
Planning Statement incorporating Design and Access Statement

Big Dreamer Productions

35-37 New Oxford Street (including 35A and 37A),
39-41 New Oxford Street, 10/11/12 Museum Street
& 16/16a/18 West Central Street, WC1A

Planning Statement

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. This Planning Statement has been prepared by Savills on behalf of Big Dreamer Productions ('the Applicant').
- 1.2. Planning permission is sought for a "Meanwhile use" viz., a temporary change of use for five years at 35-37 (including 35A and 37A) New Oxford Street, 39-41 New Oxford Street, 10, 11 and 12 Museum Street and 16, 16a and 18 West Central Street ('the site') to a performance venue within Use Class D2). The proposed change of use relates to:
- 39 New Oxford Street – Ground Floor
 - 35 & 37 (including 35A and 37A) New Oxford Street – All Floorspace
 - 10 Museum Street – All Floorspace
 - 11 Museum Street – Ground Floor
 - 16, 16A and 18 West Central Street – Basement, Ground Floor, and Mezzanine
- 1.3. No external works or internal structural works are proposed.
- 1.4. The venue will not be a traditional theatre but an immersive experience for the audience throughout the space. They will be fully 'immersed' in the story, meaning they can see, hear, smell and feel the story. Immersive theatre often involves walking through a fully realised environment to encounter the world, discover the story and interact with the characters. An immersive performance production includes every part of a traditional theatre show except for the seats.

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- 1.5. Big Dreamer Productions is an international, full-service production company specialising in immersive, site-specific and commercial theatrical productions in Broadway, the West End and international tours. Since its inception in 2000, Big Dreamer Productions has become a proven industry leader in creating ground breaking art and is currently co-producing the 'Moulin Rouge' on Broadway and the international tour and West End productions of 'Fame' and 'Rock of Ages'. Over the past two decades, Big Dreamer Productions has entertained more than one million audience members and in 2016 it produced and created New York State's largest immersive haunted house.

2. SITE AND SURROUNDING AREA

2.1. The site is situated within the London Borough of Camden (LBC) on the 'island' bounded by New Oxford Street to the north, Museum Street to the east and West Central Street to the south and west. The application comprises a number of vacant buildings comprising:

- 35-37 (Including 35A and 37A) New Oxford Street: Ground floor retail with a mix of residential and offices above.
- 39-41 New Oxford Street: Ground floor retail with a mix of residential and offices above.
- 10/11/12 Museum Street: Ground floor retail with residential / HMO above.
- 16/16a/18 West Central Street: Nightclub with offices above.



39-41 New Oxford Street



16/16a/18 West Central Street



10/11/12 Museum Street

2.2. There is an extant planning permission on site (application reference: 2016/0477/P) for:

“refurbishment and extension of existing buildings to provide a mixed use scheme which includes 19 self-contained units (6 x 1-bed and 11 x 2-bed and 2 x 3-bed), flexible A1, A2 and A3 uses and/or B1 and/or S1 at basement and ground floor levels and associated works”.

This application was granted in 2017 following two refused applications in 2014 (application

reference: 2013/4275/P) and 2010 (application reference: 2009/5460/P) for differing mixed use schemes on the site.

- 2.3. As this permission is yet to be implemented the predominant planning use of the existing buildings is retail, office, residential, nightclub and Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO). The majority of the site, including the residential and HMO uses, has been vacant for approximately 10 years. The buildings have been deteriorating internally and externally and were in an extremely poor state of repair prior to the applicant undertaking essential works of maintenance including entire decoration of properties, refurbishment of power and lighting.
- 2.4. The state of the buildings was described in the report on the 2017 planning application to Camden Council's planning committee:

"there has been little meaningful work to maintain the external parts of the buildings over recent years leaving the buildings in urgent need of attention. Internally, the occupied areas have been kept in a reasonable state of repair however the buildings on Museum Street and West Central Street are most unoccupied except for a few short term lets. These vacated parts of the buildings are particularly in a very poor state of repair" (2016/0477/P Officer's Report to committee)
- 2.5. It is understood that all of the residential units were declared uninhabitable by Camden Council following a recent inspection.
- 2.6. The site is located within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. The Bloomsbury Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategy (2011) identifies the site as being within Sub Area 8: New Oxford Street / High Holborn / Southampton Row which is characterised by large-scale, late 19th and early 20th century blocks fronting busy thoroughfares.
- 2.7. None of the application buildings is listed, although the Bloomsbury Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Strategy identifies the majority of the buildings as being positive contributors to the Conservation Area. 10/11 Museum Street is also identified as a 'Shopfront of Merit'. There are a number of listed buildings within the vicinity of the site, including the Grade II listed 43-45 New Oxford Street and Bloomsbury Public House; and the Grade I listed Church of St. George.
- 2.8. The surrounding area comprises a broad mix of uses, including both residential and non-residential. Immediately adjoining the site to the east is The Old House Public House which forms part of the urban block but stands outside of the application boundary. Beyond the PH to the east of Museum Street is The Post Building; a recently completed office development. A Travelodge Hotel is to the south of the site with a multi-storey car park forming its podium level and backing on to West Central Street. To the west is a range of offices, residential and a public house.

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- 2.9. The site has a Public Transport Accessibility Level (PTAL) rating of 6b 'excellent' and is close to a number of public transport points, including Tottenham Court Road and Holborn Underground Stations

3. PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- 3.1. The site is currently vacant and has been for some 10 years. There is an extant planning permission for refurbishment and extension but this has not been implemented. The site therefore offers a good opportunity for a “Meanwhile” use to occupy the space in the meantime.
- 3.2. A ‘Meanwhile’ use may be described as one for the benefit of the local community, for example; meeting spaces, informal training and learning spaces, temporary rehearsal spaces, pop-up shops and exhibitions, and so on. They can offer a breeding ground for innovative ideas and empower the local community.
- 3.3. This planning application therefore seeks a temporary change of use (five years) for of the existing buildings as a performance venue (Use Class D2). Internal works are limited to decoration to create the set and new apertures. Much of this work is nearing completion and the internal configuration of the buildings will be reinstated upon completion of the use.
- 3.4. The first production in Space 8 will be Variant 31. Variant 31 is a 90 minute long, narrative and plot driven live-action show where the audience is free to navigate through the venue. The building will be decorated to create an immersive experience. There will be over 150 actors and characters with whom the audience will interact. Each player will be wearing custom-built state-of-the-art wearable technology provided at the beginning of the experience.
- 3.5. Audience members are invited to join in the interactive productions, and can explore however they so wish. Within the show, the audience can move up, down, left, right and back again for the duration of the show; engaging as little or as much as they choose. Each show will feature scenic, lighting, costume and makeup designs from world renowned artists.
- 3.6. The show will be entered through the lobby at 39-41 New Oxford Street. The lobby will function as a ticket office, although the vast majority of tickets will be purchased online, and customers will congregate in the lobby ahead of the show.
- 3.7. Each show will include up to 60 audience members. Shows will begin every 30 minutes and have a duration of 90 minutes. A maximum of 180 audience members will therefore be experiencing the show at any one time.
- 3.8. During the show audience members will be fitted with headphones and all ‘in-show’ audio will be played through the headphones.
- 3.9. Audience members will be able to purchase a limited number of drinks from the entrance lobby ahead of the show and in the rear lobby after exiting the show. Drinks will be served to the same extent as any other West End theatre that includes a bar in its lobby.

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3.10. Immersive performance experiences have grown in popularity in recent years in London, with new productions such as 'Secret Cinema', 'The Great Gatsby', 'Faulty Towers', 'The Murder Express', and 'Mamma Mia! The Party' are amongst some which have enjoyed great success.

3.11. The venue opening hours will be as follows:

- Monday to Thursday: 10am until 11:30pm
- Friday and Saturday: 10am until midnight
- Sundays: 11am until 10:30pm

4. PUBLIC CONSULTATION

- 4.1. A public consultation event was held on site on Tuesday 16 July 2019 between 4pm and 7pm. Local residents and residents' associations were invited to hear about the proposed use of the site and ask questions.
- 4.2. A handout providing answers to Frequently Asked Questions was given to attendees which included contact details for the applicant should any further questions arise. The applicant is committed to ongoing engagement with the local community throughout the planning process and the operational phase of the development.

5. PLANNING POLICY ASSESSMENT

- 5.1. The planning application has been informed by adopted planning policies and other relevant guidance.
- 5.2. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states that planning applications should be determined in accordance with the Development Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. For the purpose of Section 38(6), the Development Plan for the site comprises the London Plan (2016); the Camden Local Plan (2017) and Camden Site Allocations document (2013).
- 5.3. Material considerations include; the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2019); Planning Practice Guidance (PPG); regional and local supplementary planning guidance/documents (SPG/SPDs); any emerging policy and guidance; and site specific circumstances.
- 5.4. Although not a statutory document, the Centre for London report on “meanwhile” uses, titled *‘Meanwhile, in London: Making use of London’s empty spaces’* (2018), is of relevance to the proposed meanwhile use.

Principle of Development

- 5.5. The site comprises a series of buildings in a range of uses, including retail, office, nightclub and residential. The buildings have been vacant for approximately 10 years and prior to the commencement of the internal works associated with the proposed use the building was in a poor state of repair with the residential units declared uninhabitable by Camden Council. During the consideration of a previous planning application it emerged that there does not appear to be a registered HMO, the bedsits on-site are below the minimum size requirements for a HMO, and that no record could be found of any planning permission being granted for the 26 bed-sit units.
- 5.6. Policy C3 of the Local Plan recognises the enormous contribution cultural and leisure facilities, such as theatres, make to Camden’s attractiveness as a place to live, work or study. Such facilities are considered to support opportunities for people from all walks of life to meet and interact and promote a sense of belonging and connection. The variety and richness of culture and leisure facilities is also said to have an influence on community identity and mix, townscape character and the local economy. Policy C3 therefore confirms that the Council will:

“support the temporary use of vacant buildings for cultural and leisure activities.”
- 5.7. The Council’s advocacy for temporary uses is backed up by evidence gathered during a study conducted by the Centre for London in 2018, which highlighted the significant opportunity for “meanwhile” uses prior to redevelopment.

- 5.8. In this instance is an extant permission for development but this has not yet been implemented. The site is therefore vacant and ideally suited for a temporary or “meanwhile” use
- 5.9. The proposal would make efficient use of these vacant buildings for a temporary period of up to 5 years and make a positive contribution to the cultural identity of the area and the local economy.
- 5.10. Considerable employment will be generated, in total some 500 including 150 actors. At any one time there will be some 50 actors, 20 – 30 security staff and 30 support staff.
- 5.11. The importance of other employment generating uses such as leisure and tourism is recognised by Policy E1 of the Local Plan. The temporary use of the site will generate employment on an otherwise vacant parcel of land within Camden.
- 5.12. The site is well connected being within a short walk of Tottenham Court Road and Holborn Underground Stations and has a PTAL rating of 6b. The site is close to other major leisure facilities such as The British Museum and The Shaftsbury Theatre. Policy H3 expects proposals for cultural and leisure facilities to take into account the associated impacts and for large-scale facilities to be located where as many people as possible can enjoy their benefits and make use of public transport to get there. The location is therefore wholly appropriate for the proposed temporary use as a performance venue.
- 5.13. It is noted that the site forms part of Site 18: Land Bound by New Oxford Street, Museum Street and West Central Street which is allocated for mixed use development provided by conversion, extension or partial redevelopment including retail, offices and permanent self-contained (Class C3) residential accommodation at upper levels. The site also includes residential uses and Policy H3 of the Local Plan seeks to protect all residential floor space where people live long-term and through this policy the Council will resist development that involves a net loss of residential floor space. However, the proposal seeks for temporary use of the site only and would not result in the permanent loss of residential use on the site, or prejudice the long-term delivery of the site in accordance with the Local Plan allocation.
- 5.14. The proposed temporary use of the site as a performance venue therefore accords with Policies C3 and E1 of the Local Plan which supports the temporary use of vacant buildings for cultural and leisure activities in locations that are well connected. The proposal would not prejudice the long term allocation of the site, or result in the permanent loss of residential floor space. The principle of temporary use of the site for a performance venue is therefore acceptable.

Design & Heritage

- 5.15. The site is located within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area and while none of the buildings within the site is listed, the majority of the buildings are considered to make a positive contribution to the Conservation Area. The site is also within the setting of a number of listed buildings,

including the adjacent 43-45 New Oxford Street.

- 5.16. National, regional and local planning policy attaches great weight to the conservation of heritage assets and Policy D1 of the Local Plan seeks to secure high quality design in development.
- 5.17. The proposal will not alter the external appearance of the buildings and would therefore not harm the local context and character of the Conservation Area and would conserve the setting of the adjacent Listed Buildings. Through the active use of the site, the visual appearance of the streetscape will be improved and will remove the current appearance of vacant buildings.
- 5.18. Internal works are limited to decoration to create the set and new apertures. Following completion of the temporary use, the original internal configuration of the buildings can be reinstated.

Amenity Impact

- 5.19. Amplified noise will be limited to low level atmospheric sound effects played in the entrance lobby which would be no louder than background noise levels. The sound effects will be at the ground floor of the front of the property where the existing use is retail. The volume would not be audible from neighbouring residential properties, or harmful to the function of neighbouring non-residential units. No amplified music or noise will be played in the second lobby which is intended as an area to spend a short amount of time to discuss the show with fellow audience members after the performance. The location of the second lobby to the West Central Street side of the building will further limit any noise disturbance from the lobby.
- 5.20. During the show all audience members will wear earphones and will hear the show through the earphones. Amplified equipment will therefore not be used. Noises from the show will be limited to the reaction of the audience members to the show which would not be audible outside of the venue itself.
- 5.21. Noise activity associated with the proposed use will therefore be limited to people arriving and departing after the show, rather than during the performance itself. The site is well connected by public transport and will be car-free. The vast majority of customers will therefore arrive and leave via public transport or walking to/from other destinations in the area and harmful levels of additional noise as a result of vehicle movements would not occur.
- 5.22. The area contains a wide mix of daytime and night-time uses including other leisure related facilities such as restaurants, public houses, museums, and theatres. The use would see up to 60 audience arriving at the site every 30 minutes within the opening hours; although the last show will commence 90 minutes before the venue closes and therefore the latest arrival times for customers will be:
- 10pm Monday to Thursday and Sundays

- 10:30pm Friday and Saturday

- 5.23. The second lobby will reduce the level of customers exiting the venue at the same time as some leave immediately after the show and others spend varying amounts of time in the lobby. Nevertheless, the audience will exit the venue via the West Central Street exit opposite the multi-storey car park. Customers will be guided by venue staff towards New Oxford Street via Museum Street to mitigate any potential disturbance to the residential properties to the west of West Central Street.
- 5.24. Historically there has been issues with antisocial behaviour in this location owing to the previous nightclub use of the building on West Central Street. In order to ensure that no such issue arises from the proposed use, the venue will operate a 24 hour security presence with 20 – 30 uniformed staff including at the entrance and exit doors. They will control any potential noise and disturbance and, as a result, the active use of the site will accord with Policies D1 and C5 which seek for development to minimise crime and antisocial behaviour.
- 5.25. No extraction equipment or external plant is proposed.
- 5.26. In summary, the proposed temporary use and opening hours would not cause unacceptable levels of noise through on-site activities or comings and goings from customers and the residential amenity of surrounding neighbours would be protected.

Transport

- 5.27. The application site has a PTAL rating of 6b which is considered to be 'excellent'. The site is within walking distance of a number of public transport services, including bus routes and the London Underground. The vast majority of customers will travel to and from the site via public transport and the development would have a limited impact on the transport network against the existing uses of the site.

Car Parking

- 5.28. No car parking is provided on site, and a car-free development is appropriate given the site's excellent accessibility.

Deliveries & Servicing

- 5.29. No alterations are proposed to the existing situation with respect to deliveries and servicing the site. Loading is permitted on both West Central Street and Museum Street. The use would not have a greater impact than the existing uses of the site.

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- 5.30. It is expected that there will be a weekly delivery of general stock and supplies. These deliveries will be made to the main exit at 18 West Central Street.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1. The proposed “meanwhile” use of the vacant buildings as a performance venue for a temporary period of five years will make a positive contribution to the site and surrounding area, including:
- Cultural benefits associated with the introduction of a new performance production produced by an international company who specialise in immersive performance to the West End;
 - Active use of otherwise vacant buildings and associated benefits to the visual appearance of the streetscape, Bloomsbury Conservation Area;
 - Provision of on-site jobs and economic benefits of the active use of the site; and
 - Ongoing maintenance of the buildings through their active use.
- 6.2. The proposed use is therefore a sustainable development and accords with national, regional and local planning policy and guidance.

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Appendix 1

Consultation Attendance

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