

Application – 2024/0601/P

Site Address - 187 Kentish Town Road London Camden NW1 8PD

Comment from Kentish Town Neighbourhood Forum

Kentish Town Neighbourhood Forum (KTNF) supported the original planning application in 2014 for the redevelopment of 187 Kentish Town Road to provide private residential accommodation, because there would be a community benefit from providing a cinema space that was specified as part of the application.

Under the planning permission, the developer was able to build a two-storey roof extension, in which they installed penthouse apartments, in exchange for providing a cinema. This was instead of the alternate application for a one-storey roof extension and no cinema.

The space designated for a cinema has remained empty in the intervening years because the owner Vabel says they have been unable to let it, despite marketing by Savills estate agents and a number of approaches by cinema operators and similar organisations.

The problem appears to be the high rent (£90,000 per year) for a relatively small space (235.97 sq m) which is a shell and would require complete fit-out at a cost estimated between £500,000 and £1 million by cinema operators. Another issue is that Vabel were originally only offering a 15-year lease but the tenure is now not specified.

According to feedback from potential tenants, Vabel have been unwilling to negotiate on their terms and the space has remained empty.

Now Vabel have applied for a change of use for the ground floor cinema space from “Cinema (Sui Generis) to Flexible Use for Cinema (Sui Generis) / Class F.1 / Class F.2 / Class E.”

KTNF is very concerned about the inclusion of Class E in this application for change of use. Class E is a very broad use class that encompasses a wide range of commercial and industrial applications (not all appropriate for a high street). The approval of the application to amend the cinema space to Class E would signal the loss of a community asset.

KTNF has consulted with the local community on several occasions over the past two years and we understand that there is a strong desire for Vabel to negotiate with potential cinema operators to abide by the terms of the original planning permission. However, if this proves unachievable, our research has indicated that another broader arts-based use could be considered if it provides genuine benefit to the community.

If the developer were to apply for a change from Cinema (Sui Generis) to Flexible Use for Cinema (Sui Generis) / Class F1/F2, KTNF commits to giving the application serious consideration in the interests of bringing the currently empty space into use.

KTNF asks the Council to refuse this application as it stands, and notify us of any relevant committee date.