

THE WESTMINSTER SOCIETY



URBAN VITALITY AND CONGENIALITY

NEWSLETTER

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CUNDY STREET QUARTER



Above: existing, with Pimlico Road in the foreground. Below: as proposed-- looking southwest down Pimlico Road

The biggest deal in Westminster's private residential development since the grievously disappointing-in-execution Chelsea Barracks estate, the Cundy Street Quarter proposal (see 20/03307/FULL on the Westminster planning site) looks quite good to our Society and has received our endorsement. Grosvenor Estate Belgravia wants to redevelop a postwar bombsite collection of cross-plan housing blocks that, in an alignment frequently favoured in those days, are catty-corner (i.e. askew) to existing streets. The replacement will be a more integrally aligned scheme that restores built street edges. It will maintain the amount of social housing, add 93 affordable rental units, and achieve much improved exterior public spaces.

Architects DSDHA's greater building heights in some places are an understandable concomitant that goes with the denser development, but their currently proposed expression of arched bays when executed in red brick (see left) suggest mill buildings of the industrial revolution more than contemporary apartment houses. We hope for some developmental refinement that will also confer more exterior balconies and terraces. The recent Cleland House at the end of Page Street, by the same architects, squeezes in dozens of small balconies.

EBURY BRIDGE ESTATE RENEWAL



The site, excluding buildings top and bottom left. Deck-over the tracks?

An even bigger current deal is the City of Westminster's own proposed public authority redevelopment-- and kudos to them for that-- of a miscellaneous collection of 1930s housing blocks ranged alongside 16 parallel railroad tracks approaching Victoria Station (see 20/04366/COOUT). AStudio and Arups are the development team who, so far, have produced an encyclopaedic Design and Access Statement that rigorously depicts and discusses everything.

But the main range of nearly identical 17-storey buildings that are proposed are unimpressively expressed with an uneasy mixture of slightly creased verticals and curvy cornered terrace decks; they have only one escape stair each, despite the lessons we should have already drawn from Grenfell Tower; and the designers or Westminster have funk'd the brilliant chance for doing a deal with Network Rail to deck over the tracks and nearly double the size of the site. It's not too late for a sharper, more ambitious design.

105 VICTORIA STREET

The slow, then rapid, decline of department stores in general, and of House of Fraser in particular, has led to a development deal allowing HoF to expire quietly. The site is now called Southside, with Griffiths Design Associates as architects (see 20/04966/FULL). We did a preliminary report about it a year ago in our Newsletter no. 30.



The 105 Victoria Street proposal

The development team have striven to consult well with local residents, and others, including us. The final result has been a bigger and bulkier building proposal with some added-in "community" uses, including a "village square" entered from an open ground floor loggia offering access to a mini-mall. We question their permanence, and think the new building is too big. But we gave our best advice, and we suspect the planners will find the design acceptable.

7 MILLBANK



New east elevation viewing towards St John's, Smith Square

This project by Make Architects could serve to illustrate one end of the expressive breadth that their design projects encompass. To suit OPLML developers on behalf of Baola Properties Limited who need to maintain heritage in a conservation area and yet build well-dimensioned and well-serviced modern offices, Make are proposing a near-identical rebuilt facsimile of the existing building. It will stylistically incorporate a smaller building at the Smith Square end, provide a new arched entrance in Dean Stanley Street, and rationalise the external expression of the top two storeys in a more elegant fashion. The eight new floor areas will be wide, virtually eliminating columns; and the building's energy, performance, and sustainability are aiming for an Outstanding BREEM rating. The developers have sought our advice, and will have our support.

VIEWING MOUND



The City of Westminster has sanctioned a temporary 25m-high viewing mound alongside the Grade I-listed Marble Arch, to help draw shoppers back to Oxford Street. Designed by Dutch practice MVRDV, real soil and plants will cover scaffolding with an exhibition space inside. A nice scheme. But hey, why not create a permanent overview of Oxford Street by adding a well-designed external stair to the arch, up to a new viewing platform atop it? (Competition idea.)

10 GREYCOAT PLACE



Proposed new elevation, adjacent to the former firehouse and opposite the venerable Grey Coat Hospital School

Victoria Spaces (UK) Ltd commissioned Trevor Morriss of SPPARC Architects to *re*-rebuild what was originally an early 20th century warehouse for the Army & Navy Stores designed by Reginald Blomfield, and then was rebuilt in 1959 to be as it looks now. 10 Greycoat Place is not a listed building nor in a conservation area (see 20/05884/FULL), but the architects have wrestled to achieve an evocation of old warehouse-ness expressed in modern terms that doesn't suggest fanciful insincerity. Our team provided a lot of advice, but in the final submission the new mullions are curved in half circles, most of the roof is glass, and the corner windows of the cornice elude attribution. We aren't objecting.

SPRING GARDENS



We had a pre-application consultation with the Crown Estate about 10 Spring Gardens, former home of the British Council, which is sited just off the Mall adjacent to Admiralty Arch. Architect Orms's proposals will include interior improvements to the building, and a café on the ground floor on the small plaza. Spring Gardens is a lovely underutilised space that will have nearby bollards and gates removed, and be newly landscaped, allowing tables and chairs of the café to spread outside. The problem will be the exhaust fumes of the cars backed up along the Mall that are waiting for the Trafalgar Square traffic lights to change-- surely gasping for mitigation.

180 PICCADILLY / 48-50 JERMYN STREET

Great Portland Estates consulted us about this site which currently houses two L-shaped buildings around a central courtyard, and is being explored for redevelopment as new offices above retail shops. The architects, Make (again-- see 7 Millbank above), are a design collective, so the prestige of founder Ken Shuttleworth doesn't necessarily reign on every project. Such as on this one, we regret to say. As usual behind modern office redevelopment, contemporary requirements call for bigger, higher, better lit and better serviced spaces. The new scheme we reviewed achieves all that, which seems fine; its massing makes sense; and also elements such as chamfering the corners for extra pedestrian space at Duke Street St James's.

But the existing Jermyn Street building, a postwar rebuild of a bomb site, has exceptional distinction in design and the way it addresses Fortums across the street. Its disappearance would be a real crime if it was replaced by something with less presence and character, as now proposed. Must do better-- or redevelop only the Piccadilly end.

Left: the existing 48-50 Jermyn Street. Right: the current rebuilding proposal. Fortnum & Mason is to the right in both pictures



1 KNIGHTSBRIDGE

We had no objection to some general small changes for this prominent building at Hyde Park Corner. We suggested maintaining the curved forms at the building front when the entrance portico is removed.

MARY SUMNER HOUSE



Existing



As proposed

The laudable Mothers' Union was founded by Mary Sumner, and the MU's headquarters building in Tufton Street bearing her name was erected in 1925, shortly after her death. GRID Architects have been retained by the MU to take charge of modifications and improvements, including increasing the size of the attic floor, adding another on top, and installing two lifts. We were asked to make pre-application comments. Though 24 Tufton Street is not in a conservation area, it does form the end of a coherent terrace of buildings. We thought the steep profile of the new mansard roof proposed for the top floor overbore the elegant corner chimney stack, and seemed too high in the row of rooftops. We suggested a shallower roof angle and a greater setback.



55 BROADWAY

Architect Charles Holden's 1927-29 Grade I listed office building at 55 Broadway for the Underground Electric Railways Company of London was sold last year to the Integrity International Group, whose subsidiary, Blue Orchid Hotels, planned to convert the structure into a luxury hotel. When we wrote about it in Newsletter no. 30, we hoped for the choice of an architect sensitive to the building's iconic past and potential future. Planning approval has now been granted (19/09813/FULL) to EPR, architects of sophisticated conversions that have produced, among others, The Ned, Great Scotland Yard, and the Old War Office hotels. We look forward to this completion, and its restaurants, with enthusiasm.

33 ST JAMES'S SQUARE



Charles II Street at left; St James's
Square on the right

The original building of 1770-72 was designed by Robert Adam and extended in 1817-23 by John Soane. It is Grade II* listed.

A ground floor arcaded front was added in the early 20th century when the building was converted into the Caledonian Club. The building is currently The Argyle Business Club with multiple tenants. Argyle will retain most of the space in the new proposal.

Orms architects (cf. 10 Spring Gardens, above) have avoided most planning issues by keeping the street facades unaltered (see 20/03223/LBC). The 1980s rear extension will be demolished and replaced with an open plan office building of the same bulk. The existing roof plant will be removed and relocated in the basement. The floor levels of the new extension will align with the Adam building, simplifying and reducing the size of the central core and allowing a better flow of space between the two buildings.

The exposure of the new rear extension will be slightly changed to reduce its impact when viewed from the square. It will be clad in a decorative glazed terracotta with arched dormer-style windows on the top floor. These have been designed to be distinct from the traditional dormers on the Adam building, and to work well in distant views of the top floor and skyline from across St James's Square. We raised no objections to the scheme.

(PIECE ON
PLANNING BY
MICHAEL BACH?)

(About 300 words)

62 PAGE STREET

62 Page Street is a single storey shop that has been empty for eight years and is now semi-derelict. As said in issue no 30, Nathan Silver (this newsletter's editor) has applied for planning permission to change the site's use from shop to dwelling, and build in its place a new self-contained basement-and-ground-floor house for affordable rental, while enlarging his own first floor family flat at next-door 19 Regency Street by expanding onto the rooftop above the kitchen of the Regency Café. The two new outdoor levels will be garden terraces for the first and second floor flats of 19 Regency Street. (See 20/06123/FULL.)



The shaded frieze bands indicate light grey transparent photovoltaic glass fins. 19 Regency Street is the building to the left

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