# Brent approves 826‑bed student scheme at former Matalan despite local opposition



Brent Council has approved plans to replace the former Matalan store and adjacent car park on Cricklewood Broadway with a purpose‑built student accommodation scheme despite formal local objections and campaigners’ protests. The approved scheme would redevelop a 9,100m² town‑centre site into two blocks rising to a maximum of nine storeys and is described in planning papers as a strategic response to growing student housing demand across London. The application was considered at the council’s planning committee on 4 August 2025.

The proposal submitted to the council envisages up to 826 student bed spaces across two blocks with heights varying between three and nine storeys. Architects’ plans show around two main building volumes arranged to create a pedestrian route between them; the scheme replaces a consented residential scheme approved in 2023. Developers and design teams note the site’s proximity to public transport — approximately a ten‑minute walk from Cricklewood station — which they argue places it within convenient travel time of multiple higher‑education hubs across London.

The accommodation mix supplied in planning documents and media briefings indicates the majority of rooms will be en‑suite, arranged in clusters, with the remainder provided as studios and a small number of accessible or companion rooms. One industry summary set out roughly 662 en‑suite cluster bedspaces organised into 82 clusters, with the remainder configured as studios and accessibility‑compliant units intended to meet equality requirements.

There is a degree of confusion in publicly available material about the precise developer and delivery arrangements. Architects’ Journal and BB Partnership’s project documents identify the project as being commissioned by Sentinel Security and managed by Home Is London, with BB Partnership acting as architect; other local planning summaries and community trackers record Ziser London as the applicant listed on recent planning filings. BB Partnership’s own project page also describes an alternative or earlier mixed‑use/co‑living concept for parts of the Cricklewood Broadway/Hassop Road area, emphasising a different mix of co‑living, affordable homes, and retained industrial floorspace.

Locally, at least 30 formal objections were lodged with the council and resident groups have been active in campaigning against the conversion of the low‑cost retail site. Objectors cited the scheme’s height and massing — warning it would “dominate the skyline” — and argued student accommodation does not increase permanent housing supply for families, key workers or those on council waiting lists. A Brent resident on Mark Twain Drive told Architects’ Journal the development was “totally unsuitable for the local area” and that transient student occupancy “does not support the borough’s broader housing needs.” Community groups and local blogs also recorded concerns about the loss of an inexpensive retailer and the potential additional strain on bus and local services.

Opponents point to the 2023 consent for a three‑building residential scheme that would have delivered 238 homes — a proposal that attracted more guarded local support despite reservations about height and density. Residents have contrasted that consented residential offer, which they view as providing longer‑term housing benefit, with the new student‑led brief that supplies beds rather than traditional family homes or affordable rented housing.

Developers and the design team have defended the plans. BB Partnership’s director Julian Williams said the scheme offered an opportunity “to revitalise a key site in Cricklewood, delivering high‑quality student accommodation while enhancing the local urban environment,” in comments issued alongside the planning submission. The practice and project team emphasise sustainability measures embedded in the design — including air‑source heat pumps, bio‑solar roof elements and mechanical ventilation with heat recovery — and claim those measures take the scheme beyond minimum London Plan carbon performance requirements.

A student‑accommodation demand assessment accompanying the application argues Brent and London as a whole face a widening shortfall between student housing supply and demand, and positions the Cricklewood site as a “strategic location” within a 45‑minute travel time of scores of higher‑education institutions. The developers have cited regulatory changes — including post‑Grenfell secondary escape and fire‑safety requirements — as a factor informing the decision to pursue a student housing scheme rather than the earlier private‑residential block.

The application was considered through the council’s formal planning process (planning reference 25/0413) with materials, committee reports and the webcast of the planning meeting made publicly available by Brent Council. Local groups such as NorthWestTWO have kept running records of the application, published images and collated community responses; they continue to press for greater clarity about affordable housing provision, retail replacement, public‑realm benefits and transport impacts.

The approval marks a significant shift for the edge‑of‑town centre site: supporters argue it supplies much‑needed specialist housing stock and brings vacant retail floorspace back into active use, while critics say the social value and permanence of conventional housing would better serve long‑term borough needs. With decision documents and committee minutes now on the public record, the next stage will be scrutiny of discharge‑of‑condition applications and any planning obligations to secure mitigation measures for local impacts; campaigners have indicated they will monitor whether the promised sustainability and community benefits are delivered in practice.

### 📌 Reference Map:

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/north-london-architects-student-housing-plan-approved-despite-local-objections), [[7]](https://brent.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcast_interactive/994673)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/north-london-architects-student-housing-plan-approved-despite-local-objections), [[2]](https://urbanliving.news/finance-and-investment/planning-submitted-for-826-bed-london-pbsa-scheme/), [[3]](https://www.londonworld.com/news/brent-student-accommodation-blocks-for-cricklewood-matalan-would-see-north-london-area-transformed-5010554)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://urbanliving.news/finance-and-investment/planning-submitted-for-826-bed-london-pbsa-scheme/), [[3]](https://www.londonworld.com/news/brent-student-accommodation-blocks-for-cricklewood-matalan-would-see-north-london-area-transformed-5010554)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/north-london-architects-student-housing-plan-approved-despite-local-objections), [[2]](https://urbanliving.news/finance-and-investment/planning-submitted-for-826-bed-london-pbsa-scheme/), [[4]](https://www.bbpartnership.co.uk/project/mixed-use-co-living-scheme-cricklewood-broadway-london/), [[5]](https://www.northwesttwo.org.uk/developments/), [[6]](https://www.northwesttwo.org.uk/matalan-site/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/north-london-architects-student-housing-plan-approved-despite-local-objections), [[5]](https://www.northwesttwo.org.uk/developments/), [[6]](https://www.northwesttwo.org.uk/matalan-site/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/north-london-architects-student-housing-plan-approved-despite-local-objections), [[2]](https://urbanliving.news/finance-and-investment/planning-submitted-for-826-bed-london-pbsa-scheme/), [[3]](https://www.londonworld.com/news/brent-student-accommodation-blocks-for-cricklewood-matalan-would-see-north-london-area-transformed-5010554), [[5]](https://www.northwesttwo.org.uk/developments/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/north-london-architects-student-housing-plan-approved-despite-local-objections), [[4]](https://www.bbpartnership.co.uk/project/mixed-use-co-living-scheme-cricklewood-broadway-london/)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/north-london-architects-student-housing-plan-approved-despite-local-objections), [[2]](https://urbanliving.news/finance-and-investment/planning-submitted-for-826-bed-london-pbsa-scheme/), [[3]](https://www.londonworld.com/news/brent-student-accommodation-blocks-for-cricklewood-matalan-would-see-north-london-area-transformed-5010554)
* Paragraph 9 – [[7]](https://brent.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcast_interactive/994673), [[1]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/north-london-architects-student-housing-plan-approved-despite-local-objections)
* Paragraph 10 – [[5]](https://www.northwesttwo.org.uk/developments/), [[6]](https://www.northwesttwo.org.uk/matalan-site/), [[4]](https://www.bbpartnership.co.uk/project/mixed-use-co-living-scheme-cricklewood-broadway-london/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/north-london-architects-student-housing-plan-approved-despite-local-objections> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://urbanliving.news/finance-and-investment/planning-submitted-for-826-bed-london-pbsa-scheme/> - Urban Living News reports that Ziser London submitted a planning application for an 826‑bed purpose‑built student accommodation (PBSA) scheme at the former Matalan site on Cricklewood Broadway. Designed by BB Partnership, the proposal comprises two blocks ranging from three to nine storeys and replaces a 2023 consent for 238 residential flats. The article states approximately 662 bed spaces would be en‑suite within 82 clusters, with the remainder made up of studios, accessible studios and companion rooms. It gives a room breakdown for Blocks A and B and notes the site is about a ten‑minute walk from Cricklewood station.
3. <https://www.londonworld.com/news/brent-student-accommodation-blocks-for-cricklewood-matalan-would-see-north-london-area-transformed-5010554> - LondonWorld’s local report covers Ziser London’s revised plans to demolish the Matalan store on Cricklewood Broadway and provide 826 student bed spaces in two blocks from three to nine storeys. The piece recalls an earlier consent for 238 flats and explains developers cited regulatory changes, such as post‑Grenfell secondary fire‑escape requirements, for revising the scheme. It describes the proposed room mix, accessibility provision and travel times to key higher‑education hubs, and records at least one formal objection expressing concern about the loss of a low‑cost retailer and the added strain on local buses and transit.
4. <https://www.bbpartnership.co.uk/project/mixed-use-co-living-scheme-cricklewood-broadway-london/> - BB Partnership’s project page describes a mixed‑use regeneration for Cricklewood Broadway and Hassop Road, replacing underused retail and industrial buildings with co‑living, affordable housing, retail and employment space. The firm says the design retains and extends existing structures, delivers 157 co‑living units plus eight traditional flats, and provides 2,679m² of modernised light industrial floorspace. The page highlights public‑realm improvements, a pedestrian arcade, widened pavements and tree planting. It states the scheme progressed under a Planning Performance Agreement with Brent Council and involved consultations with the GLA, local stakeholders and the Metropolitan Police’s Designing Out Crime officer throughout.
5. <https://www.northwesttwo.org.uk/developments/> - The NorthWestTWO residents association developments page summarises local proposals and planning history across Cricklewood, including the Matalan site at 317 Cricklewood Broadway. It identifies Ziser London as the developer and notes a February 2025 planning application for two blocks of student accommodation three to nine storeys high providing 826 bedspaces. The page sets out the earlier consent for 238 residential units, documents community concerns about height, density, amenity space and loss of retail, and links to Brent planning materials. It offers updates, images and local commentary reflecting residents’ campaigning and consultation activity.
6. <https://www.northwesttwo.org.uk/matalan-site/> - The NorthWestTWO blog post on the Matalan site summarises Ziser London’s intentions to submit a new application for student accommodation instead of the previously approved 238 residential units. It lists scheme changes including use of the roof for solar energy and air heat pumps, nine‑storey elements at the north corner, a car‑free approach, pedestrian access between blocks, commercial ground‑floor uses and a stated affordable housing provision. The post contextualises the proposal among wider Brent and Brent Cross Town student housing supply and records local observations about consultation materials and developer claims about demand.
7. <https://brent.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcast_interactive/994673> - Brent Council’s public webcasting page for the Planning Committee (4 August 2025) lists agenda item 250413 — 'Matalan Discount Club, Cricklewood Broadway, NW2 6PH' — showing the application being considered at committee. The page includes links to the committee report, supplementary documents and downloadable planning papers and identifies related agenda items. It provides access to the webcast, agenda, slides and transcript enabling public scrutiny of the decision process. The listing confirms the formal planning reference and frames the application within the council’s democratic process, allowing residents to view officers’ recommendations, objections summaries and councillors’ deliberations and published decision documents online.