

**Sam Fitzpatrick**  
**Planning Department**  
London Borough of Camden,  
5 Pancras Square,  
London, N1C 4AG.

11 October 2023  
**Our Ref: D-SC-ARL-23-002**  
**Camden Ref: 2023/3165/NEW**  
**PP Ref: PP-12404879**

Dear Sam

**Re: Secret Group Ltd Events Venue, 180 Arlington Road, Camden, NW1 7HL**  
**Change of Use Application -**

Please see below, and attached information relating to the proposed change of use of 180 Arlington Road, Camden, NW1 7HL.

## Background Information

Secret Group Ltd (SGL) is a pre-eminent and globally recognised cultural organisation, renowned for its theatrical, musical and cinematic immersive productions. Commonly trading under the 'Secret Cinema' brand ([www.secretcinema.com](http://www.secretcinema.com)), it has become synonymous with high quality, immersive events which take place in unusual, highly themed or purpose-built venues.

Whilst in the past Secret Cinema have concentrated on single large scale shows, Secret Cinema is now looking to evolve its offering, pivoting shows towards a shorter format, where audience members pre-book a time slot, and travel through the experience in much smaller groups of 20-30 people. The experience will last between 60 and 90 minutes.

A new Premises Licence in the name of Secret Group Limited has also been applied for.

## The Site

180 Arlington Road is currently home to Mecca Bingo. The building was constructed in the 1930's, originally as The Gaumont Camden Town, a 2,742 seat cinema. In 1968, the site was split horizontally into the Odeon as the upper portion, accessed from Parkway, and the Rank Strand Club as the lower portion, which was later renamed as Mecca.

The current site operators, Rank, have provided the below statement in relation to the the closure of the Mecca Bingo:

*"Trading has been tough across hospitality, and regular bingo players have been slow to return to halls since the pandemic. As a result, despite the prime location of our Camden club, we are not seeing the footfall required to ensure the continued operation of the venue as a bingo hall."*

*"180 Arlington Road has been a Mecca Bingo for 55 years and rather than mothball the site, we are keen to secure its future. Having reviewed various options we are confident that Secret Cinema's proposal will build on the site's great heritage of community, excitement and entertainment, and offers the best solution both for the venue and the area."*

Secret Cinema are excited to be able to take on, and revitalise the site, bringing it back into popular usage, which is fitting with central entertainment uses of the area. In recent years, Camden has become home to a number of immersive theatrical events, such as Peaky Blinders at Camden Stables Market, and it is hoped that we can build on this success, and make Camden a destination for immersive theatre in London.

The site is centrally located on Arlington Road, with Camden Town Northern Line station being an easy 3 minute walk away. The surrounding area is a mixture of residential and commercial uses, with a number of bars and restaurants being located within close proximity.

Overall the site extends to 1,913 m<sup>2</sup>, on the ground floor, with some ancillary back of house spaces being located at basement and first floor levels.

## Proposal

The building was originally designed as a cinema/music hall arrangement with front of house, auditorium and stage area. It is proposed that SGL will utilise all areas in a similar manner to those which have subsequently been managed as a Bingo Hall.

- Existing foyer area (access from/to Arlington road) - remaining as main entrance and foyer/ congregation space
- Existing bingo hall (accessed internally from the foyer) - remaining as audience space/ auditorium
- Bar area (access from/to Inverness Street) - remaining as bar/ function space

Application Number	Narrative	Decision
2017/2321/P	External alterations to building including new entrances to both street elevations and addition of plant equipment on northeastern side elevation	Granted
2007/1797/P	Retention of a metal canopy at the rear of the building, to be used as a smoking shelter for bingo hall.	Granted
PEX0200567	Installation of a shutter to the front entrance, as shown on drawing number: 958/1 Rev.A	Grant Full Planning Permission (conds)
PE9606093R1	Alterations to the front elevation to form ramped access, new entrance canopy with illuminated fascia panel above, blocking up of existing openings, new security shutters to the front recessed entrance and formation of new fire exit, as shown on drawing numbers RK192/01N, /20C, /24, /31A, A9510/01 and /7.	Grant Full Planning Permission (conds)
AE9606109R1	The display of a new illuminated fascia sign, two new projecting box signs and new fascia strip with illuminated detailing, as shown on drawing numbers RK192/01N, /20C, /24, /31A, A9510/01 and /7.	Grant Approval for Advertisement
PE9606093	Alterations to form ramped access and new entrance canopy with feature metal gable framework above, and block up existing fire exit and reposition, and fascia signage panel. (Plans submitted)	Withdrawn Application-revision received
AE9606109	Display of an internally illuminated fascia sign and projecting sign. (Plans submitted)	Withdrawn Application-revision received

## Policy

### The London Plan

Policy HC5 of The London Plan 2021 entitled "Supporting London's culture and creative industries" states:

*Development Plans ... should protect existing cultural venues, facilities and uses where appropriate and **support the development of new cultural venues in town centres and places with good public transport connectivity***

The proposed site at 180 Arlington Road offers an existing leisure venue which caters for and is suitably designed for visitors throughout the day and evening. With a PTAL score of 6b (greatest access to public transport) and being within short walking distance of three tube stations the site is well connected for visitors and staff members alike.

### London Borough of Camden

#### Policy C3

*We wish to see Camden's cultural and leisure offer sustained and enhanced.*

#### Policy C3.2

*Camden has an extremely rich cultural and leisure offer that contributes enormously to our residents' quality of life and draws people from the rest of London, the UK and throughout the world.*

#### Policy C3.3

*The Council will normally seek to retain existing cultural and leisure facilities. There is a strong and thriving cultural scene in the borough, particularly in Camden's part of the West End and **Camden Town**. [...] Many long- standing cultural facilities were **designed specifically for art and performance and in heritage terms, their public use for entertainment contributes substantially to their significance.***

## Camden Town Conservation Area

The Camden Town Conservation Area Management Strategy discusses the buildings at 180 Arlington Road briefly

- *The Mecca Bingo Hall, part of the 1930s Odeon development, which makes a distinct contribution to the Conservation Area by way of its dramatic pantiled roof slope recalling early 20th century architecture in the Low Countries.* There are no plans to alter the external pantiled roof slope as part of this project
- *During the later part of the 20th century the northern part of Camden Town has become the focus for youth culture and now attracts visitors from across the world attracted by the lively shops, markets, music venues and unstuffy atmosphere.* It is hoped that the SGL use will encourage and benefit the wider focus for cultural activities

It should be noted that:

- There are no listed buildings in close proximity to the application building
- Buildings classed as having positive impacts on the conservation area include the following, which are located across Arlington Road from the proposed site - none of the current plans will see any impact on these buildings.
  - 173-179 Arlington Road
  - Cavendish School
  - Camden House
- No external demolition or works are planned (some internal partitions and ceilings are to be refurbished), however the shell of the building will remain completely intact.
- There will be changes to the existing signage - however this will largely be to replace those signs in their current locations with an Advertising Consent application to follow shortly.

The Camden Town Conservation Area Management Strategy includes the need to continue and encourage investment and maintenance in the area to support the strategic desires of the policy. Secret Cinema intends to invest considerably in the building and increase the culture offering in Camden whilst creating jobs and opportunities for local suppliers.



## Community benefits

The following is our indicative Year 1 community programme for the site:

### Year 1 Education & Development

- Work Experience
  - 15 x Young People undertake placements at the live experiences
- Masterclass Series
  - 10 x Immersive Production Workshops (Performance, Production, Design)
  - 10 x National and Local Partner Workshops inspired by the production
  - Creative Projects inspired by the production and working in collaboration with our National Partners
- Event Series
  - Special immersive events with extracts from the main production, for all workshop and work experience participants

### Year 1 Economic & Cultural Benefits

- Local Resident Engagement
  - Free Resident Ticket Allocation
- Local Employment
  - Minimum 10 x Local People employed (E.g. FOH, Bars, Merchandise, Art Department, Costume, Hair & Makeup etc)
- Local Supplier Engagement (E.g. textiles, wholesalers, paper products, cleaning companies, breweries etc)

## Continued Success



Secret Cinema presents Casino Royale - The London Borough of Barking and Dagenham - 2019

SGL has a proven track record in the design, delivery and safe management of venue based entertainment offerings – we have brought together an expert team of designers, technicians and event professionals to help stage what we hope to be a truly magnificent new venue in Camden.

## Site preparation

There are no plans for any external alterations to the building. Internal works will be undertaken to bring the current facilities up to specification, and set pieces/ decor will be used to allow for performances.

## Further Information

Further information is included in the documents and drawings attached to this application. In addition to the attached information, a full and detailed Venue Management Plan document including evacuation procedures, health and safety information and daily management plans will be made available to the authority no less than ten days before we open for shows.

Please do not hesitate to contact me regarding any further information you might need.

Yours

*David Dobson*

**pp. David Dobson  
Secret Group Limited**