

**The Well Walk Theatre
Customer Management
&
Community Involvement Plan**



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This report has been prepared to satisfy condition 11 appended to planning consent **2021/3607/P** (dated 23 December 2021) which states:

11 Prior to the use commencing, a Customer Management and Community Involvement Plan shall be submitted and approved in writing by the local authority, which includes details of the community engagement regarding the proposed use and management of customers within the premises and in close proximity.

Reason: To ensure the continuation of the premises as an Asset of Community Value and ensure the amenity of occupiers of the development site and surrounding occupiers are not adversely affected by noise and nuisance from mechanical installations/ equipment and comings and goings, in accordance with Policies A1 and A4 of the Camden Local Plan 2017.

Introduction

The Well Walk Theatre [hereafter referred to as TWWT] is a new family-friendly venue located in the heart of Hampstead Village which will open in Spring 2024. It is situated at the junction of Willow Road, Flask Walk, Well Walk, New End Square and Gayton Road.

It will provide a creative hub for the community through its shows, bookshop, workshops, and cultural activities. In doing so, we believe we will help to preserve and nurture Hampstead's distinctive character, community spirit and local economy.

Planning permission was first granted on 07/08/2019 for the change of use of the ground floor and basement levels from a former pottery studio (Sui-generis class use) to a children's theatre at the basement level and ancillary bookshop, café, and workshop at ground level (Sui-generis class use) in 49 Willow Road, NW3 1TS.

This document is divided into two sections:

1. Customer Management
2. Community Involvement

The purpose of this document is to outline the steps that TWWT will be taking to:

- ensure the continuation of the premises as an ACV.
- ensure safe and effective customer management i.e., access, egress, attendance, and departure from the venue.
- ensure a safe and secure environment for children.
- ensure minimum disruption to the local amenities and neighbours during the operation as a Sui-generis class use establishment.
- provide an important and vibrant addition to Hampstead's cultural life.

Asset of Community Value

The Ground Floor and Lower Ground Floor premises of the former pottery studio were designated as an *Asset of Community Value* (ACV) on the 18th of September 2018, on account of being a part of local historical memory and its ability to bring people together to take part in shared activities. The building is highly valued both by people living nearby and more widely in Hampstead. With this in mind, we want to ensure that our Customer Management and Community Involvement Plan addresses the community's needs while aiming to honour the importance of Hampstead's sense of community, its rich cultural heritage and diversity, and the value of its local amenities.

Hours of Operation

TWWT will be open from 09.00-18.00 Mondays to Sundays in accordance with condition 4 appended to planning consent **2021/3607/P**. During these hours at least one member of staff will be responsible for supervising the ingress and egress to safeguard the amenities of the adjoining premises and the area generally in accordance with the requirements of policies G1, D1, A1, A4 and TC3 of the London Borough of Camden Local Plan 2017. The theatre's Operations Manager will also be based at the premises throughout the day.

The performances and shows will principally be held during the weekends.

Access to the Premises

The venue has one main entrance on the corner of Willow Road and Gayton Road, and one emergency exit on Willow Road.

Good public transport connections serve it, the nearest stations being Hampstead Underground Station and Hampstead Heath Overground, which are approximately a 5 and 10-minute walk respectively. It is envisaged that our operations will attract many local customers who would reach the venue by public transport, walking or cycling.

Due to the anticipated inflow of pedestrians, we have suggested that Camden Council extends the pavement in front of TWWT, and the Council has agreed to this request – see the annex on P10.

Following the guidance of our Accessibility Consultant, a removable ramp for disabled access will be installed. There will be some visual aids for visually impaired people, and we will ensure that tactile paving is in place at all junctions and in front of the entrance. Our staff will also undertake comprehensive disability awareness training.

Once in the building, our disabled patrons will have level access to the bookshop and café and an accessible WC on the ground floor. The Theatre in the Lower Ground Floor is not accessible.

Customer flow

As mentioned above, the entire junction will be redesigned by Camden in 2024. It is expected that the venue will primarily attract local families and local school groups. However, given the central location and cultural offering, we also anticipate the venue being popular with tourists and visitors.

Each of our business entities (theatre, bookshop and cafe) will be staffed by permanent employees fully trained in customer management. In addition, the theatre's Operational Manager will oversee all activities.

The theatre has two foyer spaces (Ground Floor and Lower Ground Floor) which will allow people to wait for the shows to start.

This provides a mechanism to prevent overcrowding by dynamically moving the waiting audience between the two levels before the house is open and avoiding crowds outside the building.

We will always allow for the house (auditorium) to open at least 15 minutes before the advertised start of the performance on the ticket. We will also ensure that before and after shows there is a designated member of staff in charge of customer flow, allowing people in and out in an orderly manner which will enable gradual audience dispersal.

Tickets will be available online or purchased directly at the theatre. To avoid extra queuing, we will send out a communication to audiences a few days in advance to remind them to bring electronic proof of ticket, how to get to the venue and any specific requests of how early to arrive etc. This has proven results in preparing audiences, mitigating delays on arrival and preventing slow ingress.

Tickets will be checked at the entrance of the foyer before each show which will permit orderly access into the auditorium. Once in the auditorium, the usher will direct customers to their seating.

Ingress and Egress

Door supervision and control of customer ingress and egress is an essential part of the efficient operation of the venue. We will ensure not only the safety and enjoyment of our customers but also peace of mind for our neighbours.

Since this is a family venue, mainly aimed at children, safety is of vital importance. To this aim, the theatre's staff will play a key role by monitoring and managing people entering the theatre to ensure there are no crowds in front of the venue and that we always operate in a safe and friendly manner.

We will make staff training a key priority. This training will include:

- Health and Safety (First Aid and Fire Warden competencies/test emergencies)

- Operation of the in-built sound system to make safety announcements if necessary
- Local knowledge - directions to all local transport links (tube and bus) and the Heath. We will also sell local maps pointing to different cultural routes and local businesses.
- Disability awareness training

Noise Control

The primary activities at TWWT will be hosted in an indoor performance space located in the Lower Ground Floor, with a capacity of 50 seats. The operating schedule is restricted to the daytime (9am to 6pm) with soundproofing to the highest standards defined by professional acoustic consultants. Noise breakout concerns are therefore expected to be minimal.

In the unlikely event that a neighbouring resident raises a complaint related to noise, we are committed to addressing it promptly and in a responsible manner, taking appropriate measures as needed to mitigate any disturbances.

Noise impact on the maisonette above has been fully considered. On 13 February 2023 Condition 8 (sound insulation details of the floor/ceiling/walls separating the commercial parts of the premises from noise-sensitive premises in residential use) was discharged under application reference **2022/4774/P**.

A Sound insulation report was submitted and addressed the sound insulation performance of the party wall and floor constructions, and associated flanking elements, between commercial spaces and residential dwellings. The report concluded that the proposed constructions between commercial and residential uses would achieve the sound insulation required by Condition 8. Environmental health officers were consulted and confirmed the information submitted was sufficient to discharge Condition 8.

The operational management team will set noise levels within the auditorium and this will be followed by the technicians working in the theatre.

We will inform our audiences on exiting the building to consider our neighbours and leave quietly.

Compliance with Local Policies and Plans

TWWT will be an important and vibrant addition to Hampstead's cultural life. As such, there is considerable synergy with Camden's Local Plan.

TWWT seeks to ensure that the quality of life of occupiers and neighbours will be protected in line with **Local Plan Policy A1 (Managing the impact of development)**.

For example, our Customer Management strategy fully aligns with **Policy A4 Noise and Vibration** of the Camden Local Plan 2017 which seeks to ensure noise and vibration are controlled and managed. At TWWT, mechanical installations have been carefully designed to meet standards and requirements established in early planning consents.

It also fully aligns with **Policy C3 Cultural and Leisure Facilities** which carefully describes how Camden Council aims to nurture and protect cultural spaces including theatres.

4.49 of Camden's Local Plan states: *Cultural and leisure facilities, such as theatres (...) contribute enormously to Camden's attractiveness as a place to live, work or study. These facilities support opportunities for people from all walks of life to meet and interact and promote a sense of belonging and connection. The variety and richness of culture and leisure facilities has an influence on community identity and mix, townscape character and the local economy.*

In alignment with said policy, we will endeavour when possible to employ local residents.

Policy C5 Safety and Security

We strongly support Camden Council's aim to promote a safer pedestrian space. As previously mentioned, we are currently liaising with the Council and awaiting the start of the expansion works of the pavement in front of the theatre on Willow Road. We will also encourage our customers to walk, cycle or use public transports.

Policy C6 Access for All

We have worked closely with an accessibility consultant to make the venue as accessible as possible within the constraints of the building:

- Tactile paving will be in place wherever it is needed, outside and inside.
- The Ground Floor's new layout is on one level only, which will greatly improve access for wheelchairs and parents with prams.
- The new layout has wide openings from the entrance door all the way to the café, which will be wide enough for wheelchair users and will carry natural light deeper into the building.
- The new layout has also been simplified, which will make it easier to navigate for people with dementia and poor spatial reasoning.
- Hearing loops will be installed.
- An accessible toilet has been installed on the ground floor level and gives good clearance to enter it.

Hampstead Neighbourhood Plan

The Well Walk Theatre is also fully aligned with the Hampstead Neighbourhood Plan. For example, Policy **ECI - Healthy Retail Mix**

Paragraph 7.15: The Forum supports the provision of opportunities to small/independent shops and businesses, which contribute positively to the vitality of the centres.

Emergency Procedures

The venue will have a *Fire and Emergency Plan* in place which will be prepared in consultation with a Health and Safety advisor. This plan will include emergency procedures including evacuation plans and muster points. Risk Assessments will also be undertaken for various activities and performances, and an *Operational Plan* is currently being developed.

The venue will have a fire detection system in place, and there will be weekly testing of the fire alarm with an emergency evacuation drill every six months.

Emergency evacuation plans and fire exits will be visibly displayed at the venue, and there will be clearly marked escape routes, emergency exit doors, emergency lighting and a ramp for disabled persons.

As previously mentioned, health and safety training will form a core element of TWWT's staff training programme. All staff will undertake fire warden and first aid training, and prior to the venue's opening, there will be several test evacuation drills. The venue will be equipped with a defibrillator and first aid provision.

In the event of an emergency, the theatre's Operations Manager, or the manager on duty will liaise with the emergency services and inform the local authority.

Refuse Storage and Removal

Bins will be stored inside during the day. A private contractor will collect general, food waste and recycling in the evening.

Security

TWWT will collaborate with the local community and already has excellent neighbourhood relations. We wish to make this area of Hampstead a better and safer environment and provide high-quality premises that will be an asset to the local community.

The presence of a functioning venue open to the public will provide the junction with added security, as mentioned in The Well Walk Theatre's Pre-App (2018/6298/PRE):

(3.8) The proposed use of this area as a bookshop and seating would bring activity and enhanced feelings of security by providing natural surveillance within the area, which would be supported.

A CCTV system is currently being installed at the premises, covering areas to which the public has access and the area immediately outside the front of the premises. The CCTV system shall be maintained in working condition and record the premises 24 hours every day. Recordings will be retained for a minimum of 30 days and be made available to the Police or officers of the Council upon request.

Community Involvement

The *Hampstead Neighbourhood Plan* supports ways to increase the use and availability of ACV buildings to the wider community, protecting them from being converted to other uses. As noted earlier, the building is highly valued both by people living nearby and more widely in Hampstead.

The delivery of a high-quality cultural experience for the local community is at the essence of *The Well Walk Theatre*. Moreover, our vision and aspirations are fully aligned with those of the *Hampstead Neighbourhood Plan* and of the ACV through collaboration with local communities, schools and other educational institutions.

The theatre at the Lower Ground Floor level will be the main activity of the premises. The theatre's performances will be directed towards children, but enjoyable for adults too.

In addition, there is a bookshop and a small café area where parents can relax whilst they wait for their children, and where high-quality beverages and healthy snacks will be served.

The facilities will also be used to spotlight and foster local creative professionals such as writers, illustrators, artists and actors; this might inspire a vocational interest and cultivate talent in future generations through different events and activities. We see cultural transmission as a key role of TWWT.

The cultural events and activities will comprise but not be limited to:

- Theatre shows
- Puppet shows
- Silent movies screenings with Live piano music
- Theatre-related workshops: costumes, puppetry, mime, etc.
- Lectures by creative professionals (preferably locals)
- Storytelling for children
- Authors' book signings

In conclusion, we strongly believe that the activities of TWWT respond positively to policy *HC2 of the Hampstead Neighbourhood Plan*. It will be an important and valued cultural addition to the area, as the enthusiasm of local residents has already demonstrated over the last few years during the construction of the theatre.

Kind regards,

Dylan McNeil & Zina Drouche

Directors, *The Well Walk Theatre*

Annex

Email Exchanges with Cllr Linda Chung regarding improving the pavement and overall junction in front of *The Well Walk Theatre*

From: Linda Chung (Cllr) <linda.chung@camden.gov.uk>
Sent: Monday, 20 November 2023, 18:17:14 CET
Subject: THE WILLOW ROAD & PUPPET THEATRE PROJECT

QUESTION TO THE CABINET MEMBER FOR A SUSTAINABLE CAMDEN BY: COUNCILLOR LINDA CHUNG

Residents were grateful that the Cabinet Member agreed that the junction where Flask Walk, New End Square, Well Walk, Willow Road, and Gayton Road meet is very dangerous and needs attention. Considerable evidence of speeding and dangerous driver behaviour was provided by residents of Willow Road and other streets.

It had been noted that the Willow Road puppet theatre was due to be opened in early spring 2024, and designs for improvement to that area had been drawn up. It is essential for that junction to be safe as it is predicted that the theatre will be a considerable attraction to families and children.

So far the promised action has not materialised. Could residents know the timescales for this important piece of work?

REPLY

I would like to thank residents for raising the issues at this location, where it is clear we have the opportunity to create a much better environment for pedestrians. Enabling walking is the top priority in our transport strategy and addressing this enables us to do things like widen pavements, create greening and public seating opportunities, and improve crossings - all of which ultimately benefits the whole community. Undertaking a scheme that will also benefit a new cultural venue is also a big positive. This location is of course a busy walking route between Hampstead High Street and the Heath.

For these reasons, we have taken the decision to include a scheme for the junction of Flask Walk, New End Square, Well Walk, Willow Road and Gayton Road in our Walking and Accessibility programme. Feasibility work on this scheme is currently under way, and this is expected to be concluded in early 2024 with a consultation to follow after.

Construction of a scheme would be subject to that consultation and subsequent decision-making process (including any relevant statutory traffic management orders). Whilst the scheme may therefore not be ready for the opening of the Puppet Theatre, a clear timeframe would be provided within the consultation materials noted above. I look forward to working with councillors and residents on this.

Ends