**Objections to the planning application no. 2024/04265/PA for the demolition of the existing building 1 Lancaster Circus and the construction in its place of two very tall towers of student housing.**

**From the *Save Smallbrook* campaign group. 29.10.24.**

These are some bullet points which can be used as the basis of writing an objection to the planning application. The application can be located online in the Birmingham City Council Planning Portal.

* 1 Lancaster Place is a fine example of mid-20th century commercial architecture. It was designed as headquarters for Halfords. It later became the offices for the West Midlands County Council, and latterly offices for Birmingham City Council.
* It was designed by a firm of good architects, J. Alfred Harper and Son, and built in 1958.
* It is in good physical condition due to its occupation by the City Council, who have looked after it well.
* It could be economically converted into flats, which could be family-sized. There is a great need for family housing to be built in and near the city centre, but it is not being met by housing developers. The deep plan of 1 Lancaster Circus would need to have a courtyard cut into it to provide daylight and ventilation. This is not an uncommon situation.
* The City Council’s recent planning policy publication *Our Future City Plan* compares Birmingham unfavourably with European cities such as Brussels, Lyon and Budapest, with their provision of compact-density housing for families in city centre mid-rise apartment blocks. The residential conversion of 1 Lancaster Circus would emulate this provision.
* 1 Lancaster Circus was originally designed to sit within a pattern of streets. This pattern was swept away by the later construction of the Inner Ring Road. But the City Council intends to reconfigure Lancaster Circus, with its underpass and flyover. This could create a more pedestrian-friendly pattern of streets and squares into which the existing building would happily fit.
* The retention and residential conversion of 1 Lancaster Circus is exactly what the Government’s agency Historic England is advocating in its recent policy publication *Heritage Works for Housing*: the conversion of historic buildings to residential use.
* A recent parallel to this is the conversion and extension of the 1974 Camden Council offices annexe in London to become The Standard Hotel, which was a RIBA Award winner in 2021. Conversion was chosen over redevelopment both because it was more sustainable and in recognition of local positive sentiment of familiarity towards the existing building.
* The two towers proposed to replace 1 Lancaster Circus are architecturally undistinguished, and fail to make any positive response to the existing urban context.
* The demolition of the existing building and its replacement by tall towers would release into the atmosphere a colossal amount of carbon, contributing to the rise in temperatures which is currently threatening life on earth. It would be contrary to Birmingham’s *Towards New Zero* policy. Tall buildings generate disproportionately large quantities of carbon release, measured per square metre of floorspace.
* The retention and conversion of the existing building would release much smaller amounts of carbon into the atmosphere. It would be part of the growing trend towards a sensible Retrofit policy for development, of which The Standard Hotel is an example. This conversion achieved a 60% reduction in carbon emissions compared with the target figure.