

DC/13/82357 and DC/13/82358: 2-4 LONDON ROAD, LONDON, SE23 3HF

I am writing on behalf of the Forest Hill Society regarding the above applications for the change of use of the ground floor and basement from Laundrette (Use Class Sui Generis) to an estate agency (Use Class A2), together with alterations to the shop front at 2-4 London Road SE23 3HF

The Forest Hill Society is the local amenity society for the area covered by SE23 and has over 500 members. The society is keen to ensure that the area develops in a positive way that supports the economic, environmental and social well-being 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 write to object to the above proposals for the following reasons:

1) The change of use from laundrette would mean the loss of an important social and community resource for the area.

There is no other laundrette in Forest Hill town centre or within walking distance and this would mean that those without access to a washing machine would not be able to do their washing locally and conveniently. This change of use would therefore disadvantage those who rely on this function and who are possibly not in a financial position to have other choices. Census data demonstrates that Forest Hill has a significant population living in accommodation that may need to make use of a laundrette.

A laundrette is a protected use as evidenced by its sui generis use class. We understand that this is in order to ensure that this valuable social and community function is not lost from an area.

This laundrette is (or has been until its closure) a busy and well used local facility. The external appearance of the building is somewhat run down, but that is not a good enough reason to accept the loss of this important social and community function. It is clear that there is still ongoing demand for the laundrette within the town centre and believe that there is no reasonable case to be made for its loss.

2) The loss of the laundrette would reduce the amount of 'active' retail or similar uses in the town centre

The laundrette is very much an active use in the town centre, most similar to an A1 retail use. We would resist the loss of active uses such as this and believe that their loss is very much against policies STC1 and STC2 which states that retail uses should be retained apart from in exceptional circumstances.

In particular this location is very central within the town centre in a prime retail position. It is important that active retail town centre uses are retained at this highly central point in the town centre at the junction of London Road and Dartmouth Road, an area which is already dominated to some extent by other A2 uses and estate agents (there are already 5 others within about 100m of here). The laundrette works well in terms of generating footfall to the town centre and encouraging people to make use of other town centre shops and facilities.

This proposal is contrary to the intention and spirit of planning policy STC 4 which aims to maintain a mix of 70% A1 usage in the Core Shopping Area. The current makeup of the Forest Hill Core shopping area is:

A1 - 7 (37%)

A2 - 4 (21%)

A3 - 4 (21%)

A5 - 2 (11%)
Other - 2 (11%)

Policy STC7 does allow for the change of use from A1 in some circumstances but more usefully explains what the function of the town centre uses should be to meet the day to day needs of the local community, coincidentally also the purpose of the launderette. Another estate agent or A2 unit in the town centre would not serve the day-to-day needs of the local community.

“The primary function of the Local Shopping Centres is to provide an adequate range of local shops to meet the day to day needs of the community. They are of particular benefit to the elderly and those people without the use of a car who cannot easily reach the larger centres. The loss of these shops could cause hardship and inconvenience to Borough residents. However, the Council recognises that non-retail uses can contribute to the variety and choice of facilities in Shopping Centres. They can also help to prevent vacancies and the detrimental effect that this can have on the appearance, function and economic health of the Shopping Centre. The criteria specified will help maintain the retail function while allowing for the natural changes that are part of the retail industry.”

This explanatory paragraph also helpfully explains that A2 can be useful in some circumstances, but these are not the circumstances that exist in Forest Hill Town Centre.

Over the last couple of years many of the empty shops within the town centre have come back into use and there are now very few empty units. The town centre would suffer in terms of its function as a useable town centre that serves the residents of the surrounding area if more units were to become A2 or non-retail A-class uses.

We would strongly resist the loss of the launderette use in this location within Forest Hill.

We hope that this letter sets out clearly our objections to this proposal. Please do not hesitate to let us know if you require any further information to support our concerns.