears four times. There is also a lack of knowledge of the Barbican Estate, and not just the residential blocks. Reliance on *Barbican Living* for details of the Estate blocks is concerning, however accurate the information may be. Beech Gardens may extend along the frontage of 45 Beech Street but all of it is the pre-listing planting and not the recent, world-renowned, Nigel Dunnett scheme.
2. Spelling, grammar, style and confusion of the compass points permeate your report.
3. Bridgewater House is both referred to as such and 5-9 Bridgewater Square. The Cobalt Building is referred to as 10-15 Bridgewater Square though.
4. There is no mention of the possibility of permanent road closures and/or restrictions which will affect deliveries, cabs, accessibility and waste collection. Yet the Barbican, Bunhill and Golden Lane Healthy Neighbourhood Plan is a live issue. The Plan will significantly affect the arrangements referred to in paragraphs 314 to 318. As previously mentioned, there is no mention either of cabs, which many residents will use, let alone the effect on that use of the Plan.
5. Although your report acknowledges the *dark and hostile tunnel along Beech Street* (paragraph 212) you don't comment on that location's suitability for the Application's proposed café. That it would both front and open onto the tunnel doesn't appear to concern you. Ironically, potential road closures/restrictions would improve the attraction of a café but at the cost of the other services. To claim, though, that a café would be “welcome” (paragraph 216) needs either evidencing or forgetting.
6. The Application proposes 174 flats but there doesn't seem to be any requirement for single occupancy despite the proposed s106 single tenant restriction (paragraph 117). Indeed, visitors are acknowledged (paragraph 118) although the use of “guests” instead of “tenants” is confusing. It is unlikely that there would be 348 occupants at any one time but meeting the proposed rents may require two incomes.
7. As far as Affordable Housing (paragraphs 129 to 149) is concerned, although you may give a high level of weight to securing a cash in lieu payment of £8,510,568, is this best value for both City Corporation and/or those on its housing waiting list? At a weekly rent of £525, a 60% social housing rent would see a weekly discount of £210. For 35% of flats (61) over 20 years the total discount would be £13,320,400. At 20% affordable housing discount, the total would be £6,660,200.
8. As we await the committed delivery of 750 new social housing units in 18 months, the benefits of onsite affordable/social housing should not be ignored. The immediate need for units, as opposed to cash is apparent from both the length of City Corporation's housing waiting list and its unspent s106 “Affordable Housing Schemes Total” as at 31 March 2023, this was £68,815,349.60.
9. According to paragraph 150, *Considering the location, the loss of office use (Class E) is not considered to prejudice the primary business function of the City.* This is seemingly

at odds with your recommendation, on 02 November 2022, to approve 22/00202/FULMAJ:

87. The office floorspace is considered to be well-designed, flexible office accommodation in a well-considered and sustainable building, further consolidating the nationally significant cluster of economic activity in the City and contributing to its attractiveness as a world leading international financial and business centre. This amount of floorspace would contribute towards meeting the aims of the London Plan for the CAZ and supports the aims of the Local Plan policy CS1, and draft City Plan 2036 policy S4. The office accommodation in accordance with policy DM1.3 of the adopted Local Plan and policy OF1 of the Proposed Submission Draft City Plan 2036, would provide flexible office floorplates for workers which are designed to meet the needs of a wide range of potential occupiers. In all therefore, we're not expecting a substantial drop-off in the terms of the need to plan for substantial additional office capacity over the long term.

This, of course, referred to 1 Golden Lane, which is located less than 50 metres from 45 Beech Street. Some Members, who supported your recommendation, were even more vociferous in their support for more office accommodation in this area.

10. In paragraph 159 in respect of *Option 3*, you use “demolition” but in paragraph 160, you use “deconstruction” in reference to reuse of materials. However, from paragraph 161, it is not clear what is to be “demolished” and what is to be “deconstructed” but the former would appear to be landfill as opposed to the latter which would appear to be recycled.
11. Previously, I have referred to the additional embodied carbon in the unnecessary roof treatment but this isn't mentioned in your report. The fact that the Application proposes the retention of the bulk of the existing building, other than facades, should not mask the need to minimise additional embodied carbon emissions. Although paragraph 183 refers to carbon reduction measures, it doesn't include a more sustainable roof treatment. Something like the Architects' Clarendon Court development, although in the originally consented colour, would be more sustainable as well as being less overpowering and not insulting Chamberlin Powell & Bon's architecture.
12. There would seem to be an error in paragraph 185. You have mixed up your “kgs” and “ts”.
13. Perhaps the applicant could be encouraged to invest in the additional greening proposed in Phase 2 of the Barbican podium waterproofing project. Certainly, the occupants of 45 Beech Street whose flats are at or above podium level will all both enjoy and benefit from views of that project's additional planting and increased investment there would make up for the non-complying UGF (paragraphs 188 and 189).
14. According to paragraph 299, *the greatest alterations to bulk and massing come from the upward extension at level 06 increasing the height of the building to +50.0m AOD. Paragraph 210 asserts the total increase in bulk and scale of the building would therefore be moderate and maintain its commensurate scale with the neighbouring Barbican blocks and Bridgewater House to the North.* How can any unilateral increase in height maintain an existing scale? Using a flat roof would reduce the *moderate* even further, as well as being more sustainable.
15. Refusing to identify 45 Beech Street as an NDHA follows the refusal to incorporate 45 Beech Street and neighbouring buildings in the Barbican and Golden Lane

Conservation Area. The needs of developers being paramount as can be seen from the minutes of the P&TC meeting on 08 October 2018:

The Deputy Chairman stated that any redevelopment would have to consider the character of the adjoining Conservation area and that the importance of these buildings could therefore be recognised without having to necessarily include them within the proposed conservation area and adjust the boundaries.

A second Member stated that she also felt that it was a mistake not to include these buildings within the conservation area and proposed an amendment seeking to adjust the proposed boundaries to include these. Another Member seconded this proposal and it was put to the vote. 9 voted in favour of the amendment and 10 against with 2 abstentions.

Previously, at the P&TC meeting on 17 November 2017:

Other Members considered that it would be wrong to include the area given that future planning applications would be affected, and also that it would be wrong to seek the views of people who wouldn't be affected.

16. According to the Buildings of England, London 1: The City of London, page 284:

The part [of the Barbican] N of Beech Street lacks a central “lung” and is inconsequence less satisfactory. It's not helped by the intrusion between the slabs of the N side by Frank Scarlett's MURRAY HOUSE, completed 1958, a stone-faced and curtain-walled office block on Beech Street, begun before the N area was incorporated into the [Barbican] plan.

17. Paragraph 241 refers to the seven criteria **suggested** (my emphasis) by Historic England for identifying [NDHA]. What are the seven and what obligation is there on City Corporation to adhere to any of them? Certainly, there is little evidence that identification has either been made following those guidelines.
18. Your argument in support of the proposed roof treatment (paragraph 252) is illogical. The building is mainly viewed above Barbican podium level and between Ben Jonson House and Bryer Court. As such, it cannot *sit comfortably within the setting of the Barbican and not be a starkly different or distracting presence*. What is the point of the roof treatment then if it isn't an *“inappropriate pastiche of the original Barbican estate?”* Of course, the existence of 45 Beech Street prior to the Barbican didn't challenge the significance of the latter – in fact defining its extent in that location - but the proposed development must, to some extent, at least, do so (paragraph 254).
19. As mentioned in paragraph 15 above, the decision not to include 45 Beech Street in the Conservation Area was purely political.
20. The alleged positive effect of the proposed development on Bridgewater House should not be allowed to ignore the claim of that building to be identified as an NDHA. Your predecessor was confused by Bridgewater House, taking some time to accept the building's “beauty” was original but whether or not she accepted that the arched windows of Bridgewater House influenced the Barbican roof treatment and, consequently, the proposed development is lost in time.
21. The enthusiasm for the accessible parking space (paragraph 276) should be tempered by its likely obstruction, when occupied, of the ramp for trundling bins. As to how an EV charging point can be accessed while keeping the ramp clear of additional obstruction when occupied will be interesting to see.

22. The Application includes the provision of an additional accessible parking space in Bridgewater Square but it's surprising to note the comment in paragraph 276. As I've previously mentioned, the location of this space is too far from 45 Beech Street to be of actual benefit.
23. The bus stop – east – for the 153 is less than 40 metres along Beech Street (paragraph 307).
24. *Noise and disturbance* (paragraphs 365 to 370) fails to even acknowledge the intention to trundle bins up and down the ramp, let alone the potential noise nuisance from doing so. How do you intend to address this potential problem?
25. *Daylight and Sunlight Impact Assessment* (paragraphs 371 to 416) relies on BRE guidelines. As mentioned above, this requires independent third-party review. That aside, the absence of consideration of the effect of the proposed development on the southern part of the western side of Breton House is surprising. Despite paragraph 382 referring to the loss of sunlight to gardens and making specific reference to the planting to the north of Ben Jonson House, the fact that Breton House is on that site line has been completely ignored.
26. I appreciate that *Air Quality* (paragraphs 433 to 436) refers to the proposed development but you should be aware of the significant current increase in particulate readings in Beech Street according to the AirAware website. PM10 readings in particular, have been at or above the $40\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ DEFRA guideline over the last week or so.

Best regards,

Fred Rodgers

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Bridgewater House northern elevation



Bridgewater House eastern elevation



Breton House on the eastern site line

