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London Borough of Camden
Development Management
Camden Town Hall
Judd Street
WC1H 9JE

Dear Sir/Madam,

ADVERTISEMENT CONSENT APPLICATION FOR PROVISION OF SIGNAGE – 1 WOBURN PLACE, RUSSEL SQUARE, WC1H 0LQ

We have been instructed by our client, Farmer J Ltd., to submit the enclosed advertisement consent application for the installation of signage at the above address. The proposals include 1 no. fascia sign, 3 no. projecting signs, 1 no. menu board sign, and some vinyl sticker signs on the windows, as well as the provision of retractable fabric awning signs on the Woburn Place and Bernard Street elevations. The proposed signage will enable our client to customise the frontage of the building in line with their branding requirements and begin trading as a 'Farmer J' restaurant.

In accordance with national and local validation requirements the following documents are enclosed in support of the application:

- Completed Application Forms;
- Planning, Design and Heritage Statement – included within this letter;
- Site Location Plan;
- Block Plan;
- Existing Elevations (drawing no. 043000);
- Proposed Elevations Closed Awning (drawing no. 203000);
- Proposed Elevations Awnings Open (drawing no. 203010);
- Proposed Signage Details Awning (drawing no. 209000);
- Proposed Signage Details (drawing no. 209001)

The requisite fee of £165 + £70 administration fee has been paid online via the planning portal. The remainder of this letter sets out the relevant planning considerations in respect of the application.

Site Background

The site comprises a vacant commercial unit on the northeastern corner of Russel Square, sitting at the intersection of Woburn Place and Bernard Street. The unit was formally occupied by a bank but has sat vacant since 2021 when HSBC vacated the premises. It is positioned at ground and basement floors of the building, with the Morton Hotel occupying the upper floors.

The ground floor frontage features a traditional stone design, reflective of its former bank use. The main access doors are positioned on the corner of the building, with glazed shopfront windows on either side that are set back from the street by way of basement lightwells to the front of the property, which are positioned behind black metal fencing.

Traditionally, the frontage featured a painted timber shopfront between the stone columns, however these were recently refurbished by the landlord and now feature powder coated aluminium frames. The upper floors of the building feature regular windows and a red brick façade.

The property is not listed; however, it is located within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area and sits directly opposite the grade II* listed Russel Hotel. Accordingly, special care has been taken to ensure the plant proposals do not cause any harm to the designated heritage assets. The site is also located within the Central Activity Zone, where commercial development of this nature it encouraged.

Planning History

The site features a limited planning history owing to its longstanding use as a bank. The planning history of relevance to the application proposals is set out below:

- In 1979, permission was granted for the change of use of the basement and ground floor from a hotel to a bank (ref: 29049);
- In December 2015, permission was granted for replacement ATM machines and associated works (ref: 2015/5049/P);
- On 16th March 2023, a Certificate of Lawfulness was granted confirming the property falls within commercial Class E (ref: 2022/37686/P).
- Most recently, on the 28th May 2024, permission was granted for the replacement of the existing timber frame shopfront and glass louvre fins on the Woburn Place and Bernard Street elevations with power coated aluminium framed shopfronts and louvres (ref: 2023/0904/P). This application was submitted by the landlord and will ensure the dated timber frontage is updated to meet the applicants' requirements as the ingoing tenant.

The site has been stripped back internally and is ready for an ingoing commercial operator. This application seeks consent for external signage, so that Farmer J can customise the unit in line with their branding requirements and will be supported by an application for HVAC to serve the restaurant and kitchen in due course.

Application Proposals

This application seeks permission for subtle shopfront signage, consisting of a fascia sign above the restaurants main entrance, projecting signs on each of the buildings three projections, a menu board sign beside the main entrance, the provision of retractable fabric awning signs on the Woburn Place and Bernard Street elevations, and some vinyl sticker signs applied to internal face of the windows.

The signage proposals will update the external appearance of the building, whilst allowing the applicant to advertise their presence in line with Camden guidance on shopfront design. The exact proposals are detailed below:

- 1 no. 'Farmer J' fascia sign, formed of individual brass letters, positioned above main entrance (110mm x 885mm);
- 1 no. 'Number One' fascia sign, formed of individual brass letters, and also positioned above the main central entrance (1095mm x 150mm);
- 3 no. 'Farmer J' projecting signs, hung from traditional iron bracket and with external trough illumination, positioned on each of the buildings three frontages (600mm x 600mm);
- 1 no. Internally illuminated menu board sign, formed of brass surround – positioned on left hand side of main entrance (330mm x 460mm)
- Provision of 5 no. traditional Victorian fabric awnings, positioned above existing glazing and featuring green canvas with Farmer J branding;
- 4 no 'Eat what comes natural' vinyl signs applied to inside of glazing (130mm x 2000mm);
- 2 no. Farmer J vinyl sign applied to internal side of glazing (530mm x 960mm);

- 1 no. 'Sesame Broccoli' vinyl sign applied to inside of glazing (50mm x 845mm).

The signage can be seen in full within the accompanying signage pack, prepared by Holland Harvey architects. It is relevant to note that the vinyl sticker signs benefit from deemed consent, but have been included on the drawings for completeness.

** Note internal vinyl signs benefit from deemed consent and do not require advertisement consent but have been included on the drawings for completeness.

Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2023)

The NPPF provides the overarching planning policy guidance for development across England. **Paragraph 85** states that planning policies and decisions should help to create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. As such, significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development.

Paragraph 141 is of most relevance to the application for advertisements. It sets out that:

“Advertisements should be subject to control only in the interests of amenity and public safety, taking account of cumulative impacts”.

London Plan (2021)

Policy D8 ‘Public Realm’ sets out that lighting, including that for advertisements, should be carefully considered and well-designed in order to minimise intrusive lighting infrastructure and reduce light pollution.

Camden Local Plan (2017)

The statutory development plan for Camden consists of the Camden Local Plan (2017), the Proposals Map (2017) and the Camden Planning Guidance. The relevant policies are discussed below.

Policy G1 outlines that the Council will support development that makes best use of its site, taking into account quality of design, its surroundings, sustainability, amenity, heritage, transport accessibility and any other considerations relevant to the site.

Policy D1 confirms the Council will seek to secure high quality design in development. Specifically, it is required that development (inter alia):

- is sustainable in design and construction;
- respects local context and character;
- preserves or enhances the historic environment and heritage assets;
- uses details and materials that complement the local character;
- integrates well with the surrounding streets, and contributes positively to the street frontage;
- preserves strategic and local views;
- provides a high standard of accommodation for housing.

Policy D2 seeks to protect and, where appropriate, enhance the character and appearance within conservation areas.

Policy D4 relates specifically to advertisements, setting out that signs are required to preserve or enhance the character of their setting and host building, with regards to their form, fabric,, design, and scale of their setting.

Policy A1 states that the quality of life for both occupiers and neighbours will be protected. When assessing new applications, the Council will consider:

- Visual privacy and outlook.
- Sunlight, Daylight and Overshadowing.
- Artificial lighting levels.
- Impacts of the construction phase.

Camden Planning Guidance 'Advertisements' (2018)

In March 2018, the Council adopted an SPD on 'Advertisements' advising what signage is acceptable within the borough. The guidance provides advice on the design and siting of advertisements so that they contribute positively to the appearance and character of the area and forms a material consideration in the determination of applications. The document states the following:

- Fascia Signs – will not be considered acceptable where they impact upon public safety, such as being hazardous to vehicular traffic (e.g. block sight lines, are more visible than traffic signals, emit glare) or pedestrian traffic (e.g. disrupt the free flow of pedestrian movement)
- Illumination – externally illuminated signs should be unobtrusively sized and sited. Spotlights and trough lights should be fixed and sized as discreetly as possible to avoid light pollution.

The proposals have been designed to accord with this guidance, and will ensure a scheme that is not harmful to the character of the building.

Planning and Heritage Assessment

The existing shopfront features a traditional design reflective of its former bank use, with a central entrance door on its corner, and a glazed shopfront on either side that is framed within a concrete façade, and set back from the street by ground floor lightwells and iron fencing. There are currently no signs installed at the property, with the former HSBC signage having been removed – meaning the façade is empty and in need of updating.

This application seeks to subtly enhance the appearance of the unit through installing 'Farmer J' signage and awnings, which will also help to advertise the presence of the unit. The key considerations in respect of this application relates to the impact the awnings on the character and appearance of the surrounding area, and the impact on highway safety. These matters are discussed in turn below.

The proposed fascia sign and projecting signs are of a simple, traditional design, that has been designed in accordance with the traditional appearance of the former bank unit and Morton Hotel on the upper floors. The fascia sign is to be formed of brass lettering and will be positioned above the main entrance door, along with a brass letter 'Number One' sign' – reflecting the sites identity and historic significance as a hotel facing Russel Square. These signs do not feature any illumination and are appropriately sized to ensure they sit harmoniously on the façade and do not harm the visual amenity of the building. A menu board is appropriately positioned beside the restaurants entrance, with 3 no. projecting signs proposed – one on each elevation – which is an acceptable amount, and will help advertise the presence of the unit. The 3 no. projecting signs similarly feature a traditional design, with external trough lighting and hanging from a traditional bracket, therefore will also help to advertise the presence of the building and direct customers to the unit, without harming amenity. Overall, it is considered the signage is subtle, and entirely appropriate in terms of amount to advertise the presence of the unit, whilst ensuring the stone façade and original metal gates are not compromised, and that the historic features of the frontage are retained.

The proposed canvas awnings feature a traditional Victorian design, with a royal green canvas and very small Farmer J Lettering displayed. The minimalist design will ensure a high-quality appearance to the unit that compliments the traditional proportions of the former bank building, and the ornate windows on the upper floors. The awnings match the design of canvas awnings installed on neighbouring properties and will ensure a notable improvement to the existing bland façade, thus meeting the requirements of Design Policy D4 and the guidance within the advertisement SPD. Importantly, the awnings and fascia/projecting signs have all been designed to ensure they are sensitive additions that do not detract from the character of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area or neighbouring listed building, with appropriate materials, methods of illumination and sizes – thus should be deemed entirely acceptable.

With regards to highways safety, the awnings when full extended will protrude just 1.03m from the frontage and will be positioned 2.5m above pavement level. They will also be positioned above the ground floor lightwells, therefore well set back from any pedestrians passing by, and highway safety along the pedestrianised street will not be compromised in any way, thus complying with Camden Policy D4. The lights similarly will be of an appropriate illumination level to ensure they do not distract vehicles or are harmful to the visual amenity of any neighbours – with the fascia signage not featuring any illumination, and the projecting signs featuring very subtle external trough illumination this ensuring highway safety is not compromised, and the signage does not harm neighbour amenity. The alterations should therefore be deemed entirely acceptable from an amenity perspective.

Fire Assessment

The proposed alterations will have no impact on the fire risk at the site – the use and layout remain as existing - and just the provision of external signage and fabric awning canopies. There are no changes to the access arrangements, internal layout, or indeed any of the existing fire safety arrangements at the site, the proposal is simply installing some minor additions to the shopfront with materials that are not fire sensitive.

As such it is not considered that the criteria set out within Policy D12(A) of the London Plan are relevant to this application due to the scale and nature of the proposed development. It is therefore considered that the fire risk of this development will remain low.

Conclusion

The design proposals will undoubtedly enhance the appearance of the unit, and in turn, the wider area, whilst also allowing the applicant to trade from their proposed unit. The installation of signage and fabric awnings represents a significant investment from our client, and will help to bring a reputable food operator to this prominent corner unit on Russel Square. The signs are subtle, with appropriate materials and illumination, and will contribute to the traditional design of the frontage and ensure a welcoming ground floor design. Accordingly, we trust the council will share our view that the proposals are in accordance with the identified planning policies and SPD guidance, and should be supported.

I trust you have sufficient information to enable a positive determination of the applications and we look forward to receiving confirmation that the applications have been validated. In the meantime, should you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully,



MARK SHEARMAN
Director



