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SUBMITTED ON PLANNING PORTAL

26 January 2021

Dear Ms Fieldsend,

RE: 37-39 Swan House, London, WC1A 6AA

On behalf of our client, Acai (Swan House) Limited, we are pleased to submit a planning application via Planning Portal (Ref: PP-09443839) for:

The removal of the existing windows at ground floor level at Warwick Court, extending the existing structural opening and replacement with fixed glazed panes; the installation of a new door and bridge over the lightwell to facilitate the creation of a shopfront with associated works.

Site and Surrounding Area

The application site is located on the northern side of High Holborn and it is bound by Warwick Court to the west. The application site comprises a 7-storey building with a basement. The site is located within the Bloomsbury Conservation Area. The site is not listed, nor is it identified as a positive contributor. The Site is located in InMidtown Business Improvement District and Central Activity Zone (CAZ).

Proposed Development

The application site formerly comprised of larger retail unit at ground floor level which have been rearranged internally to form 3 smaller retail units.

Due to the current pandemic, the existing occupants have approached the Applicant noting the existing space is surplus to their requirements and a smaller retail space is required to meet their business needs. The Applicant has also experienced increased interest from smaller occupiers. The proposal seeks modest alterations at ground floor level along the Warwick Court elevation to provide a bridge over an existing lightwell to create access and alterations to create a shop front.

Assessment

Principle of Development

Policy 2.10 of the London Plan (2016) notes Local Planning Authorities should support and improve the retail offer of CAZ for residents, workers and visitors. Policy E9 of the Publication Version of the London Plan (2020) supports a successful, competitive and diverse retail sector.

Policy G1 of the Local Plan (2017) notes the Council will support and deliver growth by securing high quality development and promoting the most efficient use of land and buildings.

Policy E2 of the Local Plan (2017) encourages the provision of employment premises and sites in the borough. The Policy seeks to protect premises or sites that are suitable for continued business use, in particular premises for small businesses, businesses and services that provide employment for Camden residents and those that support the functioning of the Central Activities Zone (CAZ) or the local economy.

The proposal would facilitate the efficient use of the site by allowing existing commercial retail occupants to continue operating from the site using floorspace that suits their business needs. The application proposal activates the frontage along Warwick Court which provides a new small business to occupy the space. The proposal is supported by Policies G1 and E2 of the Local Plan (2017), Policy 2.10 of the London Plan (2016) and Policy E9 of the Publication Version of the London Plan (2020).

Design and Heritage

Policies D1 and D2 of the Local Plan (2017) seek to secure high quality design in development and ensure developments preserve or enhance the historic environment and heritage assets. Policy D3 of the Local Plan (2017) expect a high standard of design in new and altered shopfronts, canopies, blinds, security measures and other features.

The whole site is within Bloomsbury Conservation Area, and nos. 2-6 Warwick Court are identified as positive contributors. Neither Swan House nor First Avenue House, adjacent across the Court are positive contributors.

This part of Swan House is a subordinate service wing of the secondary frontage to the main High Holborn elevation. It is distinguished from the principal Portland Stone frontages by the use of brown

brick facing masonry, though its use of Portland dressings and detailing takes care to associate it with the architecture of the main building. Swan House, is itself responding to the traditional use of stucco or stone for high-status frontages. This can be seen in the buildings just to the north on Warwick Court, of which nos. 7 & 8 are Grade-II listed. In this context, this small Warwick Court frontage reads as a return, a gap in the street frontage between Swan House and the main houses on Warwick Court.

The proposal seeks to use fixed-glazed panels and a glass door in dark-coloured with relatively fine aluminium frames to preserve the sense of the windows as voids, sustaining the rhythm of the street frontage. The proposal will not contrast with the tone of the brickwork or competing visually with the stone dressing.

Typically, lightwells and bridges to shopfronts and would probably mandate a larger expanse of glazing for a shop unit, for animation and to encourage commerce. But the four-bay rhythm of this site is important for complementing and bridging from the larger bays of Holborn to the grain of the traditional buildings to the north.

It also shares the lightwell area with the buildings to the north, including no. 6, where the occupying literary agency uses its very large fixed-glazed window for displays as if it were a shopfront. A discreet adaptation to the railings to open onto a bridge, being in the first bay of the street, would not be disruptive to the pattern of railings and areas which unites the street frontage to the north.

The two proposed fixed-glazed windows beyond the lightwell would essentially be replicating this arrangement at no. 6 and would seem a justifiable departure from the usual guidance for the benefit of the particular context of Warwick Court.

As part of the works, a gentle cleaning of the Portland stone dressings around the existing bridge and double doors and the rest of the lower facade, which has become stained; and concealment of the air conditioning units from the lightwell area are proposed, to complement the shopfront.

The proposal provides a good contextual design. Details of materials can be secured by way of a condition. At this stage, there is no known occupier of the unit and as such, signage would be dealt with by a separate advertisement consent application. Overall, the proposal would preserve the character and appearance of the Bloomsbury Conservation Area and it is consistent with Policies D1, D2 and D3 of the Local Plan (2017).

Neighbouring Amenity

The proposal simply seeks modest alterations to create a shopfront. At the present there is no known occupier of the premise as such it is suggested that the in terms of opening hours the premise shall operate between the hours of 06:00 and 23:00 Monday – Saturday and between 09:00 -18:00 on Sunday and bank holidays. A waste strategy has been prepared separately to support the application.

Supporting Information

The Application is supported by the following documents:

- Application form

- Appropriate fee
- Site location plan – 2020-06-DR-A-100 Rev. A
- Site plan - 2020-06-DR-A-101 Rev. A
- Existing ground floor plan - 2020-06-DR-A-102 Rev. A
- Proposed ground floor plan - 2020-06-DR-A-103 Rev. A
- Existing and proposed Warwick Court elevation - 2020-06-DR-A-104 Rev. A
- Existing Photographs; and
- Waste Strategy.

We respectfully request that permission is granted. Should you have any questions relating to the application, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully,

Zenab Haji-Ismail MRICS
Planning Consultant