

EBBA ARCHITECTS

ba@eb-ba.co
www.eb-ba.co

Project: 5a Agar Place, NW1 0RG

The proposed development will include a ground floor showroom with two residential units above, replacing a now defunct taxi repair garage. The following explains the key points that support the change.

1. Use & Research

Taxi repair garages throughout London are becoming obsolete. This is due to the Mayors Ultra Low Emissions Strategy whereby diesel vehicles are being phased out. You can no longer register a diesel vehicle in London due to this. The affect has been over the last 4 years, which was born out from news report on 11/01/21 that 4,000 London diesel taxis have been decommissioned in the last 12 months. The London fleet of taxis has reduced from 25,000 strong fleet only 5 years ago to approximately 14,373 taxis, and that includes 3,931 ZEC. ZEC is Zero Emission Capability Taxis, which leaves 10,442 taxis (diesel). [The source of information TfL website.] Garage's such as the existing one at 5a Agar Place are no longer viable due to the depletion of diesel vehicles from London streets and illustrates the way in which the cab industry has suddenly come to an abrupt end.

Furthermore, there is a natural wasted loss of diesel taxis per years of 2,500 due to the end of life, ie. 15 years age restrictions which is also being reduced to 12 years. As such, the figures show that in 3 years time there will be virtually no diesel taxis left on the streets of London. These figures do not include any losses due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which will only show when the fleets that have gone bust this year do not replat their taxis. This helps to explain the reasons for the obligation to develop the site, as the business is becoming obsolete.

This extends to other businesses such as general repair shops, due to the impetus to reduce car use in London, prompting a shift to electric cars. For example, the new battery powered taxis - LEVC can only be maintained or repaired for any accident damage by the Main Agent. This is due to specialised tools and skills required to carry out future maintenance of these vehicles. Effectively fleet owners and owners of London black taxis, and by extension private car owners with electric cars, will require alternative forms of maintenance in the future that the current site cannot support. This makes the garage at 5a Agar Place obsolete.

Withstanding that, the local authority (in 1965) Application No CTP/E12/23/1 refused permission for the use of the garage as a vehicle repair shop on the grounds that "the proposed light industrial use is contrary to the zoning of the area in the administrative county of London development plan which is for residential use", and "the proposal would introduce a use out of keeping with the residential character of the neighbourhood".

This is even a more powerful argument today as it was then due to the fact that the whole area is being redeveloped and the Mayors strategy regarding ULEZ and the pollution from not only London taxis but also from all Euro 4 petrol vehicles.

2. Existing Site – unfit for purpose

There are issues with the existing building being unfit for purpose due to the lack of flexibility for many businesses, and the location within a residential area. As mentioned above the future use of the building is impacted by the fact the business is becoming obsolete, hence the need for the client to develop the site. Secondly, the new Agar Grove Estate has transformed the area and the building is now very much out of context, identified historically by the fact Planning was refused for a regular repair shop – the most sensible alternative business.

In addition, the location on Agar Place does not lend itself well for the car garage to function, does not relate to nearby land uses and is poorly situated for any future business as it currently stands. The running of the repair garage was previously limited by poor access and caused disruption to local people and traffic on the tight street. This has been elevated by the recent redevelopment of the area, with many (including the developers of Agar Grove Estate) expressing concerns about the future and functioning of the site as it stands, prompting a big impetus for change.

The building itself and unit size is small in terms of useable area, particularly as the ground floor is windowless if not for the garage doors. The interior space at first floor is in poor condition and lacks adequate facilities for alternative uses such as office work, therefore unfit for new businesses. In order to provide new opportunities for businesses on the site, the building requires a major redevelopment.

3. Employment / Sui Generis

The existing business ended its lease on 31/12/20 due to the repair garage no longer required for use, as per the reasons identified above. Designated as 'Sui Generis' the repair garage will no longer function and results in the site being abandoned.

Instead the development proposes to provide opportunity to replace with a new building and in turn a replacement to match the employment status with new jobs created from the showroom at ground floor. This would provide 2 people to be employed to manage and run the showroom.

The alternative business, proposed as a private car showroom, would not only be more suitable to the surrounding land use but would also help to add to the character of the local area.

Summary

The report suggests that a replacement of the existing use and employment status is supported. The existing use is no longer viable and the above identifies appropriate reasons why the proposed form of development would be in line with policy.