



# **PLANNING STATEMENT**

**BASEMENT, THE CENTRO BUILDING, 39 PLENDER STREET**

**August 2017**

DP9 Ltd

100 Pall Mall  
London  
SW1Y 5NQ

Tel: 020 7004 1700  
Fax: 020 7004 1790

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

1.1 This report has been prepared by DP9 Ltd on behalf of Centro Property Limited (“the Applicant”) in support of a planning application for the proposed change of use of part of the existing basement at The Centro Building, 39 Plender Street, NW1 0DX (“the Site”).

1.2 This Planning Statement has been completed in order to explain the nature of the proposed development and assess it against relevant planning policy and demonstrate its acceptability.

### **The Scheme**

1.3 The application seeks Planning Permission for the change of use of part of the existing basement to a gym (Class D2) (“the proposed development”). No further external or internal works, requiring planning permission, are proposed as part of this planning application.

1.4 The proposed development, through the formalisation of the use of the Site for a gym, represents an opportunity to deliver sustainable development in line with the NPPF and, as part of the Applicant’s wider refurbishment and refitting plans for the buildings (not requiring planning permission), deliver distinct benefits, representing a positive investment in the area and ensuring the retention and creation of additional employment opportunities to meet identified current, local needs.

### **The Planning Application**

1.5 The planning application has been submitted in full to Camden Council (“LBC”) and seeks planning permission for the following development:

*“Change of use from a gym / ancillary office space (Class B1) to a gym use (Class D2)”*

- 1.6 The Planning Application submitted comprises of the completed Application Forms and Ownership Certificates; the Site Location and Ownership Plan (August 2017) prepared by Piercys; and this Planning Statement (August 2017).
- 1.7 Against this background, this Statement provides an overview of the relevant aspects of the proposed development and an assessment of its appropriateness against the Development Plan and other material considerations. The scope of this Statement is as follows:
- Section 2 describes the Site, the main features of the surrounding area and the Site's planning history.
  - Section 3 describes the main components and features of the proposed development.
  - Section 4 sets out a planning assessment of the proposed development against policy requirements.
  - Section 5 provides a summary and our conclusions on the proposed development.

## **2.0 THE SITE AND SURROUNDING AREA**

- 2.1 The Site extends to 329 sq.m (0.0329 ha) and forms part of the existing basement of The Centro Building, which comprises Centro 1 and Centro 2 buildings. These are 6 and 5-storey properties, which are joined and are currently in active use, providing predominantly office accommodation.
- 2.2 The Centro Building is located on and to the north of Plender Street between Camden Street and Mandela Street, to the south east of Camden Town.
- 2.3 The basement provides back-of-house and ancillary facilities supporting the wider Class B1 office use. This includes storage and plant areas, with the application site comprising an area within the basement which is in use as a gym, operated by Nuffield Gyms.
- 2.4 The use of The Centro Building as a whole is Class B1 office use, although the gym use on the Site – open to tenants of the building and the public – is established, by virtue of its operational use for at least 11 years. There is therefore an option to proceed with a Lawful Development Certificate under the ‘10 year rule’, although a formal change of use is considered, by the Applicant, to be the preferred route to secure this lawful use.
- 2.5 Access to the Site is via the main entrance off of Plender Street and then via a lift or stairs to the basement level. The nature of this access is shown on the submitted layout plan.
- 2.6 Although there are no external changes proposed and the change of use is essentially a continuation of an existing use, we note for context that the wider area is characterised by a mix of uses, including similar commercial uses with residential properties to the south.
- 2.7 The Site is not in a Conservation and not statutorily listed. The building is recognised as being locally listed although this is not affected in any way by the proposed change of use being sought.

## Site History

- 2.8 Planning Permission was granted in June 1992 for the use [of Blocks 1 and 2, Centro House] *“for the purposes within Class B1”* (LBC Ref: PL/9200338).
- 2.9 Reflecting individual tenants’ preferences, a series of changes of use have been approved for individual floors or parts of the building. Planning permission was granted in October 2004 for the change of use of the 5<sup>th</sup> floor from Class B1 (office / light industrial) to *“wholesale showroom and offices, stock room and kitchen, for ancillary staff restaurant”* (LBC Ref: 2004/3773/P) and for the change of use of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> floors to *“a flexible use as either office (Class B1) or wholesale showrooms (Class B8) purposes”* (LBC Ref: 2004/3772/P).
- 2.10 More recently, planning permission was granted in July 2017 for *“various facade and entrance alterations”* associated with the Applicant’s extensive refurbishment and refitting works (LBC Ref: 2017/2694/P).
- 2.11 The planning history for the Site identifies that the building(s) as a whole has a lawful Class B1 use. There is no differentiation in uses across the building(s) and there is no detail available in the 1992 permission in terms of expectations for the provision of back of house, storage, plant or other ancillary uses.
- 2.12 The Site, comprising part of the basement, has been operated as a gym by Nuffield Gyms since January 2006. The use of the space prior to this date is unknown. Due to the condition of the space it is not believed that any of the basement, including the Site, has been used for traditional Class B1 office ‘desk space’ during the building’s lifetime.
- 2.13 These factors support the principle of the proposed change of use application.

### **3.0 THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT**

- 3.1 The proposed development, set out in Section 1 of this Planning Statement, clarifies that the application relates only to the use of the Site (comprising part of the basement level), with no other materials changes either internally or externally.
- 3.2 The proposals relate to 329 sq.m of floorspace and the formalisation of its use as a gym. At present, the space is arranged so that there is an area for typical gym equipment with other areas available for use by classes and then changing and shower facilities also provided. This set up will essentially be maintained, with the proposed gym operator looking to provide typical gym facilities alongside running a series of training classes, targeting office tenants as well as those living and working in the vicinity.
- 3.3 Access will be via the Mandela Street entrance at a manned reception with all customers being required to sign in / sign up for membership. Membership is intended to vary from single classes to longer term monthly and annual memberships.
- 3.4 As established, the proposed development is part of the Applicant's wider refurbishment and refitting / remodelling plans for the buildings (not requiring planning permission), delivering distinct benefits, representing a positive investment in the area and ensuring the retention and creation of additional employment opportunities to meet identified current, local needs. The gym use will support the attractiveness of the refurbished office accommodation through the enhancement of its overall offer, replacing a similar facility operating as ancillary office space at present. The use will also provide a high-quality gym facility for use by local and nearby residents.
- 3.5 It is not anticipated that the proposed change of use will result in any external alterations or any changes to plant (or other) equipment. Any such changes will be dealt with as part of a separate planning application(s), as required.

## 4.0 PLANNING POLICY ASSESSMENT

4.1 Paragraph 11 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires that planning applications are determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The Development Plan for the Site comprises the Camden Local Plan (July 2017) alongside Neighbourhood Plans (although none are relevant in this instance).

4.2 This section outlines our assessment of the proposed development against this planning policy framework.

### Decision-Making Approach

4.3 The NPPF forms a primary consideration for the planning application alongside the Development Plan. The approach to assessing the proposed development should be based on the land use proposed and whether the scheme constitutes sustainable development and will thus benefit from the NPPF paragraph 14 presumption in favour.

4.4 The proposed development, albeit only minor in terms of the nature of the proposals, should be defined as sustainable development for the following reasons:

- **Economic Role:** the nature of the proposed use means there is limited opportunity to support wider economic strategies. The proposed development will however contribute to the building of a strong, responsive and competitive economy through the provision of a complimentary use to support the attractiveness of the enhanced and improved office floorspace on the wider site.
- **Social Role:** the proposed development will support local community's needs in terms of health, social and cultural well-being through the



provision / formalisation of this gym space for use by office tenants and local residents.

- **Environmental Role:** the proposed development will contribute towards the protection of the natural environment through the use of this site in an accessible and sustainable location.

4.5 On the basis that the proposals represent sustainable development, this assessment now turns to specific development management matters, which in this case is limited to a consideration of the appropriateness of the proposed gym use, bearing in mind and having regard to the nature of the existing use which is being lost.

4.6 The principle of the proposed Class D2 gym use is considered to be appropriate on the basis that it is essentially formalising the continuation of the existing gym use (albeit this is currently operating as an ancillary function to the Class B1 space within The Centro Building).

4.7 Local Plan Policy C3 (Cultural and Leisure Facilities) supports new leisure facilities (including gyms) as part of major, mixed use developments. Although the Centro Building is not a new development, the proposed refurbishment works being undertaken by the applicant essentially reestablish the site as a major employment use, whereby the gym forms part of the wider proposal and the building's attraction to future occupiers.

4.8 Whilst larger leisure and cultural uses are to be directed to defined centres, in the first instance, Policy C3 states that "*smaller facilities may ... be appropriate anywhere in the Borough providing they do not have an adverse impact on the surrounding area or the local community*". On this basis, and considering the established existing position, the gym use is considered to be entirely appropriate in this location, on its own right, as part of the wider office accommodation here.

- 4.9 Although it is established that there is no effective loss of Class B1 office accommodation, we have undertaken a review against relevant policy considerations.
- 4.10 Local Plan Policy E2 resists the loss of office (and other B Class space), except in specific circumstances listed as *a – i*.
- 4.11 Relevant here is circumstance ‘a’ which requires applicants to demonstrate that “*the site ... is no longer suitable for its existing business use*”. The basement space, to which this application relates, has no natural light, has low ceilings and does not have the capability (like the rest of the building) to accommodate modern, minimum office standard services (in ceilings or floors). It is therefore far less suitable and even sub-standard for office accommodation. As referenced earlier in this Planning Statement, the basement has not, to our knowledge, ever been used for typical Class B1 ‘desk space’, having always functioned as back of house and ancillary (including gym) space. The principle of this not being in Class B1 use is therefore considered to be acceptable.
- 4.12 Policy E2 sets out that the loss of office space is also supportable where there is a demonstrable increase in the intensity of office use on a site. The wider office refurbishment being undertaken by the Applicant is designed to make the rest of the office building more efficient and more in line with modern standards. The result is that the building as a whole will therefore provide improved and increased employment opportunities.
- 4.13 Against this background, and considering the nature of the change of use (from an ancillary-to-office gym use to a formal Class D2 gym use), the proposed development complies with the requirements of the NPPF and the Development Plan in terms of delivering an appropriate use in a sustainable location in line with local policy requirements.

## **5.0 SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS**

- 5.1 The proposed development, through the formalisation of the use of the Site for a gym, represents an opportunity to deliver sustainable development in line with the NPPF and, as part of the Applicant's wider refurbishment and refitting plans for the buildings (not requiring planning permission), deliver distinct benefits, representing a positive investment in the area and ensuring the retention and creation of additional employment opportunities to meet identified current, local needs.
- 5.2 The gym use will support the attractiveness of the refurbished office accommodation through the enhancement of its offer, replacing a similar facility operating as ancillary office space at present. The use will also provide a high-quality facility for use by local and nearby residents.
- 5.3 On the basis that this Planning Statement, submitted as part of the planning application, has demonstrated compliance with the requirements of the NPPF and the adopted Development Plan and in the absence of overriding harm, it is therefore entirely appropriate to grant Planning Permission for the proposed development.