



Chartered Town Planners & Architectural Technicians

DESIGN AND ACCESS / PLANNING / HERITAGE STATEMENT

Change of use of ground floor premises and basement from commercial unit to educational centre use (class F1-a), and new signage.

Application by: Mathnasium.

Property Address: 6 England's Lane, Belsize Park, NW3 4TG.

July 2023

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This Design and Access / Planning / Heritage Statement is submitted on behalf of the applicant in respect of a planning application for the change of use of the premises from use class E to F1(a) educational centre, and new signage. This Statement should be read in conjunction with other drawings and documents accompanying the planning application.

1.2 This Statement comprises:

- A description of the application property and surrounding area;
- A description of the proposed development;
- A summary of relevant planning history; and,
- An assessment of the proposed development against relevant planning policy.

2.0 APPLICATION PROPERTY AND SURROUNDING AREA

2.1 The planning application relates to the basement and ground floor premises of No. 6 Englands Lane. It sits within an overall four storey terraced property. The premises has a gross internal floor area of approx. 102m². The premises was most recently used as a carpet / flooring shop.



Figure 1 – Front Elevation of No. 6 Englands Lane.

2.2 The premises is located within a designated neighbourhood centre. The surrounding area is mixed use in nature with commercial premises on ground floors and many upper floors being in storage, office and residential use.

2.3 The site is well provided for in terms of transport and accessibility. There are many bus routes within walking distance. Chalk Farm and Swiss Cottage stations are minutes walk away. There are public bicycle parking facilities nearby on the corner with Antrim Road. The area surrounding the site is very well provided for in terms of footpaths, and pedestrian walkways connecting to shops, services and residential areas.

3.0 PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT & INFORMATION ON APPLICANT

3.1 It is proposed to change the use of the premises from to facilitate a maths tuition facility.

3.2 There is space within the premises to store waste until it is ready for collection.

3.3 New signage is proposed (new fascia sign and projecting blade type sign) which would be similar in dimensions/appearance to existing signage and signage on neighbouring buildings. The signage would be externally illuminated with a LED light trough.

3.4 It is not by accident that the applicant seeks to open a Mathnasium facility within a designated neighbourhood centre and within a parade with high footfall. Significant experience and analysis by Mathnasium has shown that such locations are key to successful operations as they enable parents to make use of the high street services while their child undergoes tuition. The convenience element for parents is essential considering the frequency of tuition. As an overview, Mathnasium started operations in 2002 and has grown into a worldwide brand with over 1,000 centres in 15 countries. Mathnasium offer extra-curricular mathematics education for children aged 6 to 16, and the model is based around offering children something notably different from that which is offered by schools. Mathnasium centres differ significantly to conventional educational providers and aim to create a fun atmosphere such that children actually look forward to their tuition sessions. The “Mathnasium method” of teaching is proven to be successful. Children’s weaknesses are identified via an initial assessment and a bespoke learning schedule is then designed to focus on their weakness areas at their own pace, supported by trained instructors. Results from the work programme are uploaded to the Mathnasium system so that the next learning program is always focused on the areas in need of improvement. The children play maths games and complete puzzles that encourage a positive attitude towards learning.

3.5 Children would attend the premises for a 60-90 minute session. It is preferred that parents don’t remain within the centre as this is a significant distraction for the child, and so it is asked that parents return at pick up time to collect their child. This necessitates the careful choosing of locations. Centre locations are assessed in terms of the neighbouring businesses and their suitability as a place for a parent to spend upwards of an hour on a regular basis. It is sought to have nearby facilities such as a supermarket, café, and restaurant. Retailers specifically named by Mathnasium customers as “preferred retailers” to visit during the instructional hours include: cafés, bars, restaurants, supermarkets, gyms, hairdressers, beauticians, clothing retailers, and children’s wear. The retail demographic profile of England’s Lane is also very closely matched to that of Mathnasium’s other existing locations. England’s Lane is an ideal area, as it has a good range of schools within walking / cycling distance – both primary and secondary – therefore complimenting the Mathnasium business because of the favourable proximity.

3.6 Mathnasium UK centres are typically between 600 – 1,200sq.ft. in size. Mathnasium operate on a membership basis (rather like a gymnasium) and on average each student attends 2 - 3 times per week, for 60 to 90 minutes per visit. There are generally around 6 times the number of members enrolled than actually attending at any one time - this is because several sessions are provided on any one day so more members can be accommodated than just the number of seats available. With careful scheduling it is generally expected to have around 100 students per day passing through the doors once the centre is at full capacity.

3.7 There are in excess of approx. 15 Mathnasium centres operating in the UK and more in the pipeline. Research has shown that the business model is not affected by extremes of weather or any changes in ‘fashion’ trends; there is an ever-increasing need for supplementary education and parents are now prioritising this over other discretionary spend items. In Mathnasium’s more established markets (US and Canada) retailers are now very aware of the “Mathnasium effect” and as a result new retailers are actively seeking out premises near to a Mathnasium Centre, as there is a marked upturn in “pedestrian traffic” whenever a centre opens (source: CBRE Commercial Real Estate Services) due to the nature of parents spending upwards of an hour or so in neighbouring businesses, two to three times per week. The centres are vibrant and dynamic operations, and they participate regularly in community outreach programmes where fun activities are organised (usually based around maths puzzles and challenges) engaging with local parents and complementary businesses to ensure that they are seen as a valued cornerstone of any local community.

3.8 4D Planning have successfully assisted Mathnasium secure planning permission elsewhere in the London and the UK:

- Recently 4D Planning secured permission for a Mathnasium facility at 52-54 Heath Road – Richmond Borough Council (Planning Permission Ref. No. 23/0095/FUL). No. 52-54 is within a designated local centre and secondary shopping frontage.
- In 2022, 4D Planning secured permission for a Mathnasium facility at 107 Drayton Gardens, London, SW10 9QT - Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (Planning Permission Ref. No. PP/22/02465). No. 107 is within a designated district shopping centre and secondary shopping frontage.
- In 2021, 4D Planning secured planning permission for a Mathnasium facility at 413 Honeypot Lane, Stanmore, HA7 1JJ – Harrow Borough Council (Planning Permission Ref. No. P/4818/21). No. 413 is within a designated town centre and designated local centre shopping frontage.

- In 2020, 4D Planning secured planning permission for two Mathnasium facilities at 1388 High Road, Whetstone, London, N20 9BH – Barnet Borough Council (Planning Application ref. No. Ref. No. 20/6233/FUL – Barnet) and 911 Green Lanes, London, N21 2QP – Enfield (Planning Permission Ref. No. 20/04083/FUL). No. 1388 is located within a designated main retail frontage, and No. 911 Green lanes is located within a designated town centre.
- In 2016, 4D Planning secured planning permission for a Mathnasium facility at a premises at 289 Watling Street Radlett Hertfordshire – Hertsmere Borough Council (Planning Permission Ref. No. 16/1929/FUL. This involved the loss of an A1 unit in a retail area however the Planning Authority recognised the unique nature of the business and the positive impacts it would have for nearby businesses.

4.0 PLANNING HISTORY

4.1 There is no recent / relevant planning history for the premises according to Camden online planning records.

5.0 PLANNING POLICY AND GUIDANCE

National Planning Policy Framework (2021)

5.1 The National Planning Policy Framework 2021 (NPPF) seeks to promote a balance of land uses. Para. 86 is of particular importance and it states:

“Planning policies and decisions should support the role that town centres play at the heart of local communities, by taking a positive approach to their growth, management and adaptation. Planning policies should:

a) define a network and hierarchy of town centres and promote their long-term vitality and viability – by allowing them to grow and diversify in a way that can respond to rapid changes in the retail and leisure industries, allows a suitable mix of uses (including housing) and reflects their distinctive characters...” (underlining is authors emphasis)

The proposed development is in response to changing trends in the commercial / education sector in general.

The traditional high street and town/city centres have been undergoing a transformation for many years. It is widely acknowledged that the future success of high street and town/city centres lies not in

retail alone, but rather in service, leisure and mixed uses. Customers want to seek out ‘experiences’ and uniqueness. A 2016 Report¹ on Town Centre Investment Zones found:

“The retail/leisure/property/investment sectors are agreed that the future of town centres is no longer mainly about shopping. It is more likely to be as much about leisure, living, learning and local services, as well as business”

The proposed development represents an innovative and unique town centre business, and one with a proven track record. It will significantly increase footfall to the benefit of existing business nearby. The proposed use represents a pro-active response to changing educational and commercial trends. Conventional commerce is continuing to come under significant pressure due to a combination of Brexit and Covid 19 knock on impacts.

5.2 Amongst the findings of a recent Royal Town Planning Institute Research Paper (*Planning for Post Covid Cities*, December 2020) were that:

- Visits to local shops may continue to decline post Covid-19.
- There appears to be general consensus among commenters that there will be ‘no going-back’ to previous shopping habits.
- With reduced face-to-face contacts with family, friends and colleagues, commenters suggested that High Streets could be revitalised as a hub for social interaction.

The proposed use would very much align itself with the likely future nature of shopping areas / local centres in that local centres are less about conventional retailing but rather new types of commerce activity and the activity that takes place on the street and how this is fostered by adjoining businesses.

The London Plan (2021)

5.3 Policy SD6 (Town Centres and High Streets) of the London Plan states that “...*London’s varied town centres should be promoted and enhanced by:*

1) encouraging strong, resilient, accessible and inclusive hubs with a diverse range of uses that meet the needs of Londoners, including main town centre uses, night-time economy, civic, community, social and residential uses...”

It is considered that the proposed development is consistent with the above London Plan provisions. The proposed development is a specialist commercial / educational use, and one which is wholly appropriate for a town centre.

¹ Town Centre Investment Zones. Getting Investment Back Into the High Street. Report of the Fragmented Ownership Group. British Property Federation. January 2016.

Camden Local Plan (2017)

5.4 Local Plan Policy TC2 (Camden's centres and other shopping areas) is of main relevance to the proposed use. Policy TC2 states:

“The Council will promote successful and vibrant centres throughout the borough to serve the needs of residents, workers and visitors.

We will:

a. seek to protect and enhance the role and unique character of each of Camden's centres, ensuring that new development is of an appropriate scale and character for the centre in which it is located;

b. provide for and maintain, a range of shops including independent shops, services, food, drink and entertainment and other suitable uses to provide variety, vibrancy and choice;

...

The Council will seek to retain convenience shopping for local residents in Camden's Neighbourhood Centres and will ensure that development in them does not harm the function, character or success of that centre”

It is submitted that the proposed development is consistent with the above Policy. The proposal would be a specialist business that would add to the mix of uses in the area at a time when traditional and small shop units are often struggling. The overall Englands Lane parade within which the prospective use would sit is already equipped with a wide variety of commercial uses including a Tesco Express. Arguably if the premises were to be occupied by an A1 / E(a)-class operator, it would likely directly compete with the businesses currently nearby which could be detrimental considering how challenging the current retail environment is.

The community is well served by the businesses along Englands Lane and typically have a choice available as to which provider they choose considering there are often multiple operators within the same industry. However, with thousands of children within the target customer demographic, the demand for maths tuition is severely underserved within the area. Demand was high before the Covid 19 pandemic and has only been accentuated since the disruption to education following the pandemic.

5.6 An Extract from the Camden Proposals Map, is set out in Figure 2 below. It is not affected by any adverse designations other than being within a neighbourhood centre, and a conservation area.

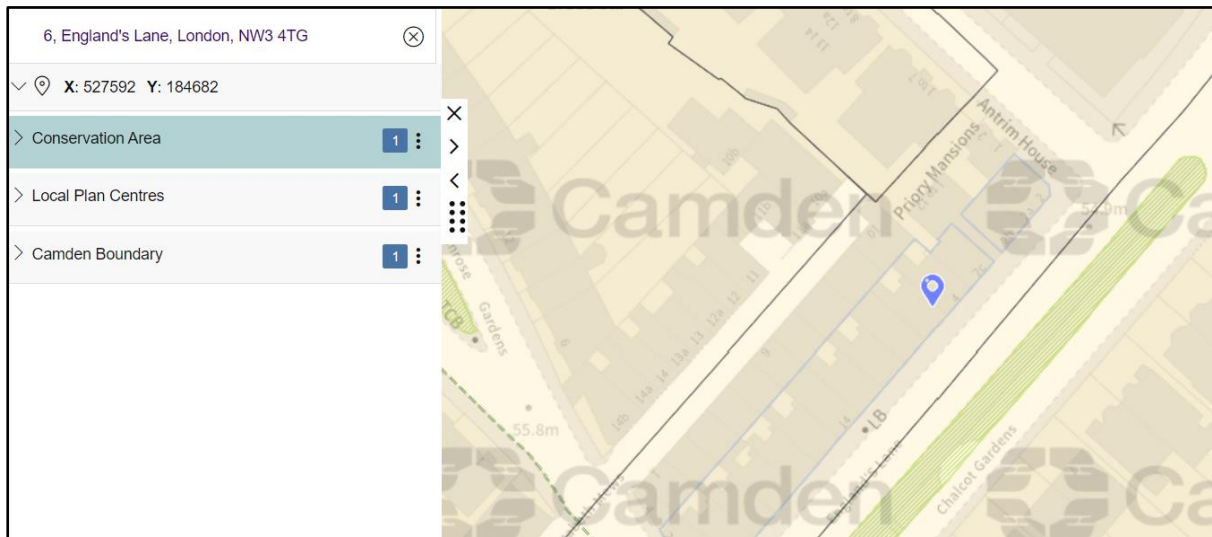


Figure 2 –Extract from Camden Proposals Map. Blue pin indicates approximate location of premises.

5.7 In further support of the proposed use we submit as follows:

- *The proposed use will complement and support the ongoing operations of neighbouring employment / business uses. The proposal will bring significant footfall to the area. Existing Mathnasium's centres have shown that retailers are now very aware of the "Mathnasium effect" and as a result many new retailers actively seek out premises near to a Mathnasium Centre, as there is a marked upturn in "pedestrian traffic" whenever a centre opens due to the nature of parents spending an hour or so in neighbouring businesses, two to three times per week.*
- *The proposed use has at its core an educational focus. It seeks to better the educational attainment of children and thus enhance their further education and employment prospects.*
- *Parents leaving children off at the centre will use nearby businesses and services whilst children are in attendance.*
- *The centre is a commercial business and will function like a shop / office in many respects.*
- *The premises will operate during typical business hours.*
- *There is no potential for adverse impacts to nearby residential properties.*
- *There would be no adverse traffic impacts (see para 6.0 below).*
- *An active window display can be provided for adding to the variety of shopfronts nearby and proposed shopfront alterations would be in accordance with Policy D3 of the Local Plan. There are many examples of Mathnasium facilities on high streets across London*

and all present a high quality, interesting and active window display – see Figures 3-5 below.

- The proposal will significantly enhance the vitality of this section of Lee Road.



Figure 3 - Mathnasium Harrow.



Figure 4 - Mathnasium Clapham.



Figure 5 – Mathnasium Crouch End.

6.0 PARKING AND RESIDENTIAL AMENITY

6.1 The parking requirement of the proposed use would be no greater than the extant use. Furthermore, the site is very served by bus routes, within walking distance of tube stations, and is within walking distance of residential areas. There are public bicycle parking facilities nearby. A significant proportion of attendees to the centre will use public / sustainable transport (as they would

if attending school). Many bus routes run along and near to Englands Lane, and there are public cycle parking facilities at several locations nearby. An important point to stress is that the proposed use is not a conventional traffic / parking generator use as a typical shop or office might be. The students attending obviously don't generate parking demand. It is the research and experience of Mathnasium that parents who drive children to the centre will not simply park up nearby and wait a full 90 minutes. Rather they will travel to services and facilities nearby and thus the proposed use is part of multi-purpose trips by parents, and part of a series of linked visits. Most parents who drive will likely park up at a business/service and both drop-off and pick up children from this point.

6.2 It is not considered there would be any adverse impact to neighbouring residential amenity as there would be little if any difference to the extant use in this regard.

7.0 HERITAGE

Assessment of the significance of the affected heritage asset(s)

7.1 The premises sits within the Belsize Park Conservation Area. According to the Belsize Conservation Area Statement (2003) the special character of the conservation area is multi-faceted but is in large part derived from mid-19th century Italianate villas, six distinct areas of varying character and appearance, and verdant character.

7.2 It is not known whether the existing shopfront is an original feature but nonetheless the proposed development will not alter it in a material way. New advertising is essentially confined to a new fascia signage and projecting blade type sign (both of which existing on the property at present). All advertising would be similar in dimensions and appearance to signage on neighbouring buildings. The overall building within which the premises sits is of moderate architectural and visual merit, however works are only proposed to the ground floor facade and would not be materially different to how it looks at present.

Impact of the proposed advertisement on that significance including any measures to mitigate potential harm and/or better reveal significance.

7.3 Whilst the important scenic, historic and architectural features of this building and wider area are noted, it is argued that the primary setting of the application is near shop fronts which already have signage of the nature proposed.

7.4 Given that no significant alterations are proposed to the external elevations, it is not considered there would be any adverse impact to the special character or appearance of the conservation area arising from the development. The proposals will have an overall positive impact on the building, and by extension the wider conservation area, by reinvigorating the commercial character and helping to sustain and attract footfall to the area to the betterment of commercial activity.

8.0 CONCLUSION

8.1 The application site is within walking distance of residential areas, day to day shops, services and facilities. The site is accessible and sustainable in terms of access and transport.

8.2 The proposed development is considered to be in compliance with NPPF policies, the London Plan as well as the Camden Local Plan.