

8 August 2010

Dear Gillian and Russell

Change of use 2010/1850 Metropolitan Business Centre (formerly the Metropolitan Hospital), 359 Kingsland Road, N1 5AZ
Conservation Area Consent 2010/1880 Metropolitan Business Centre (formerly the Metropolitan Hospital), 359 Kingsland Road, N1 5AZ

The Hackney Society would like to make the following comments about the above applications, which we hope you will find useful:

Comments:

This institution that built No 359 Kingsland Road began life in 1836 as the Metropolitan Free Hospital. It was founded for the treatment of patients 'whose only recommendations are poverty, destitution and disease'. This meant that anyone would be treated, unlike at many other hospitals at that time, where a letter of recommendation was required in order to be admitted.

Unfortunately, despite people's generosity, the Hospital suffered acute financial difficulties during its first few years. It wasn't until 1885, after moving premises and selling property to the Great Eastern Railway Company, that the Hospital was finally able to purchase a freehold site on Kingsland Road. The Hospital was further able to resolve its financial problems by bringing in a subscription scheme. This meant the 'Free' had to be dropped from the name and it became known simply as the Metropolitan Hospital. This is the name that can be read on the proud Victorian building on Kingsland Road. The building has outlived the hospital, which closed in 1977, and is now an important local landmark. It makes a contribution to the character of the conservation area, is locally listed, every effort should be made to preserve its special character.

The Hackney Society has no objection to the principle of converting the ground and first floors of the building from business to hostel use. The removal of the glass canopy from lower-ground floor level is not considered to be harmful to the building either. The alteration of the ground floor windows to make French windows, on the other hand, will change its appearance. The Hackney Society feels, however, that as long as these alterations are made sympathetically and the new windows are made of timber, the character of the building will not be undermined. We suggest that the attractive main entrance doors to the building (those painted black with four small panes of glass in the upper portions) provide a good model for the new French windows.

It is desirable that these changes to the building go hand-in-hand with other general improvements to its appearance. One improvement would be the replacement of the main sign announcing the building, above the doorway (reading 'Metropolitan House 359

Kingsland Rd'). This is not considered to be sympathetic to the history or character of the building, and would ideally be replaced with something more attractive.

We have no objection, in principle, to the insertion of a mezzanine and to internal changes to the plan, provided they do not have an impact on the building's external appearance.

Please confirm receipt of these comments.

Yours sincerely

Hannah Parham
On behalf of the Planning Sub-group