# Design & ACCESS STATEMENT, 55b Camden Street

# Introduction

## This statement is produced to support a planning building application for the change of use and internal alteration of 55b Camden Street, London NW1 0HG

## This planning statement will cover the background to the application and provide the necessary information to enable its determination by officers at the Council. It will describe the site and surrounding area, explain the operation of the proposed use and introduce the planning policies relevant to the proposal, concluding that local and national planning policies support the granting of permission.

## In addition to this statement, the application is accompanied by the appropriate planning forms, appropriate fee, and the following plans:

## Site Location Plan

## Existing and Proposed Floor Plans

## Payment of £495 which covers the relevant planning application fee, paid via the National Planning Portal.

# Site Description

## The application site is located at 55b Camden Street within the central Camden area and within close walking distance to the town centre. The site is located to the east of Camden High Street and is surrounded by a variety of residential, retail and leisure uses. The site was previously a public house and used in interim as a Artist’s studio. The most recent planning application records show the area marked as storage, which we understand from the planning team to fall under B8 classification. The property currently lies vacant.

## 55b Camden Street is a basement unit that lies beneath recently developed flats (55a – 55f Camden Street). The building front does not face directly on to Camden Street, but is reached via a short access road. A brick wall obscures the front door to 55b and there is a small walled courtyard/parking area at the front of the property attached to the unit.

# Proposal

## The proposal is for the change of use of the building from a B8 (ancillary storage) to D2 leisure use, forming an ‘escape room’ experience. This concept involves teams of between 2 and 7 people being locked in a room; needing to use deduction and quick wit to solve puzzles, mysteries and break codes to escape within the set time period. At the time of writing ‘Escape Game’ experiences were ranked 19 out of 1500 ‘things to do in London’ on TripAdvisor. ‘Escape Plan Ltd’ has experience of operating escape game experiences and is currently piloting a successful operation in London.

## Live Escape Games (also referred to as ‘Exit Games’) are a fairly new and popular market sector in the leisure industry. It is considered that they occupy a similar activity set that customers seek in their leisure time such as Live Events, Theatre, Cinema, albeit operating at a lower intensity of use. Additionally, Exit Games operate in the corporate marketplace for team building events.

## The Building will be laid out to provide a (new) toilet/tea point, waiting room/office and two experiences, with each experience spanning an existing space with a stud partition wall dividing it into 2. Each experience will be host to a maximum of 7 participants per session. Sessions will be a maximum of 90 minutes long, comprising 45-75 minutes playing time and a briefing and debrief session. The typical experience will commence with a short briefing by members of staff on the scope and rules of the game and acceptable conduct during the session. Participants are monitored throughout the session by CCTV, and will be in regular communication with staff. Each experience will be fitted with CCTV cameras and speakers.

## The proposed change of use will primarily involve internal changes only with new door openings proposed to facilitate effective game play. Traffic volume and noise levels implied would both be low.

## At the request of Camden Council Planning, signage will be covered in a separate application.

## To the front of the site is a small courtyard, with space for 2 car parking spaces, which will be unassigned between patrons and staff to allow maximum flexibility. Patrons will be advised of limited on-site parking availability when booking, and spaces for patrons will be booked with staff prior to arrival. Details of local parking availability will also be made available, but it is anticipated that the majority of traffic would arrive via public transport.

# Assessment against Planning Policy and Guidance

## The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is relevant to the consideration of the application.

## Paragraph 186 and 187 of the NPPF state that ‘*Local Planning Authorities should approach decision-taking in a positive way to foster the delivery of sustainable development’* and *‘Local Planning Authorities should look for solutions rather than problems, and decision-takers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible.’*

## The NPPF at paragraph 8 clarifies sustainable development principles as economic, social and environmental. The current proposal will contribute towards the aim of building a strong, responsive and competitive economy through adding variety to entertainment choice in Camden. The proposal contributes to the social role of the NPPF in supporting strong, vibrant and healthy communities through strengthening the entertainment provision and providing employment within the town centre. The highly sustainable location of the site also means that there would be minimal environmental impact. Consequently, the proposal would not compromise sustainability objectives.

## A key aim of the NPPF is to ensure the vitality of town centres and encourages directing retail, leisure and office development towards town centre locations. Paragraph 23 sets out that planning policies should be positive and promote competitive town centre environments, including adding variety and providing customer choice.**LOCAL PLANNING POLICY**

## DP12 of Camden’s Core Planning Strategy states: ‘New shops, services, food, drink and entertainment uses can add to the vitality and vibrancy of Camden’s centres and local areas. However, they can also have other impacts such as diverting trade and displacing existing town centre functions. As a result, the Council will seek to guide such uses to locations where their impact can be minimised.’

## The proposal would achieve the aims of the NPPF and the Core Strategy through the introduction of a new leisure use which the town does not currently offer, increasing the variety of entertainment options in the town centre. The increased variety will assist in drawing in additional visitors and increasing the use of, and spending within, the town centre. The proposal would attract new visitors to the town centre throughout the day, during and outside of normal shopping hours. The proposal will also make use of a vacant basement unit, contributing to the vitality of the town centre.

## It is also considered that the proposed use would contribute towards the 18-hour economy and will be an attractive activity to customers who will likely combine the experience with other activities such as eating out in the town centre. The proposed use would therefore complement the evening economy and increase the range of uses on offer to help cater for different sections of Camden’s community. It also offers an alternative activity to drinking. Escape Plan Ltd. has historically attracted patrons who have travelled from outside the borough – capturing tourists and Home Counties dwellers into the area.

## The proposed use is anticipated to require the recruitment of more staff, boosting the number of available jobs in the community. **Impact to neighbouring uses:**

## Core Strategy Policy CS7 states that the Council will make sure that food, drink and entertainment uses do not have a harmful impact on residents and the local area. Additionally, 15.12 ‘New community and/or leisure uses should not harm residential amenity, the environment or transport networks in line with all the policies in this document’.

## The proposed use would not generate high levels of noise. The rooms would have some quiet ambient audio to enhance the experience, but would not be of a volume to disturb neighbouring properties. Participants would be briefed on arrival about acceptable behaviour during games including noise levels, and monitoring during games via CCTV with voice commands will ensure this conduct is maintained.

## The development policy (14.4) also states: ‘Tourist attractions may also be acceptable in other parts of the borough if they have a local focus and a limited number of expected visitors’. The use will primarily generate foot traffic with a maximum of 12 visitors in a 2-hour period. Customers will have access to on site car parking on a prior booking arrangement but the majority of patrons will be encouraged to arrive via public transport. It is therefore anticipated that the proposed use would not generate significant levels of vehicular movements.

# CONCLUSION

## The proposed change of use will introduce a new leisure use to the central Camden area which is not currently on offer. The ‘escape room’ experience is rapidly gaining in popularity and has shown to attract a wide variety of groups.

## The site is also in the highly accessible location being close to the town centre and the extensive public transport network connections within close walking distance.

## The proposal will also bring a currently unused unit within a suitable use. The change of use would primarily involve internal changes, aside from signage to advertise the use, which is sympathetic to the host building.

## In summary the proposed change of use is considered to be entirely appropriate to the site and would not result in harm to the character of the area or to surrounding neighbouring properties. It would be in accordance with the aims of the NPPF and the Core Strategy and it is therefore respectfully requested that planning permission be granted for the proposed development.