

15 October 2021

Jesenska Ozdalga  
Planning Service Lewisham

Dear Jesenska

## **Retrospective Planning Application DC/21/122742, 138 Lewisham Way**

Brockley Society stands by its objection to a change of use from class F2(b) to class E. This is because our aim is to ensure that the building is retained for future community use when economic and financial conditions change. The Borough of Culture 2022 is surely the wrong time for abandoning — instead of celebrating — an important centre of cultural heritage with deep roots in the community over 45 years.

Nonetheless, we continue to seek a way forward with this application and make suggestions here relating to a business plan and considering local precedents and skills.

- The applicants propose "shared community workspace" which they say reflects "the local demand for flexible office workspace". They have not provided evidence of this, nor is this a convincing alternative to "community use". **The unique local function of the former Youth Centre at No 138 has not been recognised and has been lost.**
- House of Noise is a music company. Despite probable differences in music taste, it seems astonishing that they are unaware of the history of **Lovers Rock** and of the centrality of the Lewisham Way Centre in the founding of the Lovers Rock record label in the immediate vicinity. They have taken no steps to capitalise on this nor to involve the local community.
- The applicants do not appear to have any kind of **business plan** demonstrating their plans are viable. This is an urgent requirement. A **Feasibility Study** on practical options might be the way forward.
- This building has a **synergy with the Arthouse next next door** and our initial enquiries suggest that the Arthouse may be able to advise on how to arrange such a feasibility study as we understand they have recently done something similar.
- We understand the applicants have never sought any discussion or involvement with the Arthouse. We believe the Arthouse may be willing to engage in future cooperation such as extending their community functions via affiliating itself to No.138, or via an agreement between the parties to manage No.138. This should be investigated.

## Local precedents which might assist:

- **The Midi Music Company**, 77 Watson's St, Deptford, SE8 4AU: "... an innovative music education and talent development charity, based in Deptford, south London. We champion excellence through our educational programmes, nurturing the musical talent of vulnerable and disadvantaged young people aged 11-30, and empowering them with the skills and confidence to seek careers in music and the creative industries."
- **St Andrews Centre** on Brockley Road runs a number of community functions in its premises (independent of the church)
- **Grove Park Youth Centre** is running a partnership with Beats Lab to provide free music workshops for young people with a showcase event at the end of the month. "If you're 11 years old or over you can sign up to flip samples, make beats, rap and write original music in the styles you love."
- **Music Room London** ([musicroomlondon.com](http://musicroomlondon.com)) The Old Library, 116-118 New Cross Road, SE14 5BA. A commercial business, but may provide some pointers.
- We believe that **Montage Theatre Arts** are looking for new premises and might be interested in using 138 Lewisham Way

## Further suggestions

- Can the applicants' Community Interest Company be any use in tackling the community-use issue?
- The applicants indicate that the Council's Director of **Culture, Libraries and Learning** and the **Regeneration and Place Team** supported their application. What were their views?

## Planning contraventions

On Monday 11 October Brockley Society Chair and Cllrs Penfold and Adefiranye visited the premises at 138 Lewisham Way.

- The applicants appeared to have spent considerable sums of money on chaotic alterations, without any evidence of a business plan, systematic or otherwise, and in contravention of several planning constraints.
- Only a small part of the premises appeared fit for function. This was on the two upper floors, where offices / studios were occupied by people we understood to be tenants under licence.
- The upper and lower ground floors were a sometimes hazardous mass of equipment, wires and building materials. Only two rear spaces on the lower ground floor suggested that some productive work could take place.
- The garden area has been used as a dumping ground for waste building materials. We understand that the freeholder of 134 Lewisham Way has sent you documents and pictures showing that her fire escape has been blocked and that building work at 138 has been done without care or concern for her, and without her consent to access to her land.
- When the applicants were making changes, did they inform the landlord (LBL) as required under the terms of their lease? If so, what was the response?

- The sign on the front of the building, “**Lewisham Way Youth and Community Centre**”, a historic record of the centre’s 45-year history, **was removed without planning permission**.
- We understand that the substantial but neglected “pergola” in the garden was constructed in the summer of 2018 by the applicants, without permission, **prior to the 2019 lease**. How could this happen? Did they have a short-term lease? Or a licence? Did the landlord know about this and if so did they give permission? What is the purpose of the pergola?
- The outdoor stage (with no planning permission) is presumably intended for outdoor performances. The applicants would need a licence for this, likely to be strongly opposed by local residents. We have seen their lease and no permitted use for outdoor activities or performances is indicated.
- The previous application failed to provide adequate cycle parking, waste and recycling facilities. What they are now proposing will need to be scrutinised by officers. We found it difficult to assess this on the plans.

**In view of these further considerations (which go beyond our e-mail to you of 11 September 2021) we strongly recommend that this application be withdrawn or refused on the understanding that a coordination meeting be held with interested parties in order to assist the applicants in producing a genuine community-led solution backed up consensually via a business plan and feasibility data as suggested.**

Clare Cowen  
Chair, Brockley Society

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Image description: Lewisham Way Community Centre in 2016. Note the visibility and availability of access to the space from the street through the door and transparent frontage, with regular opening hours to the public prominently displayed on a blue noticeboard. Note the permitted use emphasised by the prominent sign spanning the full width of the building, which remain in place until it’s removal by the current occupants in 2019.