

Summary

1 This previous employment site in a listed building has not adequately met the tests of Policies ED2 and/or ED3 for conversion away from employment uses, and the alternative backpacker hostel use proposed fails to meet the tests of ED12(a) and (c). Accordingly, this is a departure application, but no public notices have been posted to publicise it. The hostel conversion is ill composed as to lavatory facilities, fire risks and disabled access, and past experience of unauthorised hostel use in the vicinity, the proposed 24 hour working and the franchise mode of operation of the particular operator proposed all suggest it would immediately become a nuisance to the residential properties nearby, a source of street drinking and a bad neighbour to the local business centre and conservation area at whose heart it lies.

2 In all the circumstances, the application should be refused and the applicant/ owner encouraged to consider alternative employment uses, such as multiple artist studio/workshop use, in conjunction with an experienced operator of such spaces, which are becoming increasingly scarce in the area, despite the desire for an increased cultural offer.

Departing from employment uses

3 The building is declared as 947.6sqm GIA, but the redline area does not include part of the basement, and it is material whether the true area is more or less than 1000 sqm GIA, as to the application of Local Plan policies. In the circumstances Lambeth should require the true GIA to be independently verified.

4 Whether or not less than 1000 sqm (Policy ED2) or more (Policy ED3) Lambeth should probe the terms on which the property was marketed, now relied on to justify alternative use. It is all too easy to market properties as "Clapped out office – any offers?" to receive the expected answer "No way" , thus opening the door to a residential or office conversion, when more imaginative conversion possibilities could preserve employment floor space and thus jobs.

5 The proposed hostel use is said to yield 25 full time equivalent jobs, a density of one job to about 38sqm, compared to the usual metric of one office job per 12.5 sqm, which would give a job capacity of about 76. Lambeth should not readily acquiesce in the loss of such employment capacity and press the applicant to assess the "redevelopment of the site for B class uses" (ED2(b) – see also ED3(b) (iii)

The Hostel Alternative

6 New hostel accommodation is required to meet Policy ED12, in particular

- ED12(a)(i) off street pick-up and set down points for taxis and coaches – the site lies on an international coach route to and from Victoria Coach Station (Megabus services regularly pass the door) which must increase the prospect of coach stops, yet the site has no off street space

- ED12(b) highest standards of accessibility and inclusion – the design makes no provision for disability access to the stepped Grade 2 Listed Building at all, and that status makes any such provision problematic, particularly for the guests assigned to the basement and first floor, since no lift access is proposed
- ED12(c) high quality design capable of accreditation under the National Quality Assessment Scheme – with a dearth of lavatories on the ground floor, the overall number of guest lavatories shown on plan is below the level required under the Quality Scheme even to qualify for one star status, the lowest going:
 - Number of proposed bed spaces 227,
 - number of lavatories shown on plan 9, a ratio of 1 to 25
 - number of showers shown on plan 12, a ratio of 1 to 19
 - number of wash basins shown on plan 11, a ratio of 1 to 21

The minimum ratio even for one star status – 1 to 15 (see Quality standards extract attached) .

7 The hostel proposed is of the “Pile ‘em high and rent ‘em cheap” variety (see picture attached of the applicant’s King’s Cross premises). Provision of a ground floor bar requires justification (though the musing on the applicant’s website of a different business model of rock bottom fees funded by cheap booze is ominous for the area), especially one without any lavatory facilities on that floor. The stocking density of guests is very high, with the use of triple bunks to increase the return per sqm, and the fire risks of congestion on escape from basement and first floor are not addressed.

8 The applicant’s franchise model has proved problematic in the past, with the closed down Manor Place hostel in Southwark an example, albeit not featured on the applicant’s website, though that does record its Brighton hostel as having had to have been put “under new management”. The 24 hour working proposed, and the single night concierge do not inspire confidence in the tranquillity of the proposed development, and the residential amenity of neighbouring properties in terms of noise, all night street activity and street drinking will be put at risk.

9 In the circumstances the application should be refused.

David Boardman

Kennington, Oval and Vauxhall Forum Board Member for Planning