

Muswell Hill Library – Options Report

Executive Summary

GL Hearn have been instructed to consider options for the Muswell Hill library building should the operation be relocated to 54-56 Muswell Hill.

The context for this is that the Council has acquired a ground floor area of 528 sq m at 54-56 Muswell Hill and needed to assess potential options for both buildings.

Planning

National and local policy were reviewed to reach an understanding of potential constraints on the relevant properties.

The current planning use class of the library building is D1 (Non-residential institutions). It is Grade II listed and as a result the normal temporary permitted development rights from D1 to A1, A2, A3 and B1 for a period of two years do not apply.

Planning history for the building shows that its side extension was granted permission in 1988 and subsequently there have been minor alterations to the building.

The most significant permission was granted in 2008 on the rear car park with a scheme for four x 2 bedroom apartments together with four parking spaces. This has now lapsed.

Key conclusions were as follows:

Library building – Grade II listed. Potential requirement for continued public access to the murals within the children's library leading to conclusion that a low impact use providing public access to part would be most suitable. A business centre would potentially meet this requirement. Bar/restaurant uses were considered more problematic due to the likely alterations required.

Rear car park – potential for residential development established through a previous, though now lapsed, planning consent.

54/56 Muswell Hill – benefits from a D1 use so potential for community/medical/nursery/crèche. Whilst physically suitable for A1/A2/A3, consent would be required.

Library Building

The building comprises 350 sq m net on two storeys. The ground floor is largely open plan with a small side extension used as a PC suite. The first floor has a large rear room used as a children's library and a smaller room to the front.

As far as alternative uses are concerned it is quite restricted by its physical layout and listing. In particular, whilst the upper floor has good natural light due to its large skylight, the perimeter windows are above head height and the high ceilings would make it difficult to subdivide.

We considered a number of potential uses for the building.

Community – this can be quite flexible but would only generate a modest rent.

Employment – we concluded that demand could potentially be anticipated from creative users such as design studios, architects etc although significant rent free periods would be required to upgrade the building's services to an appropriate level.

We also spoke to a number of workspace operators who expressed interest in principle. Again the cost of service upgrade would be an issue and it is likely that flexible terms would be sought.

Bar/Restaurant – whilst there has been strong market activity locally in this sector, we did consider that the level of provision could be reaching saturation point. The necessary works required to accommodate this type of operation were also likely to be problematic.

Medical – whilst interest has been expressed in the building, again the level of works required for this use would be problematic and the overall floorspace provided is unlikely to be sufficient.

Rear Car Park

We undertook financial appraisals of a number of options based on both flats and townhouses, all of which indicated that residential development on this site would be viable and would generate a receipt.

54/56 Muswell Hill

Part of the ground floor of this building will be subject to a 999 year lease to the Council. With an existing D1 consent we concluded that, subject to specific demand, the most valuable use for this area would be a commercial nursery.

The floorspace is physical suitable for A1/A3 uses though with relatively limited frontage onto Muswell Hill and being slightly off-pitch, demand may be limited.

It also has the potential to accommodate managed workspace and indeed given that it is a large, new-build open-plan footprint (albeit one with limited natural light) it may well be a more attractive proposition than the library for this use. Also we might expect better financial terms given that costs to be incurred in bringing it up to an appropriate specification would be lower.

Demand and potential terms would be best assessed through an open marketing exercise on flexible terms.

Conclusions

Re-use of the library building for alternative uses is constrained by planning, its listing and the physical layout of the building.

We concluded that there may be demand from office or workspace units but rental terms would need to reflect the level of works required to bring the building up to an appropriate specification.

Alternatively a community use would be able to make use of the floorspace but any rent would be modest.

54/56 Muswell Hill is equally suitable for managed workspace and would probably achieve better financial terms than the library building. However, given the potential for demand from other uses we consider that an open marketing exercise would be appropriate. In addition there is the potential for a small residential development on the rear car park site.