



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

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For the attention of Vincent Nally

10th May 2011

Dear Mr Nally

Ref 11/030034/FULL

**Abell and Cleland Houses, John Islip Street London SW1P 4LH**

**Demolition of existing buildings and redevelopment to provide two new buildings (Abell House site) comprising a three basement level, ground, plus part 11 and part 12 upper floor building and (Cleland House site) a three basement level, ground, plus 12 upper floor building, both containing plant, residential car parking and ancillary residential at basement levels and residential (Class C3) use on all upper floors with associated balconies and terraces. New hard and soft landscaping: highways and infrastructure works: plant and equipment and ancillary works.**

Thank you for sending a copy of the planning application relating to the above proposal, with your letter dated 15 th April 2011. As all the material was presented on nine CDs each divided into numerous separate files it was impossible to discover and compare the relevant information. As a result a meeting was held with the applicant, developer and architect. A preliminary meeting had been held several months previously at which opinions had been expressed regarding the basic principles of the proposed undertaking

**General**

The presentation includes very detailed descriptions of the principles and considerations that had lead up to determining the proposals. The change of use from commercial office to residential is welcomed especially the inclusion of the 'affordable housing' element.

The existing buildings are exceptionally robust in their current form, which is not as originally developed. The applicant has sought to provide a much 'softer' architectural expression with subtle references to the surroundings, which bring the junction of residential hard up against not only commercial but key security buildings, of a massive scale.

As part of this approach, Abell House is replaced by what amounts to two buildings linked together by a three storey glazed lobby with landscaped terrace above, which lessens the 'barrier' to some extent. Visibility into the sites is part of the design intention, thereby opening up the ground level from what at present is a strictly solid wall in effect. Landscaping which allows monthly continuity and change is very much to be welcomed. Several trees would be replaced - those have suffered from severe pruning, and which were not the most suitable to their location.

## **Planning and physical form**

The outline of the proposed building forms is modified compared with that which exists; with marginal impact where the height has been increased. This has allowed compensation by opening up at ground floor level and in both 'House' replacements. Almost all of the 1,2 and 3 bedroom flats are provided with balconies, and these are included within the external frame of the buildings, rather than being projections.

## **Architectural expression**

The geographical area is distinctive by many of the buildings being composed of a combination of stone and warm red to brown brickwork. In fact the latter reflects the Thorney Island Society's appreciation of the original concept of 'Westminster Village'. However it is on this point that we have raised with the applicant's team the lack of either brickwork or a similar complimentary colour in the architectural presentation. The latter is predominantly reconstituted portland stone. We would like to see some introduction of the 'brick colour' and have suggested that the rear walls to the balconies, the recesses, could be so coloured. This would provide a modest background to the light coloured 'portland stone' of the columns and cladding. We also think that this would assist the articulation of the elevation.

## **Distribution of housing types**

The provision within the proposals of a modest number of affordable/social housing is welcomed. However we recognise that those proposed which face Thames House - the security building, bring with it additional issues and restrictions. There is no doubt that those facing Thames House and at the lower level have a compromised location, regarding aspect and sunlight and being without balconies. Some few dwellings, at the higher level will have a view on the north overlooking landscaping. We are concerned by this situation and would seek an improvement. A form of detailed dwelling planning which allowed individual dwellings to extend though the building block, from front to back, would allow bedrooms to be restricted to the 'adverse' side of the building with living rooms on the 'attractive' side. Such an arrangement is described as a 'crossover plan' of which there are examples elsewhere in London. It requires some complex planning in relation to access corridors, but it is practicable while requiring radical change.

## **Considerations**

The Thorney Island Society welcomes the proposals which are sound in principle and are likely to provide good accommodation, subject to meeting the statutory requirements.

1 However we feel strongly that there should be some reference to brick work, or at the least to brick colour which we have suggested could be included in the balcony recesses.

2 We recommend that further investigation as to how to provide a better environment for some of the 'affordable housing' dwellings which have poor and restricted aspect, should be undertaken.

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

Yours Sincerely

for and on behalf of the Thorney Island Society

*pp Tom Ball*

**June A Stubbs**  
Chairman