

Objection to DC/12/79369/X 113 Bovill Road, SE23 1EL

I write on behalf of the Forest Hill Society to object to the above application for demolition of the existing industrial workshops at 113 Bovill Road SE23 and the construction of a part two/part three storey block providing approximately 800sq.m of (Use Class B1) Office Space, together with servicing area to the rear, the provision of car parking spaces and secure storage for bicycle and refuse.

The Forest Hill Society are the local amenity society for the area covered by SE23 and have around 400 members. The society is keen to ensure that the area develops in a positive way that supports the economic, environmental and social wellbeing of the people that live and work in it. Generally we try to be positive about changes to the area and proposals for improvements, however in some cases it is necessary for us to raise concerns about proposals as part of the planning process.

We object to this proposal for two main reasons:

- 1) the site is not suitable for a 3 storey office building and other workshop uses
- 2) the inappropriate design of the replacement building

We are also concerned that the application form is not clear as to what type of employment uses are proposed. The building is described as an office building but no new B1a floorspace is included on the application form which gives an incorrect impression of a significant loss of floorspace on the site. The drawings show around 240sqm at ground floor, 360sqm at first floor and 360sqm at second floor giving a total office floorspace of around 960sqm GIA, in addition to the retained workshop use in the south west corner. This indicates a net gain in floorspace of over 500 sqm. The employment section of the application form is also not completed and therefore makes any claims the applicant makes about increased employment impossible to quantify.

We are also concerned about the impact on the usefulness of the building adjacent to 111 Bovill Road which the design and access statement describes as being in the same ownership as the applicant but which for some reason is excluded from these proposals. The proposals block side windows and access doors in this adjacent building and would seem to render it no longer suitable for whatever existing workshop use it is currently in use as. This seems a serious missed opportunity for a comprehensive proposal across the non-residential uses along Bovill Road.

SUITABILITY FOR OFFICE USES

Whilst we can see that this site would benefit from redevelopment, the existing garage and workshop use is an important and well used one for the local community and directly serves those living in the area, which it is likely the replacement offices would not. We do not think that this residential street is a good location for office uses and would contribute little to the area.

A key question for this application is whether under policy EMP4, which relates to Employment Sites outside defined employment areas, the site is "still considered suitable for such a use"

We have no problem in principle with the retention of employment generating uses on this site as long as the scale and impact of the proposed development is consistent with the surrounding residential area and is of a use that is likely to serve the local community. However, we are concerned that in this case:

- Too much office use is proposed on the site, which forces the scheme to be out of scale with the rest of the street and highly dominant in this very much 'off the beaten track' location.
- The office use is designed as open plan office space, most likely for a single occupier and would

therefore be unlikely to be occupied by local small business who may be in need of flexible, attractive office and workshop space.

Whilst this proposal is a continuation of uses that fall within the B1 use class it is actually a change from a workshop to office use which has quite different impact on the character of the area and value to the community.

We are concerned at what "a mixture of B class floor space" as described in the applicants design and access statement actually means, and whether this would in fact result in an expansion of workshop uses in this otherwise residential area simply as a result of the proposal to increase to the useable developed floorspace on the site.

The internal layout and design of the office building has more in common with offices that are located on business parks than sensitive infill development in an otherwise residential area.

The office use changes the pattern of access on the site and creates a larger car parking area to the rear. This is in conflict with the surrounding residential use and creates a significant area of tarmac.

DESIGN ISSUES

We have a number of concerns about the design of the proposals.

- The proposals fail to provide an appropriate design that sits well with the houses along the rest of the street. These are highly repetitive and create a strong rhythm, that is also highly consistent in scale, massing and articulation.
- The proposals fail to achieve the tests under policy URB3 Urban Design. The proposals have attempted a pastiche victoriana style with gables and bays, but the proportioning, scale, built form, rhythm, articulation, angle of the gables, and solid to void ratio of the proposals does not compliment the adjacent houses and detracts from the otherwise consistent character of the street. The fact that the existing workshop buildings contribute little positive character to the street is not a reason to accept a poor quality replacement.
- The proposal is contrary to policy EMP5 that normally supports the intensification of existing business uses because the proposed use would create "unavoidable visual intrusion", through the increased scale, bulk and insensitive design.
- The applicant describes the proposals as a 2 storey building over 3 levels. As the elevations clearly show this is a 3 storey building, and a whole storey higher than the majority of other buildings on the street.