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Planning - Development Control
Camden Council
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Dear Sir/Madam

PROPOSED ALTERATIONS TO EXISTING SHOPFRONT TOGETHER WITH THE DISPLAY OF ASSOCIATED SIGNAGE AT ALBION HOUSE, 55 NEW OXFORD STREET, LONDON, WC1A 1BS

We enclose an application for full planning permission and advertisement consent for the above proposed development.

The application site comprises the ground floor entrance and associated modest ground floor area of an existing basement and ground floor commercial leisure premises that are located within the modern Albion House complex. The application premises have their own existing separate access from New Oxford Street. The application premises are operated as a Flight Club Darts venue, following the approved change of use on 14/10/2016 (LPA reference: 2016/2859/P). The previous planning permission and advertisement consent for the existing shopfront and signage were approved on 18/01/2017 (LPA references: 2016/6590/P and 2016/6649/A).

The applicant now wishes to undertake some modest revisions to the approved shopfront and signage, to refresh the external appearance of the ground floor of their premises. The application premises have two frontages, together with a corner entrance. The applicant wishes to amend the shopfront elevations to provide more traditional proportions, with a stallriser and glazing bars to help break-up the large glazed sections. The applicant also intends to paint the solid elements of the shopfront dark blue. The existing plain canopies are to be replaced on a very similar basis, whilst two new brass lighting units and hanging baskets are proposed on the corner entrance elevation. The replacement signage comprises the entrance sign over the entrance doors and the two menu boards, either side of the entrance doors. The approved, existing, projecting signs are to be retained as is. The proposals are detailed within the accompanying application drawings and details.

New Oxford Street is a very busy and active central London location which comprises predominantly commercial uses surrounding the site. New Oxford Street itself is heavily trafficked with high volumes of traffic at all hours of day and night. The site benefits from excellent public transport accessibility, with a Transport for London PTAL (Public Transport Accessibility Level) of 6b (the highest possible). The location is served by underground and buses as well as a series of very frequent night bus services and is also a major route for taxis. A range of different commercial uses exist within the general area of the site and these include nightclubs and other late night uses. Each of these display their own associated illuminated signage. The site lies within the designated Bloomsbury Conservation Area.

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The existing shopfront is modern in design and materials. The proposals seek to replace the principally glazed frontages with more traditional shopfront proportions, whilst retaining its active nature with inter-visibility between the premises and the adjoining public realm. It is considered that the visual character and appearance of both the host building and the wider designated conservation area would be enhanced by these shopfront alterations. The premises would have a more appropriate visual presence within the local street scene as a consequence. It is also considered that the external lighting units, hanging baskets and replacement canopies add appropriate visual interest to the proposed shopfront and that these elements are sympathetic to the appearance of the host premises and this part of the designated conservation area. The size of the lighting units themselves are very modest and they would result in no significant visual impact upon the character and appearance of this building. The proportions, materials and detailing of the host building are otherwise unaffected and the extent of the proposed shopfront alterations are considered to be very modest. It is not considered that these will have any material detrimental impact upon the character and appearance of this building, the local street scene, nor the wider conservation area.

The replacement signage is very modest in nature and simply replaces the existing entrance sign and menu boards in the same positions on the corner entrance elevation. This replacement signage is not considered to result in any net, material impacts upon either visual amenity or public safety. The proposed signage is considered to be a necessary and essential element of the appearance of the application site, given its commercial leisure use and the previously consented display of signage at the site. In short, the premises need to be able to continue to identify and announce themselves within the local street scene in order for the applicant's use of the premises to continue to be commercially viable. It is also considered that illumination is essential, given the intended evening trading times involved with the applicant's business. The existing, consented signage is also illuminated. The proposed signage has been kept to an operational minimum in order to undertake this announcement role.

The implications of the proposed shopfront alterations and associated replacement signage upon the character and appearance of host building itself, the designed conservation area and the implications for the local street scene are considered to be appropriate and respectful. Overall, it is considered that the character and appearance of the site and the designed conservation area would be enhanced by the shopfront alterations and preserved by the external lighting units, hanging baskets, replacement canopies and replacement signage, given their design, materials and form. The proposed shopfront alterations and associated replacement signage are not considered to genuinely conflict with any of the relevant and reasonable requirements of the local planning policy context for this site.

This proposal is clearly supported by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The 2021 Framework reiterates the presumption in favour of sustainable development (paragraph 11) which requires development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan to be approved without delay. Where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, permission should be granted unless in conflict with the 2021 Framework. The 2021 Framework also requires LPAs to approach decisions on proposed development in a positive and creative way and to work proactively with applicants to secure developments that will improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area. Decision-makers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible (all paragraph 38).

The 2021 Framework requires planning policies and decisions to help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development (paragraph 81).

The 2021 Framework states that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development (paragraph 126). Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments function well and add to the overall quality of the area; are visually attractive; are sympathetic to local character and history, while not

preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change; create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places; optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development and support local facilities and transport networks; and create safe, inclusive and accessible places that do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience (all paragraph 130).

Specifically, with regard to advertisements, the 2021 Framework states that the quality and character of places can suffer when advertisements are poorly sited and designed. A separate consent process within the planning system controls the display of advertisements, which should be operated in a way which is simple, efficient and effective. Advertisements should be subject to control only in the interests of amenity and public safety, taking account of cumulative impacts (paragraph 136).

The 2021 Framework requires that heritage assets are conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance (paragraph 189). Heritage assets should be put to viable uses consistent with their conservation and development should make a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness (paragraph 190). Development proposals should avoid or minimise any conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal (paragraph 195). In determining applications, LPAs should take account of: the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation; the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness (paragraph 197). When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation, irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance (paragraph 199). Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset should require clear and convincing justification (paragraph 200). Where a development would lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use (paragraph 202).

It is also considered that this proposal accords with the adopted regional and local planning policy contexts for this site.

Policy GG1 of the London Plan concerns building strong and inclusive communities and this requires growth to be inclusive and seeks to ensure that changes to the physical environment achieve an overall positive contribution to London. Good quality community spaces services and amenities are encouraged to strengthen communities, increase active participation and improve social integration. Specifically, Policy GG1 seeks to ensure that streets and public spaces are consistently planned for people to move around and spend time in, in comfort and safety.

Policy GG5 of the London Plan concerns growing a good economy. Its goals include conserving and enhancing London's global economic competitiveness through, amongst others, ensuring that London's economy diversifies and promoting London's role as a 24-hour city.

Policy D4 of the London Plan covers the delivering of good design. Its primary focus is rightly upon larger scale development proposals.

Policy D5 of the London Plan addresses inclusive design. Included within its goals are that proposals should be able to be entered, used and exited safely, easily and with dignity for all.

Policies C3 and C4 of the Camden Local Plan 2017 respectively seek to protect public houses which are of community, heritage or townscape value and cultural and leisure facilities.

Policy E1 of the Camden Local Plan 2017 looks to secure a successful and inclusive economy by creating conditions for economic growth and supporting businesses of all sizes.

Policy D1 of the Camden Local Plan 2017 seeks to secure high quality design in development, that respects local context and character and preserves or enhances the historic environment.

Policy D2 of the Camden Local Plan 2017 requires the preservation and, where appropriate, enhancement, of Camden's heritage assets. Proposals causing substantial harm to heritage assets will not usually be permitted unless justified, whilst proposals cause less than substantial harm will not be permitted unless the public benefits convincingly outweigh that harm. Development within conservation areas will be required to preserve or, where possible, enhance the character or appearance of the area.

Policy D3 of the Camden Local Plan 2017 specifically covers shopfronts and requires a high standard of design in new and altered shopfronts and canopies.

Policy D4 of the Camden Local Plan 2017 addresses advertisements and requires these to preserve or enhance the character of their setting and their host building. Advertisements must respect the form, fabric, design and scale of their setting and their host building and be of the highest standard of design, materials and detail.

The LPA has also published Camden Planning Guidance on Design (January 2021). Chapter 6 of this specifically covers shopfronts, which are required to be designed to a high standard and should consider the character and design of the host building and its context. Shopfront alterations to existing buildings should respect the detailed design, materials, colour and architectural features of the shopfront and building itself. Shopfronts in newly designed buildings should be designed to integrate well with the surrounding area and contribute positively to the public realm.

The LPA has also published Camden Planning Guidance on Advertisements (March 2018). In general, the most satisfactory advertisements are those which take into account the character and design of the property; the appearance of its surroundings; and the external fabric of the host building.

It is considered that any reasonable assessment of the proposals set against a fair reading of the adopted national, regional and local planning policy context, would conclude that there is no material conflict with these policy aims and aspirations, given the modest and appropriate nature of the shopfront alterations and associated replacement signage.

The proposed alterations and associated signage are considered to result in the visual enhancement of the appearance of the existing premises, creating a more appropriate appearance for the host premises and their visual presence within the local street scene and this part of the designated conservation area. The key proportions and detailing of the host building are retained, whilst the proposals enhance the detailing of the glazed areas, with stallrisers and glazing bars. The signage is considered to relate well to the host building and is well designed and sensitively located within the street scene; and relates well to the character, scale and architectural features of both the host building and the proposed shopfront. The materials used respect the character and appearance of the host building and the wider local area; whilst the methods of illumination are also considered to be discrete, appropriate and necessary. Overall, it is not considered that any material detriment to the character and appearance of the host building, nor the settings of the conservation area and the wider street scene, would result from the proposals. Given all of the above context, it cannot be reasonably concluded that the proposals would warrant a refusal of planning permission and advertisement consent.

It is therefore considered that these proposals are supported by the 2021 Framework and will comply with the aims and aspirations of the adopted regional and local planning policy context. The proposals will also ensure the continued economic use of these premises that will continue to function as an integral part of a

vibrant and appropriate mixed-use commercial environment within New Oxford Street; which adds to the vitality and viability of the local area in general and which does not compromise the amenities of the wider area. In accordance with the 2021 Framework's presumption in favour of sustainable development the proposed shopfront alterations and associated replacement signage should be approved without delay.

In the above circumstances, it is hoped that officers can support the modest proposals. If you need any clarification of the proposal or require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours faithfully

Bidwells LLP

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