

Planning Department  
London Borough of Camden  
2nd Floor, 5 Pancras Square  
c/o Town Hall, Judd Street  
London  
WC1H 9JE

23rd March 2018

Dear Sir/Madam,

**Unit 7C, O2 Centre, 255 Finchley Road, London NW3 6LU  
Change of Use Application**

On behalf of our client, Hemisphere Security Solutions Limited trading as "The Little Gym Hampstead", we hereby submit an application seeking full planning permission for a change of use of Unit 7C from A3 (Restaurant) to D2 (Assembly and Leisure) to accommodate *The Little Gym* as a new tenant.

Accordingly the development description is:

*"Change of use from A3 (restaurant) use to a D2 (assembly and leisure) use"*

The following documents have been submitted in support of this application:

- Completed planning application form and ownership certificates;
- Location Plan Ref: AL(04)0700 P01;
- Existing Floor Plans Ref: AL(04)0701 P01; and
- Proposed Floor Plans Ref: AL(04)0702 P01.

In addition to the above a cheque for **£462** has been submitted in the post to cover the required planning application fee. The Planning Portal reference for this submission is **PP-06804886**. It is noted that our client is not the owner of this building and we have served notice on the freeholder accordingly.

This letter serves as our Planning Statement and sets out details of the proposed Change of Use and also our analysis of the proposal against planning policy.

## Site

This application considers the vacant A3 Unit 7C, located on the first floor of the O2 Centre. The unit comprises 254.3m<sup>2</sup> (GIA). While the unit currently has lawful A3 use, it lies empty having been vacated in 2015. Our client wishes to bring the unit back into use and repurpose it for use as Camden's first 'Little Gym'.

## Proposal

This proposal seeks a change of use of Unit 7C from A3 to D2 for use as a 'The Little Gym': a children's structured gymnastics franchise. While this is a relatively new and innovative concept to the UK, it is enjoying widespread success, with over 300 clubs open across 30 countries.

Currently there are 12 Little Gyms in the UK, with a further 9 due to open or being planned. There are just 3 Little Gyms currently in operation across London in Chiswick, Wandsworth and Westfield London, making this the first of its kind in the London Borough of Camden.

Unlike traditional gyms, The Little Gym focusses on '*premier enrichment*' and physical development of children aged from 6 months to 12 years. Programmes are designed to:

*"...offer children a springboard to life's adventure by using movement-based learning and imaginative play to help build the confidence and skills needed at each stage of childhood".*

This is achieved through offering classes including gymnastics, martial arts, dance, and multi-sport programmes. Classes are capped at a maximum of 18 children.

This proposal will add a new offering to both the O2 Centre and the wider Swiss Cottage/Finchley Road Town Centre, attracting a wide range of visitors while simultaneously bringing back into use a unit which has been vacant since 2015.

## Planning history

There are no relevant planning records relating to Unit 7C however the following applications pertaining to other units within the Centre are considered to be relevant:

- **2010/6586/P** – Creation of a restaurant (Class A3) by extending first floor over central atrium within the existing shopping mall (O2 Centre). Approved.
- **2009/4698/P** – Unit 2 – Partial change of use from gym (Class D2) to Retail Shop (Class A1). Approved.
- **2006/1610/P** – Unit 4 – Creation of a new mezzanine floor plus a ground floor extension into the mall to provide additional Class A1 retail space, in association with the change of use of the ground floor from a restaurant (Class A3) to retail (Class A1) unit, together with alterations to the shopfronts facing Finchley Road. Approved.

## Planning Policy

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) requires planning decisions to be made in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The development plan for the Borough comprises:

- The London Plan (2016);
- Camden Local Plan (2017); and
- Camden Policies Map (2016).

Other material considerations:

- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2012); and
- Emerging Draft London Plan (2018).

### **NPPF**

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) adopted in March 2012 sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how they are expected to be applied. The NPPF encompasses an overarching principle of sustainable development and seeks to use the planning system as a means of facilitating positive sustainable growth through appropriate development.

Paragraph 20 of the NPPF recognises that in order to help achieve economic growth, local planning authorities should plan proactively to meet the development needs of businesses and support an economy fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Chapter 2 of the NPPF states that planning policies should be positive and promote competitive town centre environments. It encourages local planning authorities to:

*'Recognise town centres as the heart of their communities and pursue policies to support their viability and vitality;*

*Where town centres are in decline, local planning authorities should plan positively for their future to encourage economic activity.*

Additionally, the NPPF sets out the definition of 'main town centre uses' which includes leisure facilities, and specifically health and fitness centres.

### **Development Plan**

The policies considered relevant to the proposal contained within the Development Plan are set out below:

### **Local Plan (2017)**

The site is located within the following allocations in the Proposals Map:

- Swiss Cottage/Finchley Road Town Centre

### **Planning Policy Analysis**

Our consideration of the proposed development against the relevant planning policy is set out below.

As previously set out, the site is not located within secondary retail frontage but is located within Swiss Cottage Town Centre as allocated within Camden's Proposals Map.

**Policy TC2(g)** sets out that the Council will protect secondary frontages as locations for retail (A1) *"together with a broader range of other town centre uses to create centres with a range of shops, services, and food, drink and entertainment uses which support the viability and vitality of the centre"*. However, as the site is located outside of the secondary retail frontage, and that the proposed development will not lead to a loss of A1 retail uses, the development is considered acceptable in principle.

**Para 9.32** sets out that leisure (Use Class D2) is considered to be a town centre use, in line with the NPPF. Due to the site being located within Swiss Cottage Town Centre as allocated within Camden's Proposals Map, this location is therefore considered to be acceptable in principle for the proposed use.

**Policy TC4** seeks to ensure that development of town centre uses does not cause harm to the character, function, vitality and viability of a centre. Additionally, this Policy seeks to protect the character of the local area and the amenity of neighbours.

Echoing this, **Policy C3** supports the provision of new leisure facilities in the borough and notes that smaller facilities may be appropriate anywhere within the borough provided that they do not have an adverse impact upon the surrounding area or local community.

This proposal will not lead to a loss of A1 retail uses in the town centre, and will lead to a wider variety of offering within the O2 Centre. It is therefore considered that the proposal will serve to benefit the vitality and viability of the Town Centre. Additionally, by virtue of the site's location within a shopping centre, there are no residential neighbours within the immediate vicinity whose amenity would be impacted upon by the proposal.

The Council seeks to secure a successful and inclusive economy for Camden, as outlined within **Policy E1**, by creating the conditions for economic growth and harnessing the benefits for local residents and businesses. This includes: supporting businesses of all size; maintaining a stock of premises that are suitable for a variety of business activities; and recognising the importance of other employment generating uses including leisure.

This proposal represents a new and innovative offering not only to the O2 Centre but also to Swiss Cottage Town Centre. Research conducted by The Little Gym into their target market has found that parents – typically in the middle to upper income brackets – will typically spend at least 1.5 hours at the location. The proposal will therefore lead to increased footfall and spending, increasing the vitality and viability of the shopping centre and local area and will benefit the local economy.

**Policy A4** sets out that the Council will seek to ensure that noise and vibration is controlled and managed. This will be achieved by ensuring that development complies with Camden's noise and vibration thresholds as set out within **Appendix 3** of the Local Plan. Permission will not be granted for development which is likely to generate unacceptable noise and vibration impacts. The supporting text of this policy sets out that noise sensitive uses include: housing, schools, hospitals, offices and open spaces.

As previously mentioned, there are no residential uses within the immediate vicinity of the site, or any other noise sensitive uses which could be negatively impacted by this proposal. Additionally, unlike a traditional gym, The Little Gym is predicated upon soft play rather than heavy resistance weights which have the potential to generate high levels of noise and vibration. Noise and vibration levels are anticipated to stay within the acceptable limits as set out within **Appendix 3** of Camden's Local Plan.

Based on the above policy considerations, it is considered that the proposed Change of Use is acceptable at this location and accords with both local and national policy.

### **Conclusions**

This proposal seeks permission for a change of use of Unit 7C from A3 (restaurant) to D2 (gym). The proposal will ensure the unit returns to economic use and in so doing increase the viability and vitality of the O2 Centre by diversifying the shopping centre's offering and increasing footfall.

The proposal therefore accords with both national and local policy and, as set out within Paragraph 14 of the NPPF, and should be granted permission "*without delay*".

We trust that you have all of the necessary information to progress this application and make a decision. We look forward to receiving confirmation of validation. If you have any queries, please contact me on the below details.

Yours faithfully,



**Samuel Dargue**  
Planning Graduate

[samuel.dargue@glhearn.com](mailto:samuel.dargue@glhearn.com)