

Secret Group – 180 Arlington Rd, London NW1 7HL – Planning Application
Our Reference (D-SC-ARL-23-005)

Design & Access Statement

The Purpose of this Document

This document has been prepared on behalf of Secret Group Limited (SGL) for their Change of Use application from D2 (Bingo Hall) to Sui Generis (events venue) to be located at 180 Arlington Rd, London NW1 7HL

The Change of Use of 180 Arlington Rd, London NW1 7HL will allow the site in Camden to be used for a range of event activities. The purpose of this document is to explain the primary design principles of the planned development.

The Site

The site is bounded by Arlington Road to the West, Parkway to the South, Inverness Street to the North, and Camden High Street to the East. The site has access to the public highway on both Arlington Road and Inverness Street.

The site is currently occupied by 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.

“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.”

Statement from Rank

SGL are excited to 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 and Tomb Raider 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 m2, on the ground floor, with some ancillary back of house spaces being located at basement and first floor levels.

| Area | Current Use | Proposed Use | Retained Use m2 | Changed Use m2 |
|--------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Ground Floor | Foyer & Bar | Foyer & Bar | 775m2 | |
| Ground Floor | Bingo Hall | Main Event Space | | 1,140m2 |
| 1st Floor | Offices, Dressing Rooms and Ancillary | Offices, Dressing Rooms and Ancillary | 175m2 | |
| Basement | Plant Rooms | Plant Rooms | 329m2 | |

The Proposed Development

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 and internally from the auditorium) - remaining as bar/ function space

As the previous use was within a similar use category, very little work on the building's infrastructure is planned. A modest amount of internal refurbishment works are required. External elements such as windows and doors will be refurbished inline with their current appearance, and a separate advertising consent application will be submitted for the replacement of the property's signage.

SGL plans to use the space as a multi-purpose events venue, and it is the intention that a number of individual events will be hosted on the site.

Given the size of the venue, it is currently planned that these shows will follow a 'pulse' format, with tickets being available on a time slot basis. This approach effectively distributes the audience throughout the day, rather than a singular 'curtain' time, which concentrates audience arrivals and departures into a short time period.

In addition, it is planned to provide a food and beverage offering, within the area currently occupied by Mecca's current bar. This will be primarily provided to compliment the main offering within the event space, but at times may run independently using the entrance on Inverness Street.

SGL are aware that Arlington Road and the surrounding areas have increasingly become an area of high crime and antisocial behaviour. It is envisaged the proposed development will have a positive impact in reducing these issues. The increased visible staffing presence around the entrance, and the nature of the audience flow being distributed throughout the day will help reduce the risk of crime usually associated with little footfall.

The landlord is keen to keep the site in use, and the proposed development provides a secure future for the application site, further reducing the risk of crime and antisocial behaviour normally associated with vacant sites.

Assessment

An assessment has been made for the need of this events venue, to be located at 180 Arlington Road, the following aspects have been taken into consideration.

Temporary Venues and Immersive Experiences

The history of site specific theatre and meanwhile use venues dates back to the late sixties and early seventies, however the more recent trend in immersive experiences has seen a larger number of options made available to the experience seeking public.

Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens (2009) was one of the first full scale site specific theatre projects and has been followed by immersive productions from Punchdrunk (currently located in Greenwich), SGL (numerous locations across London in recent years), Les Enfants Terribles (productions include Alice's Adventures Underground and Sherlock Holmes) and various others. Immersive experiences are now a key staple of the London entertainment offering, current and recent productions include:

- London Dungeon
- War of the Worlds Immersive Experience
- Punchdrunk: The Burnt City
- Monopoly Life Size
- Frameless
- Dali: Cybernetics
- Dopamine Land
- Immersive Van Gogh
- Peaky Blinders: The Rise
- Twist Museum

Meanwhile use often suits immersive experiences well - the availability of suitable spaces for long term entertainment offerings is often difficult - with the 'pop-up' nature of the genre working alongside shorter

term leases and availability. In addition the offerings can be brought to areas which otherwise would not be offered these types of artistic venues, bringing people and additional benefits to an area (for example increased spend in local food, accommodation and with other business types).

Proposed site

The site was originally constructed as a cinema, the Gaumont Regents Park, a brand owned by its current owner, Rank.

Cinema-going declined in popularity in the 1960's, as television ownership increased in the home. In order to fit in with the trends of the time, Rank horizontally subdivided the property, creating the Odeon Cinema from the upper half, and the Top Rank Club, a forerunner of the Mecca Bingo brand, which still occupies the site today.

"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."

Statement from Rank

Why This Site?

180 Arlington Road provides an excellent location for this type of experience. It is located within the central Camden Town town centre area, with excellent public transport connections, in close proximity to other leisure uses, and Camden Town is increasingly a must-visit destination amongst tourists.

As the site is currently laid out to handle larger capacity audiences, with WC facilities, circulation and emergency egress routes already designed for a capacity in excess of requirements, this vastly reduces the amount of construction work required onsite.

The site has a proven track record of use as an entertainment venue, and is located very close to public transport, suitable access and egress routes are available that do not pass through predominantly residential areas.

A site of this scale, with larger-capacity facilities, does not become available very often and SGL is in a unique position to be able to revitalise the site within a very similar leisure use.

Previous Applications

| 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 a 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 detrimental 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. The SGL project will see considerable investment in the building, an increase in culture offering and jobs, and the longevity of the site as a place of leisure and entertainment.

SGL have contacted Camden Town Conservation Area Advisory Committee, and will keep them informed of our proposals. Further information about community consultation can be found in document D-SC-ARL-23-018.

Physical Impacts

This application proposes no changes to the external physical changes to existing buildings. A further advertising consent application will be made for any directional and wayfinding signage necessary to identify the development.

Social Benefits

The proposed development will provide a number of employment opportunities, which will be advertised in the local area. Further details can be found in the community document D-SC-ARL-23-018

Conclusion

The proposed development will ensure the continued use of the site, within an entertainment use class. SGL have chosen 180 Arlington Road as their next venue, after considering a number of factors:

1. Availability

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Statement from Rank

The property is already set up for larger audiences, so minimal construction works will be required to activate the site.

2. Transport

The proposed development site has excellent public transport links, and is in a town centre area. All marketing materials for any future shows mounted at the site will promote public transport as the primary method of travel to the site.

3. Location

The proposed site is located in an ideal location, which has satisfied many of the following criteria:

- Good access
- The desire to have a low impact on other users in and around the site
- The desire to have a low impact on neighbouring properties
- To meet the needs and requirements of the landowners.

Design

The proposed development does not include any physical external changes to the site.

The proposed shows will be carefully designed and managed to ensure a smooth flow of audience from purchasing their tickets, to arriving at the site, throughout the experience and back off site.



Use

Description of the Site

The proposed site is 180 Arlington Road, and is bounded by Arlington Road to the West, Parkway to the South, Inverness Street to the North, and Camden High Street to the East.

The building on the site was constructed in the 1930's and is of brick construction, with a large pantile roof. The building is horizontally subdivided, with the Odeon Cinema occupying the upper floors, and the application site on the lower floors, currently occupied by Mecca Bingo.

The application site is comprised of:

| Area | Current Use | Proposed Use | Retained Use m2 | Changed Use m2 |
|--------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Ground Floor | Foyer & Bar | Foyer & Bar | 775m2 | |
| Ground Floor | Bingo Hall | Main Event Space | | 1,140m2 |
| 1st Floor | Offices, Dressing Rooms and Ancillary | Offices, Dressing Rooms and Ancillary | 175m2 | |
| Basement | Plant Rooms | Plant Rooms | 329m2 | |

The Development

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 the main entrance and foyer/ congregation space
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- Bar area (access from/to Inverness Street) - remaining as bar/ function space

As the previous use was within a similar use category, very little by the way of works on the building's infrastructure are planned, with just a modest amount of internal refurbishment works being required. External elements such as windows and doors will be refurbished inline with their current appearance, and a separate advertising consent application will be submitted for the replacement of the property's signage.

SGL plans to use the space as a multi-purpose events venue, and it is the intention that a number of shows will be hosted on the site..

Given the size of the venue, it is currently planned that these shows will follow a 'pulse' format, with tickets being available on a time slot basis. This approach effectively distributes the audience throughout the day, rather than a singular 'curtain' time, which concentrates audience arrivals and departures into a short time period.

Accessibility

SGL is committed to providing accessible experiences for all. The proposed development will meet or exceed all requirements for buildings of this nature for the provision of an accessible site. Main guidance will be taken from:

- BS8300: 2009 - Design of Buildings and Their Approaches to Meet the Needs of Disabled People.
- Buildings Regulations Approved Document Part M.

Impact on Local Businesses

The proposed development will revitalise the site, and drive audiences to the site, and therefore the surrounding areas. SGL has a national following, and the proposed shows have their own followings, so it is envisaged that the site will become a destination in its own right, helping bring new people into the area, who will then make use of the existing nearby facilities, such as bars and restaurants, therefore It is not envisaged that the proposed development will have a detrimental impact to the surrounding businesses.

Amount

The proposed development is for a change of use from D2 (Bingo Hall) to Sui Generis Events Space.

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It is planned to re-use the majority of the existing infrastructure within the building, including WCs, HVAC systems, and access egress points, which negates the need to undertake any major construction works.

Hours of Operation

Although exact hours will change on a per-show basis, below is a representative example of the opening hours of the venue.

| | Operational Hours | Public Hours |
|-------------------|-------------------|---------------|
| Monday - Saturday | 08.00 - 17.00 | 10.00 - 00.00 |
| Sunday | 08.00 - 17.00 | 12.00 - 00.00 |

During operational hours, the building will be occupied by staff and contractors as required, during these hours the following activities will be undertaken;

- Servicing and preparation of the venue spaces
- Maintenance
- Staff training

For further information about vehicle movement during the operational period, please refer to document D-SC-ARL-23-009

Construction Deliveries

During the construction period deliveries will be made to the site between the hours of 08:00 and 18:00.

For more information about deliveries and collections to/from site, please see Transport assessment, document D-SC-ARL-23-008

Construction Working Hours

External 'noisy' works will be limited to 08:00 – 18:00 Monday to Friday and 08:00 – 13:00 on Saturdays. In this instance, noisy works are those which can be heard outside the boundary of the build site. It should be noted however that:

- No percussive works are to take place
- No heavy construction works are to be carried out

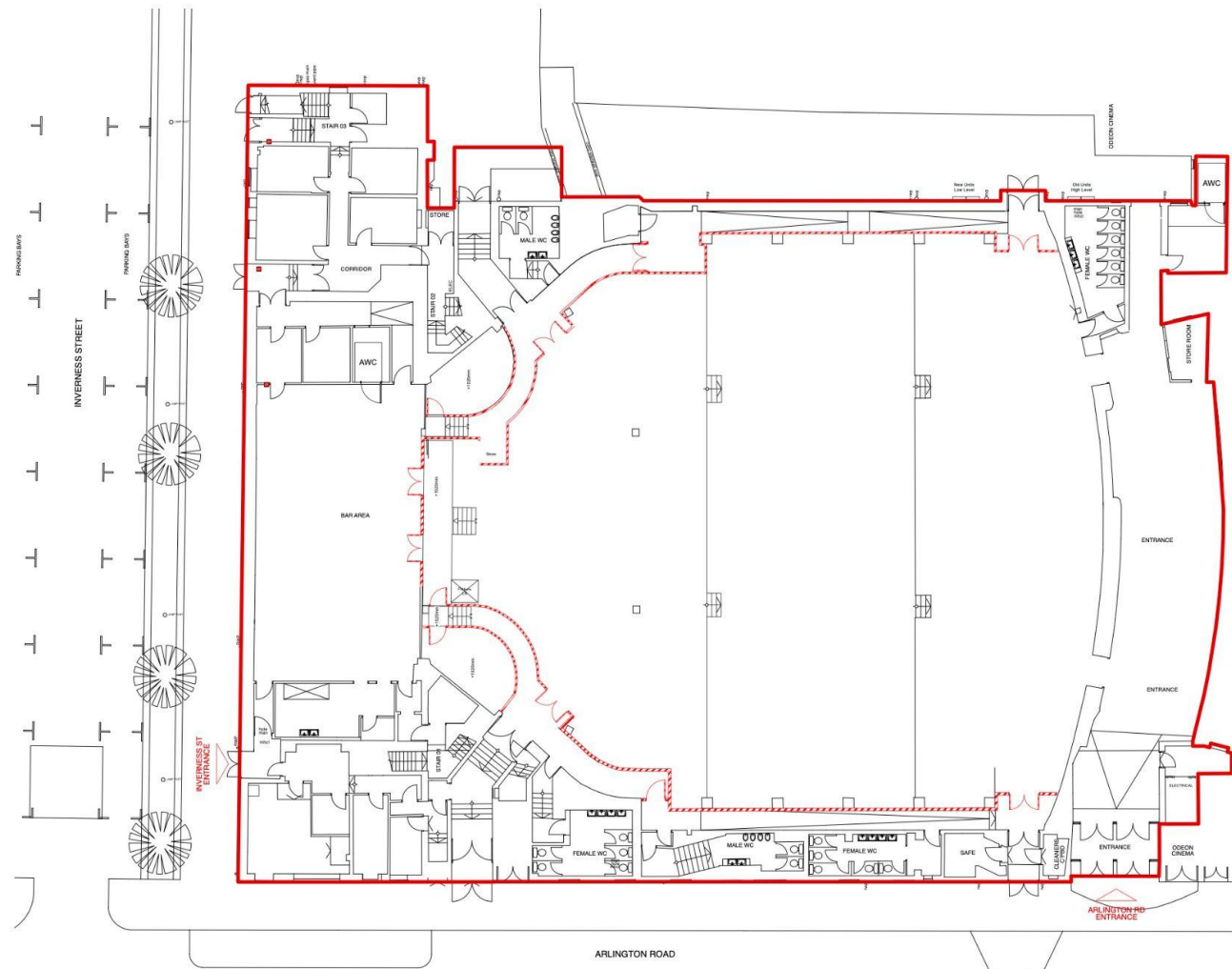
Internal and 'quiet' works may, at times, take place 24 hours a day. These activities will not result in noise being heard outside of the boundary of the build site, and staff, contractors and visitors will be advised not to make noise when leaving the building during unsocial hours (i.e. between 20:00 and 08:00). Quiet works may include:

- Installation of prefabricated exhibition displays
- Electrical works
- Soft fit
- Painting and decorating
- Cleaning and general maintenance

For more information about the construction phases of the project please see document D-SC-ARL-23-008.

Layout

For a proposed layout plan, please refer to drawing P-SC-ARL-23-008.



The site layout will remain largely unchanged from its current use, with the existing entrances on Arlington Road and Inverness street being retained.

The main event space will occupy the current bingo hall, with both the foyer and the bar areas being used for their existing purpose.

Where required, deliveries will be made via the existing arrangements on Arlington Road and Inverness Street. Given the town centre nature of the site's location, the use of appropriately sized vehicles will be employed as required.

Upgrades will be made to the security system, specifically CCTV cameras to cover the external elevations. Staff will be employed to manage access and egress for those attending the site, either to work or as a paying audience member.

Plan P-SC-ARL-23-009 shows the entrances and egress routes that will be employed and used throughout the building.

Event Space

The majority of the site will be occupied by the multi purpose events space, which will be the home of SGL shows that shall be mounted at the venue. This is situated in the current bingo hall area, in the centre of the site.

Sanitary Facilities

The existing building has a number of WC facilities around the outside of the event space, which will be used for the proposed development. These facilities will be refurbished and modernised, but the quantities already within the property are more than sufficient for the numbers of audience planned.

HVAC Systems

The existing main air handler and chiller plants are relatively contemporary, having been installed in 2016/17. There are no current plans to replace these assets, however some elements of smaller HVAC systems will be updated and exchanged on a like for like basis.

Waste & Recycling Management

There is existing provision within the service yard to the east of the site. This yard is shared with the Odeon Cinema, and includes facilities for the storage of a number of 1100 litre wheeled bin containers. Given the nature of access to this area via the pedestrianised Inverness Street, it is envisaged that the proposed development will continue with this existing arrangement.

Scale

The overall footprint of the application site is approximately 1,915m²

Landscaping

Given the urban nature of the site, and lack of publicly accessible exterior space, no landscaping is proposed.

Crime Impact

The proposed development will ensure the application site continues to be occupied and remains active, preventing any potential crime and disorder that is usually associated with vacant properties.

The proposed high staffing levels onsite, and the nature of the audience flow (little and often) will also help ensure that the the risk of crime or antisocial behaviour in the immediate vicinity of the site is reduced as the street will overall have a greater presence of people than the current under utilised bingo hall.

Overall, it is envisaged that the proposed development will have a positive impact on the surrounding area. By keeping the application site active, it will reduce the risk of problems usually associated with vacant sites.

Conclusion

SGL are in a great position to revitalise the property at 180 Arlington Road, and create another flagship immersive experience venue in the heart of the borough. In its lifetime, the building has been through a number of changes in use, to fit in with the ever changing entertainment needs of the public, and we hope we can work together to bring this much loved local building into its next use.