

Dr Joseph Hanlon
7 Ormonde Mansions
100a Southampton Row
London WC1B 4BJ

7 August 2021

**Objections to Planning Application
100 Southampton Row London WC1B 4BB**

Partial change of use from A1 commercial to C3 residential unit at existing lower and ground floor level including a rear courtyard area and lightwell at lower ground level.
Application number: 2021/2602/P Application type: Full Planning Permission

Objector

I am the owner and resident of flat 7 Ormonde Mansions, 100a Southampton Row, upstairs from the proposed conversion.

Objection on grounds of

1. Residential area with inadequate light and air.
2. Creating a commercial space without toilet or washing facilities.
3. Failure to protect existing residential leaseholders against noise and other nuisance, both through physical design and the lack of compatible lease restrictions.

General

I have chosen to live in central London upstairs from shops, and thus am accustomed to the mix of commercial and residential of south Camden. Leases and restrictions on noise help to maintain the balance. Furthermore, I do not object in principle to the conversion of commercial to residential.

Thus this objection is specific to the proposal, and not general.

Physical objections

The proposal involves the conversion of a small toilet and storage area in the basement of the current commercial area as part of the proposed flat. The toilet remains where it is, with a tiny window onto a lightwell. The rest of the basement area has no windows or ventilation. The proposal is to dig a new lightwell at the rear of the basement part of the flat. The plan gives no dimensions, but from the scale it appears to be 1.2 m by 3 m. Such a sunken space cannot provide adequate light and air for a living space.

The toilet of the ground floor shop is taken as part of the proposed residential unit. The leaves no toilet for the shop, and the plan does not include the construction of toilet and washing facilities for the shop.

Thus the proposal is physically unacceptable, and should be rejected on these grounds alone.

Below, we also argue the proposal is physically unacceptable on noise grounds.

Noise, intrusion and short lets

Ormonde Mansions was built in 1902 with commercial ground and basement, and with residential on floors 1-4. Around 1975 the flats were sold with quite strong leases restricting

noise and disturbance as well as effectively preventing short lets and AirBnB. I have been resident for 34 years and can say that the system works well with a general neighbourliness and cooperation.

The Supporting Statement for the application says "There is also a precedent for conversion into lower ground floor flats at this location, with a similar change of use gaining consent and implemented in 2005." We agree that this precedent is important and its failure to protect the environment of residents on upper floors is the main reason to object to its repetition.

The freeholder and applicant, Lapid Developments Ltd, uses different managing agents for residential and commercial parts, and we are unable to see the leases of the two flats in the basement and we are unable to restrict noise, disturbance and short lets.

The government guidance note on noise and planning (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/noise--2>) says "Noise needs to be considered when development may create additional noise, or would be sensitive to the prevailing acoustic environment."

On the issue of "acoustic environment", the existing basement flats have similar small courtyard spaces at the bottom of walls and lightwells. This small below ground space becomes an echo chamber, in which even ordinary conversations can be heard by upper floor bedrooms along the back of Ormonde Mansions. This is particularly a problem in warm weather. The basement flats (and the proposed flat) are tiny and people clearly prefer to sit outside in this small space. After a few drinks, even a small group becomes more noisy, and they are sitting at the bottom of an echo chamber, creating more noise than they realise. This is exactly when bedroom windows are open, and it becomes loud enough to keep people awake. We believe this problem of the acoustic environment is impossible to resolve. The creation of a flat with a small echo chamber lightwell "courtyard" will necessarily be disruptively noisy. Under the government's guidance note, this plan cannot be approved.

Finally, as noted above, the present flats above all have the same leases which have excellent restrictions on noise and disturbance, to which neighbours adhere, and also effectively prevent short lets and AirBnB. Any planning consent must contain the requirement that any lease for the new flat contains the same restrictions as upper floor residential leases. We have been told *verbally and informally* by a representative of the freeholder and applicant that such a restriction would not be opposed.

Summary

I ask that the planning application be rejected on grounds of

1. Residential area with inadequate light and air.
2. Creating a commercial space without toilet or washing facilities.
3. Failing to take account of the acoustic environment being created which necessarily creates an echo chamber and noise nuisance.

If the council chooses to approve the application despite its manifest faults, I ask that the approval be conditional on the lease having the same noise, disturbance and environmental restrictions as the existing upper floor residential flats and that it also contain similar restrictions on short lets.

Dr. Joseph Hanlon
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