

## **Major tower block to go ahead despite objections from Historic England**

*The leading heritage charity has claimed that 60 Gracechurch Street will draw attention away from the Square Mile's historic views.*

A new planning application to demolish the existing building at 60 Gracechurch Street and build a new 36-storey tower block has been accepted, despite objections about the project's damage to views of the area's historic buildings.

Historic England has criticised the development's impact on views both of the Tower of London and of nearby renowned Hawksmoor church St Mary Woolnoth. In letters of objection submitted in August and November, the charity claimed that the "visual dominance" of 60 Gracechurch Street and surrounding buildings (known collectively as the "City Cluster") provides a "distraction from multiple highly graded heritage assets".

In recent years, Historic England has opposed the nearby 55 Gracechurch Street 'workplace destination' development for similar reasons, namely that it obstructs views of the sky framed by Tower Bridge. That application was accepted in January 2021.

In a Corporation of London planning meeting about the 60 Gracechurch Street development on 6 December, developers Obayashi Properties provided a graphic indicating that the development would sit on the western side of the Cluster, and thus not obstruct views of the Tower and St Mary Woolnoth from Tower Bridge.

Natasha Lloyd-Owen, a Labour councillor for Cripplegate Ward who voted against the proposal, said: "The point is not that [60 Gracechurch Street] obscures the view, it's that it draws attention away. Even if the building is further to the west, it still draws eyes away from the Tower.

"We have a diversity of architecture here that makes the City special and different from other places. You have to choose your priority between considering the heritage implications and more office space, and we keep on choosing office space."

The current Allianz House building at 60 Gracechurch Street, which dates from 1998, will be replaced by a development comprising a mixture of retail and office space, with a roof garden and 'education space' open to the public. Historic England proposed amendments to this plan including reducing the height of the development and simplifying the design of its facade, which have been rejected. Lloyd-Owen has also criticised the decision to demolish and not retrofit the 1998 building on sustainability grounds.

Shravan Joshi, chairman of the Planning Applications Subcommittee, said: "We take a bespoke and exhaustive approach to tall buildings and heritage, recognising the exceptional significance of the Tower of London and the Church of St Mary Woolnoth. Our policies will ensure development protects and celebrates all our heritage assets while continuing to support the economic growth of the capital."

In publicly available documents, the Subcommittee claims that any harm to heritage assets is "outweighed by the public benefits of the scheme", including the education space (which will target engagement with East London schools), biodiversity in the roof garden, and the creation of

additional jobs. At Friday's meeting, Historic England were criticised for their "emotive and aggressive language" in their objections to the proposal.

Historic England declined to comment for this piece.

Word count (not including headline and standfirst): 486 words