



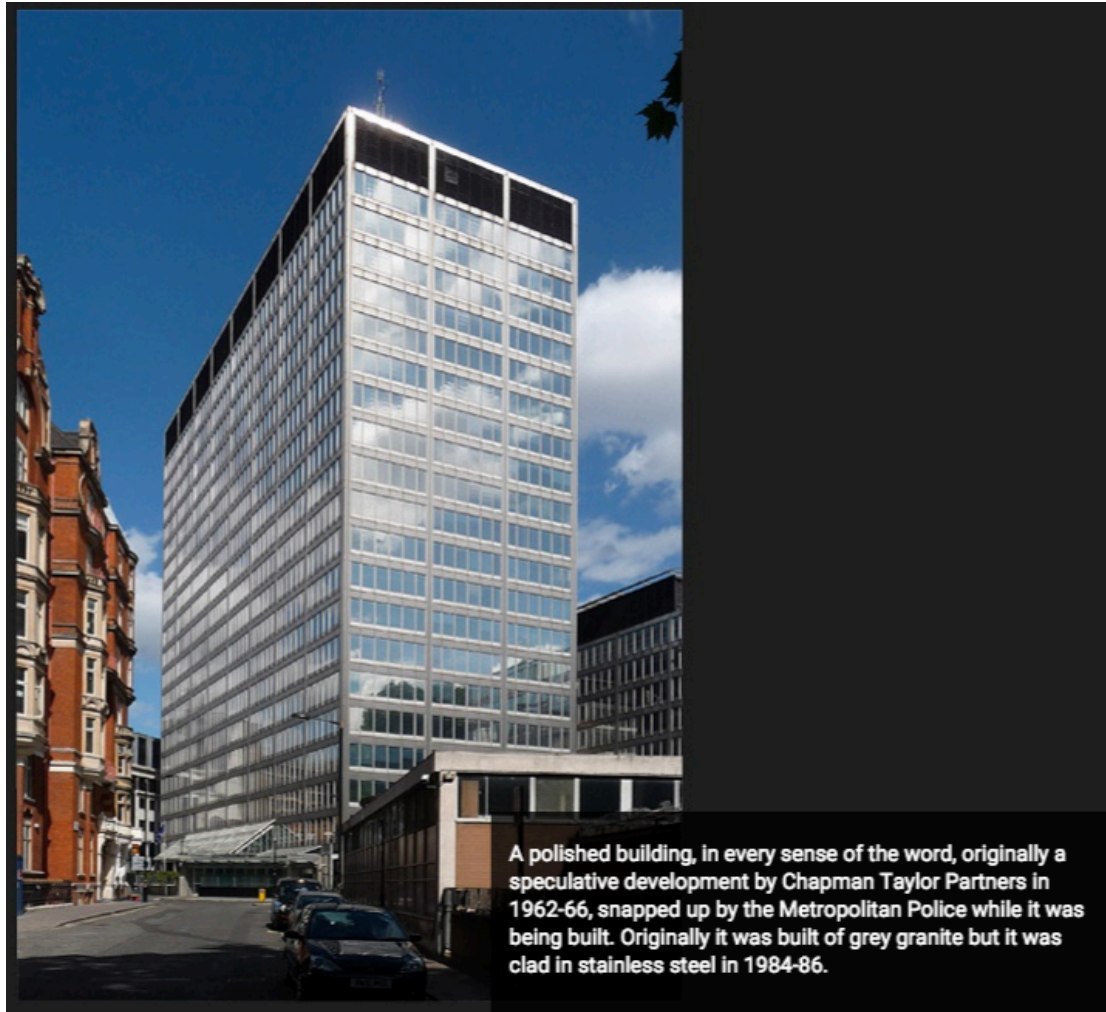
THE ARCHITECTS' JOURNAL

Westminster approves policy-busting Squire towers

23 FEBRUARY, 2016 • BY COLIN MARRS







Westminster City Council has overridden its own planning guidance by allowing a 20-storey scheme designed by Squire and Partners on the former Metropolitan Police HQ at New Scotland Yard

The triangular site on Victoria Street is designated for a development of between eight and 10 storeys in the authority's Victoria Planning Brief, adopted in 2011.

However, council planners dismissed objections by local campaign group the Victoria Neighbourhood Forum about the height of the six Squire and Partners towers, the lowest of which would be 14 storeys.

The new 268-home scheme will replace an **existing 20-storey 1966 Chapman Taylor Partners-designed block.**

A report by planning officers, which recommended approval went before the council's planning committee last night (23 February), said: '[Each] proposal has to be considered on its merits and [...] it is considered that the proposal constitutes an enhancement over the existing situation.'

Therefore, the guidance in the planning brief would not justify a refusal of this proposal on design or conservation grounds.'

Speaking before last night's decision Barbara Weiss, founder of the anti-high-rise Skyline Campaign, said: 'What was there before was a dreadful '60s slab block; but that doesn't justify putting back something as bad with a 2016 date stamp on it.

'The architecture is as vulgar and commercial as it gets, and the site is being over-developed.'

She raised concerns over the effect of the development on views from Westminster Square and the River Thames.

Historic England called for the scheme to be shrunk in scale to reduce the harm it would cause to heritage assets. HE also raised concerns over the view from County Hall on the south bank of the river.

The scheme will see the construction of two four-storey podiums containing offices and shops, each with three residential buildings on top.

The developer, Abu Dhabi Financial Group, has promised to provide 10 homes at intermediate rent in the building, and a £10 million contribution for offsite affordable homes.

The planning report said that the design of the scheme 'is considered to have a distinctive quality but also to sit comfortably within the context of neighbouring buildings.'