

Fitzrovia News

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BT Tower sold to US hotel group for £275mn

BT Group has agreed to sell its telecommunications tower in Fitzrovia to MCR Hotels for £275mn, after the US company privately approached it with an offer, *writes Linus Rees*.

The 189 metre tall Tower is no longer essential to BT's operations as these are now delivered by other methods.

"The Tower's microwave aerials were removed more than a decade ago, as they were no longer needed to carry telecommunications traffic from London to the rest of the country," said BT in an announcement on the sale this week.

MCR says it intends to preserve the iconic Tower — which was listed Grade II in 2003 — by "re-purposing it as a hotel and opening it up to the public".

Payment for the sale will be made over multiple years, while BT carries out the complicated task of removing its telecommunications equipment from the building, with final payment being made on completion of the purchase.

When the sale is finalised MCR will own the freehold of the Tower and the podium it stands upon, plus all the buildings on the site bounded by Howland Street, Cleveland Street, Maple Street and Cleveland Mews.

Those streets were originally laid out in the late 18th century and Maple Street still has a number of original buildings

standing from that time across the road from the Tower.

The site also includes a number of unlisted buildings including the former Museum Telephone Exchange, built in 1939, on Howland Street on the site of a row of Georgian houses.

It is these elements of the building — which are substantial — that will be the focus of possible demolition and redevelopment.

MCR says it will partner with London-based architects Heatherwick Studio and there will be significant time for design development and engagement with local communities before proposals are revealed.

"The deal, which came about after the hotel group approached BT with an offer, is not conditional on MCR securing planning approvals to convert the protected historic building," reported the *Financial Times*.

The completion of the purchase could take up to six years reported the FT, which means a planning application is likely to be submitted to Camden Council towards the end of the decade.

A large hotel would require daily servicing with frequent vehicle movements to and from the site, and would be a source of noise nuisance to nearby residents unless managed properly.

There is an opportunity to provide some community benefit by providing shops to meet the needs of local residents, and the roof of the buildings surrounding the base of the Tower could be used for much needed public open space and greenery.

The new owners might also consider a mix of affordable housing on the site. However, they are likely to want to introduce cafes, bars and restaurants on the ground floors — something Fitzrovia has enough of already.

In 1973 Fitzrovia's first community newspaper, *Tower*, took its name from the building at the geographical centre of the neighbourhood.

Plans 'enhance traffic movement and capacity' around Oxford Street

Westminster Council has admitted for the first time that its Oxford Street Programme will displace motor traffic into Fitzrovia, *writes Linus Rees*.

Buried in a report providing a progress update on the Oxford Street Programme (OSP) to councillors on the Housing and Regeneration Policy and Scrutiny Committee there is a candidness all too rare in local government.

"The enabling highway schemes are essential highway improvements/changes that seek to enhance traffic movement and capacity in the wider Oxford Street area and support the delivery of the Oxford Street project," states the report of Cllr Geoff Baraclough, the cabinet member for planning and economic development.

"These include Marylebone / Fitzrovia, Eastcastle and Oxford Street West schemes and were consulted upon in the OSP consultation in Summer 2023," states the report.

However, the public consultation only mentioned "more direct vehicle routes" for motor traffic, not additional "capacity".

The work on Mortimer Street and Wigmore Street was originally planned for this month but will now start in March.

"Enabling highway scheme construction is planned to commence in the Marylebone/Fitzrovia project area on Wigmore Street and Mortimer Street in March 2024," states the report.

"Designs are being progressed for the remaining Marylebone/Fitzrovia schemes including Eastcastle Street, Margaret Street and Henrietta Place, and for projects in the Oxford Street West area."

The new restrictions on private vehicles along Oxford Street mean an increase in motor vehicle traffic in Fitzrovia and Marylebone — something that local residents knew all along.

More news over page. ►

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Twenty-four residents' groups against Camden's licensing and night-time policies

Residents groups have again hit out at Camden's plans to boost the borough's nightlife, ahead of a meeting of the council's cabinet this week, writes *Noah Vickers, Local Democracy Reporter*.

The Labour-run council last month published proposals in January to relax some licensing policies restricting the hours and locations in which venues like pubs and clubs can operate.

While the Night Time Industries Association has welcomed the plans, several local community groups spoke out in opposition, fearing increased noise and crime. Much of it has been expressed in the letters pages of the *Camden New Journal*.

Concerns are also understood to have been raised by the police, prompting the council to withdraw the draft policies. Critics of the plans believe they will come back in similar form, however.

The council had proposed extending Camden's "framework hours" — the period when licensed venues are not generally expected to take extra steps to prevent crime and "public nuisance", such as by ensuring "the orderly dispersal of customers". For nightclubs, hours would be extended from midnight to 2am on Fridays and Saturdays.

A total of 24 residents groups across the borough have opposed the policies.

News in brief

Conservative MP for Cities of London and Westminster, Nickie Aiken, is standing down at the next election. In a statement, she said the decision is due to her husband, Alex Aiken, taking a job overseas, for which "he deserves my full support as he pursues a new career".

An **air pollution monitoring station** has been installed outside a children's nursery and playground in **Whitfield Street**, to record NO2 and PM2.5 levels in Fitzrovia.

Westminster Council says 271 were counted sleeping rough in the city on a single night last autumn. In **Camden** the number was 121.

An exhibition of portraits by Kevin Davies who photographed **David Bowie** over the course of a single day is at the **Fitzrovia Chapel** in March.

US guitar maker **Gibson** has opened a new retail shop, showroom and studio on Eastcastle Street.

A developer wants to name a **new street** in Fitzrovia as "Fitzroy Walk".

Planning applications

Camden Council registered 23 planning applications during February in Bloomsbury ward. Including: gates and a door in the internal courtyard at Maple House; tables and chairs outside 43 Charlotte St; alterations at 7-10 Charlotte Ms; and rear extension at 21 Scala St. See: planningrecords.camden.gov.uk

Westminster Council validated 12 planning applications during January in Fitzrovia West. In the list: tables and chairs outside Green Man pub on Riding House St; amendments to permission for roof terrace at 95 New Cavendish St; fifth and sixth floor roof extension at Swan Court, 1 Booth's Place; alterations to a listed building at 2 Pearson Square. See: idoxpa.westminster.gov.uk

Licensing applications

Westminster: Alex Coffee, 1 Hanson Street. Seeks permission for the sale of alcohol. D/L 18 March. See: idoxpa.westminster.gov.uk

Camden: Ning, 5-7 Tottenham St. Seeks permission for the sale of alcohol. D/L 28 March; Chipotle, 64 Tottenham Ct Rd. Seeks permission for removal of conditions. D/L 19 March. See: camden.gov.uk/public-licensing-register

Advice for responding

Residents should check Camden and Westminster's websites for the latest applications.

In Westminster residents can contact licensingadvice.org for free advice, and should also email the Fitzrovia Neighbourhood Association fna@fitzrovia.org.uk

In Camden email the Charlotte Street Association at csafitzrovia@yahoo.co.uk where you can also seek advice.

It is also a good idea to contact your ward councillors well before the closing dates with your concerns about any planning or licensing applications.

This news-sheet is produced usually four times or more a year and is available from outside Fitzrovia Community Centre, 2 Foley Street. More news, features and comment on our website: fitzroviaanews.com
Subscribing to our free email newsletter: fitzroviaanews.substack.com

Free housing and welfare advice for residents

The Fitzrovia Advice Service, run by Fitzrovia Neighbourhood Association, is able to help residents with private and social housing problems, housing and council tax benefits, disability benefits, Universal Credit and Job Seekers Allowance, pensions and Pension Credit, Working and Child Tax Credits, fuel poverty; and help with benefit, passport and other forms.

Advice is available to Camden and Westminster residents by telephone, email and in person, for speakers of English, Bengali, Sylheti, Urdu and Hindi. Contact 020 3984 6364; or email: advice@fitzrovia.org.uk

Cost of living support

Camden has help at camden.gov.uk/find-support-in-camden
Westminster has help at westminster.gov.uk/cost-of-living-support

Neighbourhood listings

Covid-19 vaccine information is available from Camden and Westminster councils. See camden.gov.uk/coronavirus and westminster.gov.uk/coronavirus

Local councillors serving Fitzrovia on the **Camden** side are: Adam Harrison, Sabrina Francis, and Rishi Madhani; telephone: 020 7974 2792. On the **Westminster** side they are: Paul Fisher, Patrick Lilley, and Jessica Toale; telephone: 020 7641 5377.

Fitzrovia Community Centre has activities available, and a community garden. fitzroviacommunitycentre.org
Visit 2 Foley Street, call 020 7580 8680.

All Souls C of E Primary School, Foley Street takes children from ages 3 to 11. See allsoulsprimary.co.uk for more.

Fitzrovia Youth in Action is a local charity for young people. See fya.org.uk or call at Basement 66-68 Warren Street or call 020 7388 7399.

Rainbow Angels Nursery Fitzrovia 54A Whitfield Street. More information at rainbowangels.co.uk

Little Raccoons Day Nursery, Holcroft Court, Carburton Street, Fitzrovia, London W1W 5AL. See their website or email info-fitzrovia@littleraccoons.co.uk

Age UK provides services for people over 50 years old. In Camden call 020 7239 0400 or visit ageuk.org.uk/camden; in Westminster call 020 3004 5610 or visit ageuk.org.uk/westminster

American International Church offers services including a soup kitchen for the homeless and those in need. See amchurch.co.uk, call 020 7580 2791, or visit 79A Tottenham Court Road.