



Council of Management of Coram's Fields
93 Guilford Street
London WC1N 1DN

Planning Services
London Borough of Camden
Camden Town Hall Extension
Argyle Street
London
WC1 H 8EQ

For the attention of Hugh Miller

14 May 2010

Dear Sir / Madam

PLANNING APPLICATION FOR EXTENSION AND ALTERATIONS TO THE COMMUNITY NURSERY AT THE SOUTH WEST COLONNADES IN CORAM'S FIELDS, 93 GUILFORD STREET WC1N 1DN

This letter is submitted by the Council of Management of Coram's Fields (the Trust) in support of the planning and associated listed building consent application for extension and alterations to the existing children's community nursery at the south west colonnades buildings in Coram's Fields, 93 Guilford Street.

In particular, this statement addresses the planning policy issues associated with the change of use of part of the south west colonnades from residential to facilitate the proposed extension to the children's community nursery.

Background

Coram's Fields is a unique seven acre playground and park for children and young people in south Camden which is owned and managed by an independent charitable Trust. It is open access and provides a calm, safe and stimulating environment where children can play freely and enjoy a varied programme of activities.

Described as a green oasis in the heart of the city, the playground occupies the site of the original Foundling Hospital established by Captain Thomas Coram in 1739. When, in the 1920's the hospital was relocated outside London, the land was sold to a developer who demolished the hospital building itself leaving only the single storey colonnaded Georgian buildings. Following a campaign and lengthy fundraising by local people the land was turned into London's first public children's playground.

It was opened under its' new name "Coram's Fields" in 1936. Since then it has continued to flourish, often in very difficult circumstances, to become the jewel it is today.. The site is Grade II listed by English Heritage as a site of historic interest.

Within the play ground, as well as extensive outdoor facilities for play and sports activities, the colonnaded buildings provide space for indoor activities including a community nursery, an after school and holiday play centre, a youth centre and halls for community events and festivals.

Application Proposals

As noted above, since 1987, part of the south west colonnades at 93 Guildford Street has operated as a Community Nursery and is currently OFSTED registered to provide 26 child care places. In 2008, Coram's Fields became a designated Sure Start Children's Centre. The existing accommodation for the nursery is in urgent need of significant improvement and up-grading to meet current standards for child care provision as well creating space to provide additional places .

We have recently secured additional capital funding from Camden Council as part of central Governments' 'Quality & Access for All Children' programme. This will enable us to refurbish and reconfigure the existing nursery accommodation and through an extension of the facility into the adjacent lodge building enable us to accommodate an additional 4 full-time or 8 part-time places for children aged 2-4 years. There are currently 17 children on the nursery waiting list so child care places at Coram's Fields are in high demand.

Existing Use of The Lodge

The Lodge at 93 Guilford Street was originally built in **18thC** as a porter's lodge, Following the establishment of Coram's Fields in the 1930's, the building was first used as a campaign office for the charitable appeal launched by the Trust to buy the site. After that, the building was used by the Army during the Second World War, then as living accommodation for the on-site caretaker until the early 1970s. From around 1972, the building provided accommodation for The Administrator of Coram's Fields. Essentially the accommodation was provided as a "tied-cottage" and the residential use was ancillary to the main Coram's Field's facility.

However, when the current administrator, Sandra Wynn, took office in 1988, due to personal circumstances, she decided not to occupy the accommodation. Accordingly, since this time, the Lodge has been rented out on an Assured Shorthold Tenancy basis.

However, the terms of the agreement require the tenant to undertake outside hours park security duties such that the residential accommodation remains intrinsically linked to the main use of Coram's Fields. Furthermore, the layout of the accommodation is such that the residential unit can only be accessed through Coram's Fields itself.

In our opinion the residential use of The Lodge prior to 1988 was ancillary to the main use of Coram's Fields and did not constitute a self-contained residential unit (Use Class C3). However, given the change in occupation since that time, we accept that the residential use of The Lodge needs to be addressed as part of the current application for change of use given the policy context set out in the Council's Adopted UDP.

Planning Policy Considerations

Policy **H3** of the Adopted UDP states that the Council will resist proposals that lead to a net loss of residential floorspace, except if the loss is to provide small-scale health care facilities. The written justification for this policy explains that the Council's aim is to increase the amount of housing in the Borough and that the loss of residential accommodation would undermine this objective.

It is acknowledged that the application proposals will result in the *prima facie* loss of a residential unit which conflicts with the objectives of Policy **H3**. However, we consider that this 'loss' should be considered in the context of the benefits of the scheme and the particular circumstances of the existing residential accommodation.

Specifically, it is clear that the application proposals will deliver important benefits for the local community through the provision of improved and additional child-care facilities. As noted above, there is currently a waiting list of children for the nursery and the proposed expansion would allow up to 8 additional households to access much-needed child care facilities in their local community.

In our opinion, the Council's objective of securing additional housing in the borough (and resisting the loss of existing accommodation) must be implemented within the context of creating sustainable communities including through the provision of appropriate social and community infrastructure.

There is a significant need for child care facilities in the local area and the application proposals represent an opportunity to provide additional childcare facilities in an ideal location with direct access to unique play and open space facilities.

In relation to the existing residential accommodation on-site, as set above, it is clear that until 1988 the accommodation was ancillary to the main use of the site such that the proposed change of use would not have previously been subject to planning control. Furthermore, it is clear that there remains an instinct link between the residential accommodation and the main use of Coram's Fields by virtue of the security functions undertaken by the existing tenant. The present tenant has decided to move out of central London and re-locate to a more rural, village setting which is more convenient for her work and personal commitments.

In summary, whilst it is acknowledged that the application proposals will result in the loss of a single residential unit contrary to Policy **H3** of the Adopted UDP, we consider that, in this instance, the loss of accommodation should be considered acceptable given the benefits of the scheme in delivering much needed community child care facilities for the local area.

We trust the above information is of assistance to the Council in considering our application and that the local planning authority feels able to grant consent for the proposals and allow the benefits of the scheme to be realised.

Yours sincerely

Sandra Wynn
Administrator and Secretary to the Trust
Council of Management of Coram's Fields

