



Friends of St. James's Park and The Green Park

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Dear Rosemarie

Response to Application Ref 11/05097/FULL |

Demolition of existing buildings on site and construction of a part six, part seven and part nine storey building (Building 7B/7C) fronting Bressenden Place and Allington Street for use as offices (Class B1), retail (Classes A1-A5, flexible library/retail (Class D1/A1-5), flexible library/office (Class D1/B1) and 35 affordable housing units with servicing from Bressenden Place. Reinstatement of the facade, part basement and ground floors of Sutton House on Allington Street. [Revised proposal for application two of Victoria Interchange 2 RN 08/08206/FULL]. | Land Bounded By Bressenden Place Victoria Street Allington Street London SW1

The Society welcomes the changes made in this application over the previous proposals. The repositioning of the library facility and the incorporation of part of Suttons are important changes. However the Society is very concerned by the architecture, which is considered heavy handed and unresolved. Given the extreme prominence and importance of the site, Westminster requires a much higher standard of design. In summary we regard the intentions as being worthy but that the design development needs considerably more attention to detail. We elaborate below.

Massing on the site

We have viewed the proposals found on the WCC Planning web site, but with difficulty. Three times the process failed due to a "WCC system error". Considerable time lapsed between the failures; and in the end the Design and Access Statement could not be viewed at the time.

The brief is demanding for the limited site area. The architects have addressed the mixed use issues as use distribution reasonably well. It would however have been much better and in the gift of the developer had he required less of the site, recognising the civic importance of the location at the centre of Westminster. As one consequence the access to the library is poor and restricted.

Urban design considerations -

The corner of Bressenden Place and Victoria Street is an extremely important location in the context of Westminster's civic centre, being highly visible. It holds a commanding position from east, south and west, as well as is prominent on Bressenden Place. The illustrations presented demonstrate this very clearly.

The form of the building

From an architectural point of view, a large 'building' has been produced which includes the library, retail outlets, residential, and some office use plus the facade of Sutton House, repositioned from Victoria Street. These different uses have been given their individual external expressions, which is a challenge for the architectural design to make a satisfying whole from the parts. At this stage that has not been achieved, but with attention and care it could be. Whether the Library can be made more accessible at ground level is problematic, but adjustment is required.

Elevational treatment

In simple terms it appears as though the two main elevations were designed in isolation. More attention needs to be paid to the continuity of the 'building' in the round. The overall expression of the Victoria Street elevation and its continuity around to Bressenden Place simply does not work: This is largely due to the difference in elevation systems and spacing.

Victoria Street Elevation

On Victoria Street the building is made to look massive in scale, because of the screen and pseudo column elevation with its separation from the true face of the building, set back. It is ungainly with its extravagant facade treatment of detached 'columns', serving little practical purpose as a 'screen device'. As with Kingsgate House, the architects' seem to be obsessed with the notion of discontinuity of vertical elements, which is visually disturbing. The curvature of the elevational skeleton also adds to the discomfort of the viewer.

In floor planning terms the ground floor plan should be reduced to the line of the planned upper floors, allowing a larger pedestrian space at ground level offering some better use to the public realm.

Bressenden Place Elevation

The Bressenden Place Elevation is completely different, only having the same floor heights. The junction of the two sides of the building i.e. the elevations, is not resolved nor acceptable. And yet there is a semblance of a 'tower corner'. But this does not work either because of the scale and disposition of the very large glazed areas. Again the 'corner' could be made to work with more attention to the building as a whole. Why do the Library have a different elevational treatment on the two elevations? This inconsistency only adds to the weakness of the architecture as a whole.

We were not able to discover detailed information regarding the elevational treatment of the residential part of the Bressenden Place elevation. The eaves line appears to be very shallow as do the vertical elements - in marked contrast with the Victoria Street elevation

Civic design

In Civic design terms it is very much to be regretted that there is no attempt to establish a relationship with the adjacent theatre. The crude excessive size of the elements of the library elevation, and their form shows complete disregard to the understanding of 'scale' in the real and perceptual sense. The understanding of 'scale' or lack of it, is undermining the presentation and the elevational expressions.

We trust our observations and comments will be of assistance and ask that our comments be made known to the full Council and Committee.

Yours Sincerely
for and on behalf of the Thorney Island Society

PP Tom Ball

June A Stubbs
Chairman