



Chartered Town Planners & Architectural Technicians

DESIGN AND ACCESS / PLANNING / HERITAGE STATEMENT

Change of use of ground and first floor office space to music / performance educational premises (class F1-a), and new signage.

Application by: School of Rock.

Property Address: Richmond Brewery, 18 Petersham Road,
Richmond, TW10 6UW.

August 2024

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This Design and Access / Planning / Heritage Statement is submitted on behalf of the applicant in respect of a planning application for the change of use of ground and first floor office space to music / performance educational premises (class F1-a), and new signage. This Statement should be read in conjunction with other drawings and documents accompanying the planning application.

1.2 This Statement comprises:

- A description of the application property and surrounding area;
- A description of the proposed development;
- A summary of relevant planning history; and,
- An assessment of the proposed development against relevant planning policy.

2.0 APPLICATION PROPERTY AND SURROUNDING AREA

2.1 The planning application relates to part of the ground and first floor of the former Richmond Brewery building. The building itself was originally two storeys in height but was later extended with two additional floors. The premises has a gross internal floor area of approx. 330m². The premises was most recently used as office space.



Figure 1 – Application premises.

2.2 The premises is located just outside a key office area. It is within the Richmond Hill Conservation Area. The surrounding area is very mixed use in nature.

2.3 The site is well provided for in terms of transport and accessibility. Bus Route No's 65 and N65 run along Petersham Road. Richmond Bus Station is within walking distance and is served by multiple bus routes. A dedicated cycle path runs along the Thames just metres away. The site has a PTAL rating of 4 but is right adjacent to areas with a rating of 6a. The area surrounding the site is very well provided for in terms of footpaths, and pedestrian walkways connecting to shops, services and residential areas.

3.0 PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT & INFORMATION ON APPLICANT

3.1 School of Rock is a performance based music school which prides itself in instilling in children and adults the love for music and performance arts, and pushing them to develop not only music skills, but also soft skills such as team building, confidence, leaderships etc. Their goal is to contribute to the development of children in the UK in addition to providing them with a well designed entertaining / educational activity based on music. By opening the first School of Rock in the UK, they are seeking to make a significant contribution to the creative industries sector.

3.2 It is proposed to change the use of the premises from E to F1(a) to facilitate a music / performance educational premises.

3.3 There is ample space within the premises to store waste until it is ready for collection, although the use in itself is not a high generator of waste.

3.4 New signage is proposed (new lettering, logo and projecting blade type sign). The main lettering and projecting sign would be illuminated by way of swan neck lighting.

3.5 As stated, it is sought to open the first School of Rock premises in the UK. Originating in the USA in 1998 and the inspiration for the 2003 movie '*School of Rock*' (as well as the Broadway and London West End '*School of Rock*' musical), it is the largest musical education franchise in the world with more than 380 schools in 23+ countries, and growing. It has over 75,000 students on its books, and offers employment to 4000+ musicians worldwide.

3.6 School of Rock uses a revolutionary teaching method that teaches music to people of all ages at any learning level through performance preparation. Instructors are eminent musicians and artists from each country's music scene. It was awarded the 2023 Global Champion Award – this is the highest honor granted by Global Franchising Magazine, as well as awards in Forbes, Entrepreneur, and several other franchising specialist publications. Premises are fitted out internally to the highest standards (including acoustic attenuation). By way of example in Appendix A are images of premises fit outs in School of Rock operations in Chile, Colombia and Mexico (between them these three countries have 14 premises). The franchise is in most of the America countries as well as in South Africa, Australia, Spain, Portugal and Ireland.

3.7 The proposed opening hours are from 10am to 10.30pm Monday to Friday and 10am to 6pm on Saturday. The main hours of operation for students are between 4pm – 8pm Monday to Friday, and 11am to 2pm on Saturdays. Typically there would be up to 15 students present at any one time, although this can rise to up to 25 at peak times. Up to 14 staff members would be present at peak times. Staff are employed on a mixture of full and part time basis.

3.8 The music program is structured as follows:

- 4-7 years: 1hr group session a week.
- 8-12 years: 1.5hr group rehearsal session and 45min individual session a week.
- 13-17 years: 3hr group rehearsal session and 45min individual session a week.
- 18+ years: 2hr group rehearsal session and 45min individual session a week.

3.9 It is not by accident that the applicant seeks to open a School of Rock premises adjacent a designated town centre. Experience has shown that such locations are key to successful operations as the students / parents of students make use of high street services before, after or during (in the case of parents) lessons. The premises in Richmond will be the first school in the UK, and there are plans to open a further 30+ schools through the UK in the years to come.

3.10 Premises locations are assessed in terms of the neighbouring businesses and their suitability as a place for students (parents of students) to spend time on a regular basis. It is sought to have nearby facilities such as a supermarket, café, and restaurant. The retail demographic profile of nearby Hill Street is an ideal area.

4.0 PLANNING HISTORY

4.1 There is extensive planning history for the brewery building and surrounding site. Planning permission was granted for workshop use and office use in the building in question under planning permission Ref. No's 97/0377 and 99/2927 respectively.

5.0 PLANNING POLICY AND GUIDANCE

National Planning Policy Framework (2023)

5.1 The National Planning Policy Framework 2023 (NPPF) seeks to promote a balance of land uses. Para. 86 is of particular importance and it states:

“Planning policies and decisions should support the role that town centres play at the heart of local communities, by taking a positive approach to their growth, management and adaptation. Planning policies should:

a) define a network and hierarchy of town centres and promote their long-term vitality and viability – by allowing them to grow and diversify in a way that can respond to rapid changes in the retail and leisure industries, allows a suitable mix of uses (including housing) and reflects their distinctive characters...” (underlining is authors emphasis)

The proposed development is in response to changing trends in the commercial / education sector in general.

Traditional commercial centres have been undergoing a transformation for many years. It is widely acknowledged that the future success of town/city centres lies not in conventional / traditional commerce alone, but rather in service, leisure and mixed uses. Customers want to seek out ‘experiences’ and uniqueness. A 2016 Report¹ on Town Centre Investment Zones found:

“The retail/leisure/property/investment sectors are agreed that the future of town centres is no longer mainly about shopping. It is more likely to be as much about leisure, living, learning and local services, as well as business”

The proposed development represents an innovative and unique business, and one with a proven international track record. Although not within a designated urban centre, it is directly adjacent one and will significantly increase footfall to the benefit of existing business nearby. The proposed use represents a pro-active response to changing commercial trends. Conventional commerce continues to struggle not least due to a combination of Brexit and Covid 19 knock on impacts.

¹ Town Centre Investment Zones. Getting Investment Back Into the High Street. Report of the Fragmented Ownership Group. British Property Federation. January 2016.

5.2 Amongst the findings of a Royal Town Planning Institute Research Paper (*Planning for Post Covid Cities*, December 2020) were that:

- Visits to local shops may continue to decline post Covid-19.
- There appears to be general consensus among commenters that there will be ‘no going-back’ to previous shopping habits.
- With reduced face-to-face contacts with family, friends and colleagues, commenters suggested that commercial centres could be revitalised as a hub for social interaction.

The proposed use would very much align itself with the emerging future nature of local centres in that local centres are less about conventional retailing but rather new types of commerce activity and the activity that takes place on the street and how this is fostered by adjoining businesses. The premises lies adjacent a designated centre (premises of the size and layout needed are not typically present within designated centres) and will help foster activity and footfall within the designated centre.

The London Plan (2021)

5.3 Policy SD6 (Town Centres and High Streets) of the London Plan states that “...*London’s varied town centres should be promoted and enhanced by:*

1) encouraging strong, resilient, accessible and inclusive hubs with a diverse range of uses that meet the needs of Londoners, including main town centre uses, night-time economy, civic, community, social and residential uses...”

It is considered that the proposed development is consistent with the above London Plan provisions. The proposed development is a specialist commercial / recreational / cultural use, and one which is wholly appropriate adjacent a designated town centre.

Richmond Local Plan (2019)

5.4 Local Plan Policies LP4 (Non-Designated Heritage Assets), LP8 (Amenity and Living Conditions), LP41 (Offices) and LP45 (Parking Standards and Servicing) are of main relevance to the proposed use. Policy LP4 states, amongst other things:

“The Council will seek to preserve, and where possible enhance, the significance, character and setting of non-designated heritage assets, including Buildings of Townscape Merit, memorials, particularly war memorials, and other local historic features.”

The building in question is included on the Richmond Local List as a building of townscape merit. Other than signage which is completely reversible / non-intrusive, no alterations are proposed to the external elevations and the building would retain its streetscene character.

5.5 Policy LP4 states, amongst other things:

“All development will be required to protect the amenity and living conditions for occupants of new, existing, adjoining and neighbouring properties. The Council will:

...

ensure there is no harm to the reasonable enjoyment of the use of buildings, gardens and other spaces due to increases in traffic, servicing, parking, noise, light, disturbance, air pollution, odours or vibration or local micro-climatic effects.

Internally the premises will have acoustic attenuation to a very high specification. School of Rock have significant experience and expertise in this regard, with all their premises around the world having varying degrees of acoustic attenuations. Typically measures provide a reduction of 50 Db from interior of drum or rehearsal rooms to corridors, and from then to outer spaces a further reduction of 20-30 Db. The reduction of noise is based on the principle of total insulation of each school room from inside. Walls and ceilings are treated as insulated boxes, and acoustic doors are also used to ensure noise insulation. A Noise Assessment Report is submitted to accompany the application. It concludes that subject to recommended mitigation works ‘resultant sound levels inside receptor demises will be within the limits stipulates by the local authority’, and ‘external noise egress levels have also been assessed and also comply with the relevant requirements without any further mitigation measures’.

5.6 Policy LP41 (Offices) states, amongst other things:

“The Council will support a strong local economy and ensure there is a range of office premises within the borough, particularly for small and medium size business activities within the borough's centres, to allow businesses to grow and thrive.

Retention of offices

A. There is a presumption against the loss of office floorspace in all parts of the borough.

Any loss of office space (on sites outside the designated Key Office Areas) will only be permitted where:

1. Robust and compelling evidence is provided which clearly demonstrates that there is no longer demand for an office based use in this location and that there is not likely to be in the foreseeable future. This must include evidence of completion of a full and proper marketing exercise of the site at realistic prices both for the existing office use or an alternative office-based use completed over a minimum period of two continuous years in accordance with the approach set out in Appendix 5; and then

2. A sequential approach to redevelopment or change of use is applied as follows:

a. Redevelopment for alternative employment uses including social or community infrastructure uses; followed by

b. Mixed use including other employment generating or community uses and residential which maximises the amount of affordable housing provided as part of the mix; followed by

c. Residential with maximum provision of affordable housing in accordance with policy LP 36 Affordable Housing.

B. Low cost office spaces should be retained to meet the requirements of small businesses, start-ups and the voluntary sector. Utilising premises above shops in the borough's centres for office occupation is encouraged as a source of lower cost office provision”.

A marketing report is submitted to accompany the application. It concludes:

“The property has been widely marketed now for almost 2 years, by 3 highly experienced agents. The property has received a consist level of enquiries which clearly demonstrates that the various marketing platforms have made the property readily accessible to both commercial agents and members of the public. Out of the 15 parties who received details and made further enquiries, only 2 followed through with actual viewings. We subsequently received 2 written offers for part let only, but only 1 party, School of Rock are still interested in taking 3,200 sqft. If this proceeds through to Completion, there will still be 3,492 sqft available to let in the building”

It is emphasised that the proposed use would create employment for up to 14 people. It also serves a social / community infrastructure use through providing an educational facility for music and performing, although it is more accurately described as a promoter of recreational and cultural activities.

6.0 PARKING AND RESIDENTIAL AMENITY

6.1 The Transport Statement submitted to accompany the application concludes:

“... the site has very good access to public transport within an immediate walking distance. The site access and servicing arrangements are unchanged. A significant benefit in traffic terms will be that the music education facility will not generate trips during the key morning peak hour, and trips during the evening peak hours will be restricted to the changeover of students on individual hourly lessons.

The proposed development would not have any perceptible impact on the local highway network, and as such there should be no transport grounds to prevent the granting of permission”.

The site is very served by bus routes, and is within walking distance of residential areas. A significant proportion of attendees to the premises will use public / sustainable transport (as they would if attending school). An important point to stress is that the proposed use is not a conventional traffic / parking generator use as a typical shop or office might be. Young persons attending obviously don't

generate parking demand. It is the experience of School of Rock that parents who drive children will not simply park up and wait until the session is over. Rather they will travel to services and facilities nearby and thus the proposed use is part of multi-purpose trips by parents, and part of a series of linked visits. Most parents who drive will likely park up at a business/service and both drop-off and pick up children from this point. There will be a drop off area at the premises (hardstanding area to the rear accessed via a crossover).

6.2 A Travel Plan is also submitted to accompany the application. It sets out hard and soft measures to encourage sustainable transport to and from the site.

6.3 It is not considered there would be any adverse impact to neighbouring residential amenity, in terms of comings and goings, as there would be little if any difference to the extant use in this regard.

7.0 HERITAGE

Assessment of the significance of the affected heritage asset(s)

7.1 The premises sits within the Richmond Hill Conservation Area. According to the Richmond Hill Conservation Area Statement, the special character of the conservation area is multi-faceted but is in large part derived from its mixed use character, several distinct character areas, relationship to Richmond Hill, and important public open spaces.

7.2 New signage is proposed but this would be relatively modest in the context of the large building onto which it would be positioned. The overall building within which the premises sits is of architectural and visual merit (although it is not statutorily listed), however signage works are only proposed to part of the ground floor façade.

Impact of the proposed development on that significance including any measures to mitigate potential harm and/or better reveal significance.

7.3 Whilst the important scenic, historic and architectural features of this building and wider area are noted, it is argued that the primary setting of the application is near commercial buildings which already have signage of the nature proposed. The building's origins are that of a brewery and indeed original signage is still in tact.

7.4 Given that minimal alterations are proposed to the external elevations at ground floor level, it is not considered there would be any adverse impact to the special character or appearance of the conservation area arising from the development. The proposal will have an overall positive impact on the building, and by extension the wider conservation area, by reinvigorating the commercial character and helping to sustain and attract footfall to the area to the betterment of commercial activity.

8.0 CONCLUSION

8.1 The application site is within walking distance of residential areas, day to day shops, services and facilities. The site is accessible and sustainable in terms of access and transport.

8.2 The proposed development is considered to be in compliance with NPPF policies, the London Plan as well as the Richmond Local Plan.

8.3 The proposed development would be the first School of Rock premises in the UK. Not only does it comprise a significant employment element, it would be a significant promoter of recreational and cultural activities.