

Commercial Agents Proof of Evidence - 9th December 2020

Instructions received from Chris & Dawn Roads working with WSP for consideration under reference and appeal: LPA reference: 18/2714/FUL

Appeal PINs reference: APP/L5810/W/20/3249153

1. In my capacity as a practising commercial estate agent within the Borough of Richmond upon Thames, I have been asked for proof of evidence regarding matters identified in The Statement of Disagreement pertaining to Arlington Works, 23 – 27 Arlington Road, Twickenham, TW1 2BB. I was the author of the Marketing Feasibility Report prepared on the 13th June 2018 which appraised the site's viability at that time.



Arlington Works, 21-27 Arlington Road, Twickenham, TW1 2BB

Andrew Weeks Head of Department Featherstone Leigh Commercial

2. Born and raised in Richmond upon Thames, I started my career in residential agency aged 17 a weekend member of staff for Whitman & Porter which became Barnard Marcus. On finishing my business diploma at Richmond College, I became an office junior at Chiswick High Road office and within 3 years became the youngest office manager of the Turnham Green Terrace office the groups most profitable office out of 750 branches. I practiced in residential estate agency for over two decades before venturing into the development sector working for Mansard Homes, a new homes builder based in Bookham in Surrey. I was the land acquisition manager and assembled sites for redevelopment across Surrey including projects within the Richmond Borough. This role came to an end in 2009 after the banking crisis of 2008.
3. In February 2010, I was delighted to be appointed as head of department for Featherstone Leigh Commercial based at head office; Holbrook House, 34-38 Richmond Hill, TW10 6UA. Within my 10 years within the role, generating numerous sales and lettings of commercial property including shops, offices, industrial, gyms and nurseries, investments and mixed-use developments, Featherstone Leigh Commercial now ranks within the top 4 commercial agencies in Richmond.
4. The practice advises a large and diverse range of clients, from statutory bodies, multiple unit landlords to private individuals. Viability and feasibility have become an important part of portfolio management, reflecting a rapidly changing commercial environment.
5. I been actively involved in the sale and letting of commercial space within Richmond and advising on marketability and demand, often from the conceptual stage of pre-development.
6. In a collaborative capacity, I attend the commercial agent's quarterly meetings at York House with Susan Shaw the Business and Enterprise Manager Serving Richmond and Wandsworth Councils. The meetings include attendance by Robert Angus the head of planning for Richmond.
7. My credentials as an active and practising commercial agent, I believe to be uncontested by Richmond Council. The evidence which I have prepared and the opinions expressed are my true and professional opinion.

Introduction:

8. This report will address matters arising from section 2.2 of the Statement of Disagreement and will naturally broach other areas of consideration. Materially the application 18/2714/FUL promotes better use of the existing site in a sustainable manner, increased employment and subsequently, greater diversity. I will highlight the current state of the existing properties, reviewing the financial feasibility of improving either piecemeal, working around existing occupiers, and comprehensive redevelopment.

9. The reason for refusal is:

U0069279 Loss of Industrial Floorspace The proposed development, by reason of its complete loss of an existing industrial site and lack of satisfactory full and proper marketing evidence to demonstrate there is a lack of demand for continued use of the premises as a B2 use, or appropriate alternative employment generating uses, or other suitable evidence; would result in an unacceptable loss of an industrial site, to the detriment of the local economy and range of employment premises within the borough. The scheme is therefore contrary to policy, in particular, policies 4.14 of the London Plan (2016) and LP42 of the adopted Local Plan (2018).

10. LBRUT Planning team have suggested that the site is used for Industrial purposes where in fact, when the existing occupiers are analysed, most businesses can be accommodated under the B1 provisions of the town & country planning (use classes) order 1987. I summarise below:

- B1(a) Offices
- B1(b) Research and development of products or processes
- B1(c) Industrial processes

11. Under amendments to the Use Class Order that came into effect on the 1st September 2020 A1, A2, A3, B1, D1 & D2 (the majority of use classes at Arlington Works) now fall into Class E (g). There are three small units that fall under B2 and there are several areas or storage, either ancillary or B8. These units and areas could be converted into B1 through permitted development. As such, it is my understanding that all of the units could move to a range of Class E uses without the need for planning permission.

12. Regarding marketing of commercial properties to satisfy policy LP42, it is my view that it is not necessarily appropriate in this instance. The policy requires 2 years marketing evidence before change of use or loss of employment site/space can be considered. The Appellant has from the outset set out an employment based scheme which would upgrade the space in the Buildings of Townscape Merit and build a new unit at the far end of the terrace. The sheds would be removed as they are no longer fit for purpose having come to the end of their useful life. It is my view that the employment space to be provided in both the refurbished space and new building would be attractive to the market for a mix of B1 uses including light industrial workshops. On this basis, it will be inappropriate and unnecessary to market the existing space at the site for employment use, ie it is the intention of the Appellant to provide such space.



13. Under the current proposal (LPA reference: 18/2714/FUL) redevelopment and comprehensive renovation of the mews properties with the addition of a new mews building at the far end providing a character enclave of 5 two storey flexible B1 units with a floor area of 610 m² / 6,568 ft². Although shown as five two storey units these will be flexible and can be let as smaller or larger units across the former B1 class i.e. to include workshops, studios, offices or a mixture.
14. The Building of Townscape Merit listing presents some challenges as it only lends itself to multiple unit occupation, in reality for this location presents the ideal B1 categorisation for appropriate local SMEs.
15. The modest loss of area will be more than compensated by a fit for purpose scheme that provides:
 - Sustainable, energy efficient commercial premises for the next 50 years.
 - A working environment that will promote full occupation and longevity with tenants and or commercial business owners.
 - The size of units and siting will keep them affordable for local traders and businesses.
 - The diversity across the B1 (a,b,c) will present opportunities for an array of SMEs that will find suitable alternatives within the Borough hard to replicate. Examples: workshop operators, musicians / artists, upholsterers etc.
 - The B1 space will be the perfect steppingstone from home working and downsizing which we are currently experiencing as a result of Covid-19 restructuring.
 - Positive impact to neighbouring residents and local shops, cafes, bars and restaurants. Through considered development the site will house significantly more workers from the 17 currently on site to as many as 50 generating many more on the doorstep spending facilities for local shop etc.

- Business Rates – The rateable value for newly refurbished units will generate income for the local authority.

Existing:

16. The Buildings of Townscape Merit and corrugated sheds are occupied on flexible terms many of which are historic tenancies. There has been no provision for upkeep or maintenance which is commonplace for light industrial sites, workshops etc. This will ultimately lead to buildings and sites falling into disrepair which now needs addressing on a comprehensive basis.

Buildings BTM:

- The slate tiles on the roof have all been covered in meshing and painted to keep them in place and the buildings watertight. I am informed that this “temporary measure” was implemented 20 years ago.
- Windows are timber sash, rotting and singled glazed.
- The cottages have obvious damp as there is no heating.
- Roof and guttering all needs replacing.
- The end unit has a vertical crack suggesting subsidence. Lateral restraint tie bars and straps probably needed.
- Brickwork all needs repointing
- Ivy damage to the rear flank of the cottages backing onto the railway line.







Industrial Sheds:

17. Constructed from corrugated metal and wooden windows the lean-to sheds are long past being fit for purpose. The corrugated metal has rusted and bent out of shape and the wooden windows rotted by the elements. They could in theory be replaced by similar cheap material, prefab constructions but would never provide any meaningful commercial space / facility on this basis. The new and refurbished floorspace proposed in and next to the BTMs will easily absorb the minimal loss of these units providing high quality, sustainable and usable commercial space.



18. The extent of works has escalated due to their poor construction and age. The photographic evidence displays that these outbuildings were at the end of their usefulness some time ago. It is highly unlikely that these buildings could be satisfactorily upgraded and instead need to be removed.
19. There are three shed units which could be classified as B2 due to the nature of the operation (which have received complaints from Twickenham Studios) and how long they have been there. These are:
- Unit 1 – Marble fireplace maker and restorer
 - Unit 2 – Blacksmith
 - Unit 8 – Car repairs and body works
20. The market rents that these properties command, makes it unviable to replace in their existing capacity. The new scheme promotes removing this section which is best described as urban blight and replacing with affordable housing.





Conclusion:

21. The local authority in their reason for refusal have sited LP42 lack of 2 years marketing evidence. It is my understanding that this is to establish viability or lack thereof. As I have advised from the outset that this type of B1 flexible space is attractive to the local market, particularly for SMEs, it would be strange to market the units or the site.
22. The buildings that are recognised as B2 & B8 can be converted to B1 via Permitted Development which in essence creates E-Class qualification. My understanding is that the owners are happy to restrict uses to the B1 categories by condition or S106. Richmond Council's Direction of Travel Document (**CDE13**) identifies growing trends for flexible business space for SMEs.
23. Development of the site will create better quality employment space and the number of workers will increase from the 17 currently employed on site up to around 50. Better tenancy agreements will protect the site's viability for many years to come. I do not feel that there is any loss of employment under the current proposal just square footage, which is more than compensated by the quality of the
24. space and sustainability of the buildings. In addition, uses which are currently causing concern to neighbouring occupiers, will be removed. The scheme as proposed will bring many more benefits to the area than the existing arrangements offer

For and on behalf of Featherstone Leigh Commercial



Commercial Director
Holbrook House
34-38 Hill Rise
Richmond, Surrey
TW10 6UA
aweeks@flcproperty.co.uk
www.featherstoneleigh.co.uk

Registered Office
Holbrook House, 34-38 Hill Rise,
Richmond, Surrey, TW10 6UA

Registered Number 2780193
VAT Number 626 8298 05

Incorporating Smith & Co.