

3 November 2023

London Borough of Camden
Planning Department
5 Pancras Square
London
N1C 4AG

Our Ref: 1445

Dear Sir/Madam

Application for planning permission for:

Demolition of existing lean-to structures, erection of a small 'infill' extension, alterations to the exterior of the building (including replacement/alteration of various windows and doors, removal of external services and plant, improvement of some external finishes, replacement of sections of roof, reclad external stair case, install vents and overclad plant room and refurbishment of bridge structure), installation of air intake/exhaust features associated with ventilation, heating and cooling, external courtyard landscaping works and replacement of entrance gates

At

Utopia Village, Chalcot Road, Primrose Hill, London, NW1 8LH

This letter accompanies an application for planning permission by Utopia A Ltd, the owners of Utopia Village, for works proposed to refurbish and modernise the existing office space to make it suitable for modern office requirements, improve the energy efficiency and performance of the buildings and to refresh the general appearance of the site. The first phase of these works (subject of planning applications reference 2021/5939/P and 2020/1251/P) have previously focussed on the western end of the site and are now largely completed; this application proposes works for the undertaking of a similar programme to renovate the eastern end.

The application comprises:

- Plans, elevations and details by Anderson Orr Architects
- Design and Access Statement by Anderson Orr Architects
- Heritage Impact Assessment by Handforth Heritage
- Plant Noise Assessment Report by Noico
- Environmental Noise Survey Report by Noico
- Outline Construction Management Plan by Jackson Coles

Site Context

The site measures approximately 0.4 hectares in size and comprises of a part two/part three storey office building, currently undergoing general refurbishment to facilitate its ongoing use as office space. The site occupies the interior of a residential block formed by Gloucester Avenue, Edis Street, Chalcot Road, Egbert Street and Fitzroy Road. It comprises an L-shaped mews style layout around a central courtyard which was originally developed as a piano factory in the late 19th century. The site is broadly split between the largely two storey former piano factory buildings late 19th century making up the eastern end and the three storey 1950s block at the western end.

The site is predominantly surrounded by terraces of mid-19th century homes fronting Gloucester Avenue, Edis Street, Chalcot Road, Egbert Street and Fitzroy Road that are three storeys high with a raised ground floor from street level, a basement and often further accommodation in the roof space.

There are two pedestrian and vehicle entrance points serving Utopia Village, one off Chalcot Road and one off Egbert Street. There is very limited parking space within the site and parking in the surrounding area is controlled by means of a Controlled Parking Zone.

The site is relatively free of constraints, with its only local planning policy designation being that it lies within the Primrose Hill Conservation Area. Neither the site itself nor any immediately adjacent buildings are listed, and the site is wholly within Flood Zone 1.

Planning History

This site has a relatively extensive planning history but the applications of most relevance to the current proposal are those which refer to the first phase of refurbishment recently undertaken to the western end of the site, as follows:

Reference	Application Type	Description	Decision
2021/5939/P	Full planning permission	Replacement, consolidation and renewal of existing heating/cooling/ventilation systems and two associated acoustic enclosures	Approved
2020/1251/P	Full planning permission	Replacement of ground and first floor lanterns; replacement of existing glazed roof with solid roof with rooflights; replacement of glazing on Egbert Street frontage; alterations to ground floor fenestration on north-west elevation.	Approved

Proposal

The general principle of the proposed development for which permission is sought is to refurbish and enhance the existing buildings in order to provide an attractive and efficient building which is suitable for modern office requirements.

It is proposed to demolish the existing single storey 'lean-to' structures along the eastern boundary of the site since the existing is of poor quality and its removal will allow better natural light to the ground floor and enable the creation of external courtyard space in this location. These demolitions total 136 sqm. It is also proposed to remove the existing 'lean-to' roof over the single storey element to the west elevation and replace this with a new roof structure. Existing areas of felted flat roof are also proposed to be renewed with insulated single ply roofs.

It is proposed to create a small 'infill' extension measuring 5sqm at ground level where the existing first floor currently overhangs an area at the corner of the building in the centre of the site.

The proposals also seek to replace the existing unsympathetic glazing with a high-quality metal framed glazing system in a traditional Crittall style. The fenestration of the existing buildings is not original and currently consists of white uPVC windows and doors. The materiality and proportions of the windows and doors do not correlate to the historical character of the buildings. This is considered to be much more appropriate for the architectural style of the Victorian range of buildings and an enhancement to the historic buildings.

In addition, the bridge linking the two buildings across the centre of the site is proposed to be refurbished as part of the proposals. The existing link bridge is not an original feature of the site and is of limited architectural quality. However, it is a prominent and characterful feature so it is therefore proposed to be retained with the existing facades to be replaced with a high quality glazing system.

It is proposed to replace existing heating, cooling and ventilation systems with a modern, efficient and consolidated system. The existing heating, cooling and ventilation requirements of the building are provided by a dispersed array of different systems which largely operate independently, a legacy of the previous subdivision of the site in to a number of lettable units. These systems are dated and inefficient, including gas boilers which are no longer considered suitable for use. The proposed new system would comprise a consolidated bank of condenser units housed in a dedicated plant room to be created within the 1950s extension at the southwestern corner of the site to be created entirely within the existing building envelope. To facilitate the creation of the plant room the building will be altered externally to provide for air intake on its eastern (courtyard-facing) elevation and air extract to its roof. A secondary plant area is also proposed to be accommodated within an acoustic enclosure alongside the western boundary with its air intake and exhaust through the roof.

The system also includes the installation of a number of new louvred wall and roof vents to provide passive vent points for the system to expel air. These include six 'penthouse' louvres to be installed along the ridge line and 24 smaller roof terminals (details enclosed).

A number of the existing units to be removed and replaced are positioned close to noise sensitive boundaries such that their removal will benefit their direct neighbours in terms of mitigating the noise impacts. The proposed location for the new units has been carefully considered having regard to operational, aesthetic and neighbourly considerations (considered and discussed in detail within the

accompanying DAS). The incorporation of both plant areas within the existing building envelope is intended to mitigate both visual impacts and assist with the acoustic attenuation required to meet the noise constraints set out in local planning policy. The roof and wall-mounted vents provide passive exhaust points only so would create negligible noise in themselves such that they would not have any detrimental impact on the amenity of neighbours either.

The proposals also include the removal of existing building services that have been added to the facades in an ad hoc and unsympathetic manner. The use of a timber trellis to conceal the services detracts from the rhythm and proportions of the windows on the buildings' facades. The removal of these services together with a comprehensive clean and repair of the existing brickwork will significantly enhance the appearance of the buildings in addition to ensuring the buildings' continued good condition for the future. It is also proposed to overclad sections of the building – the staircase at the southeastern end and the eastern elevation of the new plant room - to rationalise the architectural styles on the site and create a coherent architectural language that clearly defines the 1900s buildings and later additions.

It is also proposed to replace the existing entrance gates at the Egbert Street and Chalcot Road entrances to the site. The existing gates are of limited quality and have limited cohesion with the street scene. The replacement gates are of a contemporary design but use classical proportions that sit harmoniously with the architecture of the Georgian style terraces and wider Conservation Area. The gates feature restrained signage and high quality design to give the site a clear identity within the context but not become an overt feature within the street scene.

Finally, it is proposed that the courtyard areas will be landscaped to provide a pedestrian friendly environment along with external seating areas and planting, limiting vehicular access to the site and creating new green infrastructure instead.

Community Engagement

During the course of the preparation of this application the applicant has sought to engage with neighbours and other key stakeholders (i.e. the Primrose Hill Conservation Area Advisory Committee and the local ward member) to seek their views and endeavour to respond to and address any concerns.

Public consultation took the form of an exhibition hosted on site on 11th July 2023. All neighbours in the surrounding block (comprising residents of Gloucester Avenue, Edis Street, Chalcot Road, Egbert Street and Fitzroy Road) were notified of the event by way of hand-delivered letter distributed a week before the event. A series of boards were presented detailing the proposals as envisaged at the time (see Appendix 1 to this letter) and feedback was sought by representatives of the consultant team in attendance and by way of a feedback form available to be completed either in person or subsequently online. A total of circa 25-30 residents attended during the course of the event and provided comments to the team; only six feedback forms were completed. The summary of responses received is as follows:

- General appreciation for the need to undertake works/refurbish the site
- Various concerns regarding new plant installations relating to noise, visual and amenity impacts; queries/concerns regarding noise outputs, exhaust air temperatures/velocities,

timing of plant operation, vibration, height/scale/appearance of plant installations; alternative technology to be considered (e.g. hydrogen boilers, gas boilers, swamp coolers, GSHPs, etc); consider alternative locations, moving internally and dispersal of plant instead.

- Mixed reaction to the requirement for replacement entrance gates at Chalcot Road and Egbert Street; Feeling of a lack of 'openness' to the site; some queries / feedback asking whether any of the shared amenity spaces would be accessible to neighbours as a potential benefit
- Concerns arising from potential increased road traffic to/ from site (i.e., increased number of deliveries); Similarly, concerns relating to site access for construction works and potential disruption
- Concerns regarding construction impacts (e.g. deliveries, working hours, etc)
- Concern regarding appearance of louvres to first floor plant area (replacing windows facing Edis Street gardens)
- Demolition of 'lean-to' along Edis Street gardens – condition and stability of wall, liabilities for any damage, etc; Need for Party Wall Notices / Awards with affected neighbours
- Desire to see existing boundary vegetation on Gloucester Avenue and Edis Street boundaries retained during works

Feedback was also received following the public consultation event from the Primrose Hill Conservation Area Committee (PHCAAC), making the following observations:

- Utopia Village is recognized in the Primrose Hill Conservation Area Statement (current SPD) at p. 24, as making a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area.
- Hope for an exemplary refurbishment of the original and surviving industrial buildings; details to be like-for-like and in consistent materials.
- Exemplary approach to retrofitting to minimise energy use and CC2 should be followed
- Proposals for air-conditioning, heating and cooling, and the need for external plant raise concerns for amenity of the local community.
- Measures addressing the problem of light pollution are required.
- Requested more details of new design elements, including bridge (whilst acknowledging need to renew), in advance of formal submission.
- Would welcome the opportunity to review soft landscape proposals and express concern to see sustainable planting recognizing the problems of the climate crisis and water shortages.
- Welcome the replacement of the gate to Chalcot Road but would like a simpler design with security equipment (eg, CCTV) designed to avoid clutter.
- Want to see traffic movement minimised, recognizing the mixed residential area.

In addition, local member Cllr Cooper requested a briefing having been contacted by local residents following the consultation, which was duly provided.

Detailed consideration was given to the feedback received from all parties and the scheme has been carefully considered and revised to respond to the comments received. In summary, the key revisions/responses to the comments made are as follows:

- Plant installations comprehensively reviewed and decision made to forgo existing usable floorspace to create plant areas within existing building envelope in lieu of external plant installations (further commentary, including discussion of alternatives considered, set out below and in accompanying Design and Access Statement).
- Outline construction management considerations document prepared and submitted with the application to address residents' concerns regarding construction phase impacts and how they will be managed.
- Comprehensive details of noise assessments undertaken prepared and submitted with the application.
- Consideration of climate change policies of local plan and detail provided in terms of increasing energy efficiency, improving climate resilience, reducing energy usage, etc – see below and within accompanying Design and Access Statement.
- Further design details and revisions made in discussion with and responding to PHCAAC input in relation to new design elements, notably bridge and gates.
- Party Wall notices/agreement to be addressed as necessary.

Following these revisions, further update meetings were held with representatives of the PHCAAC and the local member Cllr Cooper. A further letter drop has also been issued to all the same neighbouring addresses notified of the exhibition previously to inform of the updates and direct towards the Council's website for the formal consultation.

Planning Policy

The current Development Plan for the London Borough of Camden consists of the following documents:

- London Plan 2021
- Camden Local Plan 2017
- Site Allocations Plan 2013

Additionally, a number of Supplementary Planning Documents are of relevance, including the **Camden Planning Guidance** SPDs on **Design, Amenity** and **Energy Efficiency and Adaptation**, and the **Primrose Hill Conservation Area Statement**. The **National Planning Policy Framework** is also an important material consideration.

Camden Local Plan

Policy A1 seeks to protect the quality of life of occupiers and neighbours. Amenity factors that will be considered in determining planning applications will include: visual privacy, sunlight, daylight and overshadowing, artificial lighting levels, transport impacts, construction impacts, noise and vibration, odour, fumes and dust, the microclimate, contaminated land, and impact upon water and wastewater.

Policy A4 relates to noise and vibration and states that the Council will seek to ensure that these are controlled and managed. Planning permission will not be granted for:

- a. developments likely to generate unacceptable noise and vibration impacts; or
- b. development sensitive to noise in locations which experience high levels of noise, unless appropriate attenuation measures can be provided and will not harm the continued operation of existing uses.

Permission will only be granted for noise generating development if it can be operated without causing harm to amenity. Clear guidance is set out within Appendix 3 of the Local Plan detailing the acceptable thresholds that must be observed to ensure acceptable levels of noise are achieved.

Securing high quality design is the focus of **Policy D1**. Integration into the surrounding streets and preserving or enhancing the historic environment are of most relevance to this application.

Policy D2 confirms that Conservation Areas are designated heritage assets. Development that results in harm that is less than substantial to the significance of a designated heritage asset will not be permitted unless the public benefits of the proposal convincingly outweigh the harm. Development is required to preserve or where possible enhance the character or appearance of the Conservation Area.

Policy CC1 requires all development to minimise the effects of climate change and encourage all developments to meet the highest feasible environmental standards that are financially viable during construction and occupation.

Policy CC2 states that all development should adopt appropriate climate change adaptation measures such as protecting green spaces and promoting new green infrastructure, not increasing (and where possible reducing) surface water run-off, incorporating biodiverse, blue and green roofs where appropriate and incorporating measures to reduce the impact of urban and dwelling overheating, including application of the cooling hierarchy

Policy E1 supports a successful and inclusive economy in Camden by creating the conditions for economic growth and harnessing the benefits for local residents and businesses.

Primrose Hill Conservation Area Statement

The site lies within Sub-Area 2 of the Conservation Area, this is identified as an area of urban character with a high density of development with sporadic areas of greenery, dominated by long terraces.

Chalcot Road is specified as a 'principal road' with generous width and wide pavements, views from the road to the rear of the terraces with small gardens and trees is also noted as a significant characteristic. Edis Street and Egbert Street are noted as 'secondary roads' that have a distinctly urban character with a high degree of enclosure.

Utopia Village is identified as being a large industrial building which is surrounded by late Victorian terraces.

It is noted within the Statement that Utopia Village is a building that makes a positive contribution to the special character and appearance of the area whilst the part of the site identified as “Works at north end of Egbert Street” is identified as a negative building.

Planning Appraisal

- Design and Heritage

Local plan policies D1 and D2 are aimed at achieving good design and conserving and enhancing heritage assets and their setting. As noted above, the site is located within the Primrose Hill Conservation Area and the 19th century piano factory buildings are considered to provide a positive contribution to the character of the Conservation Area whilst the later 1950s additions are acknowledged to be a negative contributor.

The proposals have been carefully considered in terms of their visual impact both for the enhancement of the site itself and in terms of its contribution to the character of the wider area. Public views of the site are limited but a number of neighbouring residential properties overlook and there are glimpses also of the upper levels/roofs of the site from externally too.

The proposals would enhance the character and appearance of the existing buildings by renewing their historic features (e.g. refurbishing the link bridge, replacing windows, removing services from building facades, etc), removing/renewing structures in poor condition (e.g. lean-to extension/roofs, felted flat roofs, etc), creating an attractively landscaped pedestrianised courtyard, renewing dated features such as the entrance gates and overcladding of the 1950s elements to rationalise the architectural styles on the site and create a coherent architectural language that clearly defines the 1900s buildings and later additions.

The application is supported by a Heritage Impact Assessment which considers the heritage significance of the site and the impact of the proposed development. It concludes that the proposals would *“provide much needed investment into this positive building within the Primrose Hill Conservation Area. The proposals will greatly improve the environmental efficiencies of the building and have taken opportunities to restore elements of its original appearance whilst also adding to its interesting palimpsest through the introduction of new contemporary features. The proposals provide the opportunity to enhance the significance of the building and also the wider Primrose Hill Conservation Area. We therefore see no heritage reason why the council should not support the proposals.”*

Furthermore, the refurbishment will provide a significant investment in refurbishing the building and providing it with a viable long-term use as modern office space, supporting the aims of policy E1 of the Local Plan along with aspirations of securing the optimum viable use of a heritage asset.

Having regard to these assessments and the positive influence of refurbishing the site, it is considered the proposals would accord with policies D1 and D2 of the Local Plan and relevant national policy and statute with regards to preserving heritage assets.

- Amenity

The amenities of local residents have been carefully considered with regards particularly to noise and visual impacts of the proposals, most notably the installation of replacement plant for heating, cooling and ventilation of the buildings. These are necessary to create a suitable office environment within the buildings and to replace existing out-dated, inefficient and polluting plant.

Following the public and stakeholder engagements and detailed considerations undertaken to inform these proposals, the intention is for the new plant installations to be internally accommodated within the existing building envelope to avoid the visual impact of new structures or external mounting and to assist with mitigating the noise impacts of the plant. Alternatives to the plant proposed were also considered in detail (see discussion within DAS).

A detailed design process has resulted in the selection of the plant locations on the site as discussed within the DAS. A number of considerations have informed the proposals; these include the impact on the historic buildings on the site (buildings directly to the central mews), impact and availability of daylight to internal spaces, the drive towards sustainable and renewable technologies under Part L of the Building Regulations, visual impacts on neighbours (locating plant and enclosures behind existing boundary walls and structures), availability of air and air movement to allow plant to function efficiently, distances for internal building services and the constraint of retrofitting these to an existing structure, site access for emergency vehicles and deliveries. The consolidation of the existing dispersed and unsightly plant is considered to represent a benefit in terms of minimising the visual impact and placing the proposed units in the least conspicuous location. It is considered this would result in an enhancement to the Conservation Area.

Furthermore, the application is supported by noise assessments to demonstrate how the plant noise will be attenuated to a level of 10dB *below* the background noise level – in effect to make it unnoticeable relative to the existing recorded noise levels, in accordance with Camden’s planning policy requirements set out in Appendix 3 of the Local Plan. These assessments explain the detail and methodology behind the assessments which have been carried out in accordance with relevant guidance by an appropriate professional. It is noted that background noise levels were monitored within the site during a period when the eastern end of the site was largely un-occupied. As such the mechanical plant associated with these buildings had been de-commissioned, giving rise to background noise levels lower than would normally have been experienced in the past, and consequently a lower baseline level for the noise assessment. Nevertheless, the plant noise assessment demonstrates how the noise levels would be attenuated to acceptable levels to ensure neighbours would not be adversely impacted.

Other key issues highlighted during the consultation related to the potential impacts during the construction period and how these would be managed and mitigated as far as possible. These have also been carefully considered by the consultant team and a plan for mitigating these impacts (including matters such as working hours, deliveries, noise and vibration, etc.) has been prepared and submitted with the planning application to provide comfort that contractors will be required to be considerate of neighbours and the local environment.

Based on the mitigation measures proposed, it is considered the proposals would not adversely impact on amenity of neighbouring residents in accordance with policies A1 and A4 of the Local Plan and relevant national policy and guidance.

- Energy and Sustainability

As described in the submitted DAS, the energy strategy for the proposals has been carefully considered by the project team. A comprehensive thermal dynamic model has been constructed to assess the existing buildings performance and calculate improvements that could be made to bring down the energy consumption of the building.

The DAS explains that the existing buildings are very inefficient with low levels of insulation and outdated and poorly performing services. This results in the internal spaces experiencing thermal comfort levels outside of the Health and Safety Executive recommendations in both summer and winter months. The thermal dynamic model identified a considerable number of the spaces experiencing significant overheating throughout the course of the year due to large expanses of poorly performing glazing and a lack of adequate ventilation systems.

The existing plant on site consists of air conditioning units and gas boilers which have been installed on an ad hoc basis for the individual office units. This has led to an ill-conceived overall energy strategy for the site and the discordant plant locations seen today. The existing external plant has no attenuation, and, on this basis, it is assumed that it may not meet Camden's design criteria for noise when in operation. The proposals seek to replace existing gas boilers and air conditioning units with new high performance air source heat pumps in order to provide heating and cooling to the office spaces. The calculated efficiency improvements of the air source heat pumps are expected to be somewhere in the region of 400-500%. When viewed in the context of the current gas boilers having an efficiency of 90% this presents a significant reduction in energy consumption for the building as well as aligning with decarbonisation initiatives.

Whilst the proposed development is of a modest scale and below the threshold for the provision of a Sustainability Statement, due regard has been had to policies CC1 and CC2 and the requirements to minimise energy usage and ensure resilience to future climate change in accordance with these local policies and national planning policy.

Conclusion

The proposals would create a modern and attractive office environment ensuring the optimum viable use of the heritage asset and the long-term viable future of the site for office use. They would deliver enhancements to both the visual appearance of the site and its energy performance and climate change resilience in accordance with local policies.

It has been demonstrated that the noise output from new plant installations would be attenuated to a level of 10dB below the already low existing background noise levels in accordance local policy requirements and, by forgoing existing usable floorspace to accommodate the plant installations within the existing building envelope, this would be achieved without impacting on the visual amenity or outlook of any neighbours. The replacement plant installations would result in a more efficient and effective integrated system to support the ongoing use of the building as high-quality office space. A number of the existing units to be removed and replaced are positioned close to noise sensitive

boundaries such that their removal will benefit their direct neighbours in terms of mitigating the noise impacts.

The proposal would also result in a tidying up of the existing disparate and unsightly heating, cooling and ventilation systems which detract from the appearance of the building along with substantial improvements to the exterior of the building and its associated courtyard and, therefore, the appearance of the Conservation Area more generally. The proposals would enhance the Conservation Area whilst respecting the amenities of neighbouring properties.

As such, the proposal is considered to accord with relevant local and national planning policy and is commended for approval accordingly.

Should you have any queries in relation to the above please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Seth Williams'.

Seth Williams MRTPI
Director
Smith Jenkins Ltd

Enc.