

DC/16/096415 Lawful Development Certificate (Existing) for the conversion from Office to 2-bed flat (C3) at 41A Dartmouth Road, SE23. 41A DARTMOUTH ROAD, LONDON, SE23 3HN

I am writing on behalf of the Forest Hill Society to object to this Lawful Development Certificate.

The Forest Hill Society is the local amenity society for the area covered by SE23 and has around 400 members. The society is keen to ensure that the area develops in a positive way for 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 dispute that this property is currently classed as office space as the last known use of the building was a bakery. We therefore request that you reject this application for conversion of this building to residential use. We also request that a site visit is made to ascertain whether the upstairs floors are already being used as office space or residential and, if so, to refer this matter to the planning department's enforcement team.

We have no objection to the principle of the floors above commercial units being used for residential purposes, such as elsewhere on Dartmouth Road, but we are concerned that division of a ground floor retail unit to provide separate access to an upstairs unit may be detrimental to the future viability of the retail unit. We are also concerned that the size of the proposed residential unit might not meet current space standards.

1. Usage history and division of the premises into two units

The building was used as a bakers until the ground floor was damaged by fire at some point before 2008 and the ground floor frontage has been boarded up ever since. The attached images from Google Street View show the building unused and in a state of disrepair until 2014. As far as we are aware the building has always been one unit as there was no separate access to the upper floors from Dartmouth Road. A second door was inserted into the frontage between August 2014 and April 2015.

We query the legal status of this building being two units. Of the two doors in the frontage, only one door bears a number (41) which, strangely, appears to lead to the upstairs unit which this application claims to be numbered 41A. Although both 41 and 41A are listed on the Royal Mail post code finder, a recent search of the Land Registry website shows only an entry for 41 Dartmouth Road and nothing for 41A.

The separation of the upper floors for a different use, and the conversion of part of the ground floor retail unit to create a separate entrance to the upper floors, constitutes a change of use of the premises from retail use. Yet there is no evidence of an application for change of use on Lewisham's Planning website.

We believe that dividing the ground floor retail unit to provide access to the upper floors is detrimental to the retail unit because of the reduction of its size and the poor design quality of the frontage. This will affect the future viability of the retail unit at a time when Dartmouth Road is at last coming back to life as a retail area, with promised street development and many small businesses starting up. We do not want to see any of the retail units suffering a reduction in their viability.

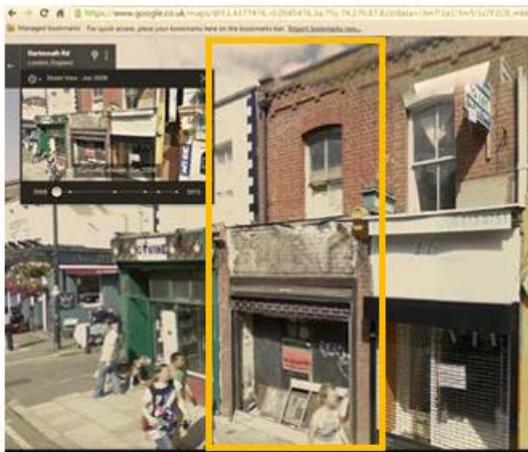
2. Change to shop frontage

The frontage has been altered by division and the insertion of a second door, and the building is situated within the Forest Hill Conservation Area. Conservation Area Consent is required for such works but there is no evidence of a relevant planning application on Lewisham's website.

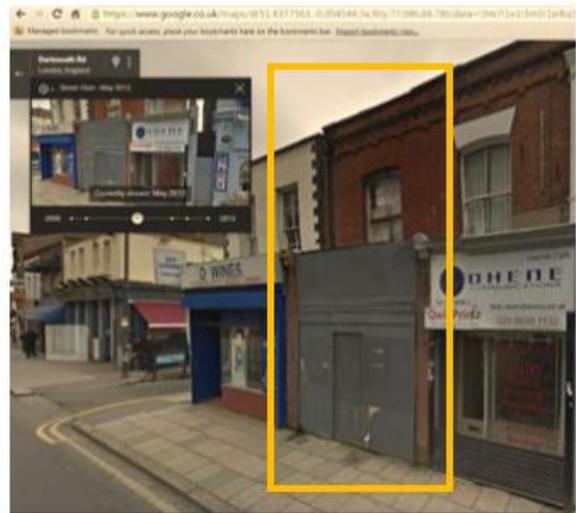
3. Size of residential unit

The submitted drawings are misleading as they show the second floor being almost the same size as the first floor (and they also show a window on the Dartmouth Road frontage which does not exist). The second floor is a loft space with a pitched roof so only the usable space beneath a certain ceiling height should be used to calculate the floor area. Given the pitch of the roof it seems unlikely that the usable floor space would be 23.5sqm as claimed in the application, as this would be only 1.5sqm less than the first floor with its full height ceilings. Depending on how little usable space there is on the second floor, the whole unit might not meet the 37sqm minimum for a 1 person flat.

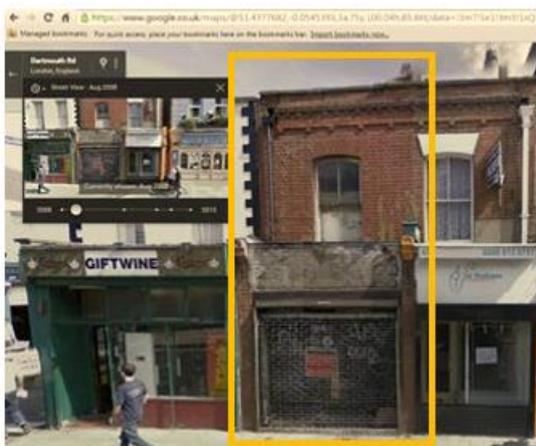
In summary, we object to the proposed change of use on the grounds that the unit has not been legitimately used as office space and that the unit will take space from the ground floor retail unit. We are also concerned that the proposed residential unit is not of a sufficient size to meet current residential standards.



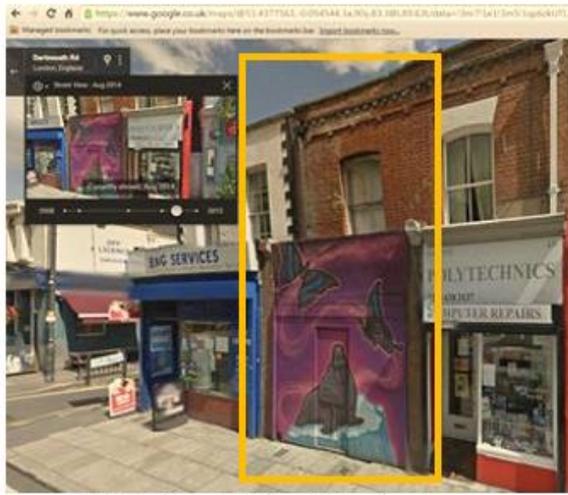
June 2008 (Google Street View)



May 2012 (Google Street View)



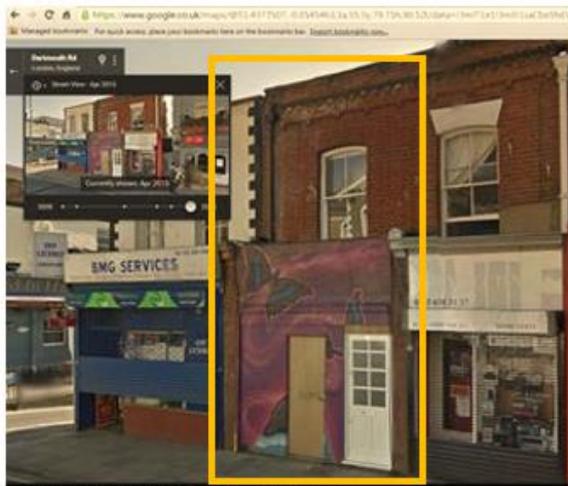
August 2008 (Google Street View)



August 2014 (Google Street View)



May 2016 (own photo)



April 2015 (Google Street View)