

Neil McDonald
Planning Solutions Team
London Borough of Camden
5 Pancras Square
London N1C 4AG

via: Planning@Camden.gov.uk & Neil.McDonald@Camden.gov.uk

3rd July 2023

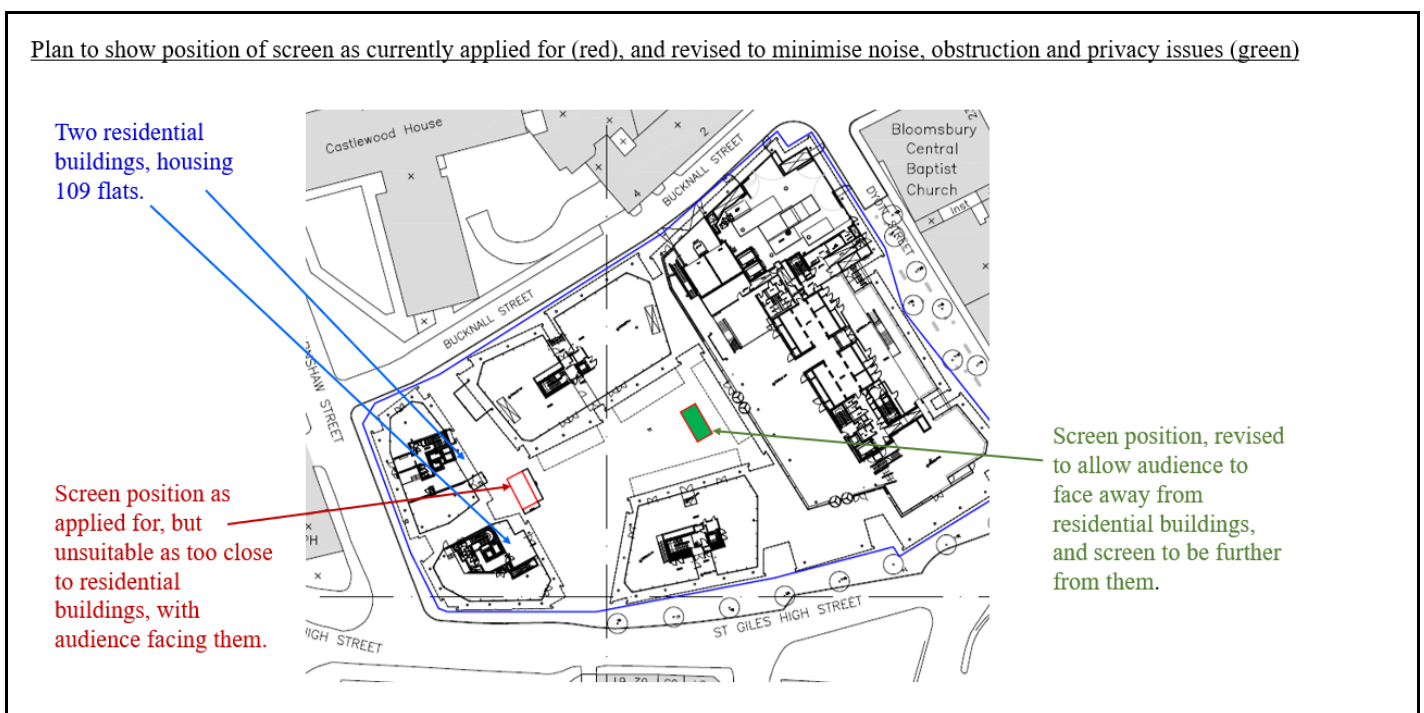
Dear Neil,

Re applications ref. 2023/2237/P and 2023/1604/A for erection of LED screen from 16/06/2023 to 16/09/2023 in Central Saint Giles Piazza, London WC2H 8AG.

As the amenity society for the area, Covent Garden Community Association **STRONGLY OBJECTS** to this application.

However, if the application were modified in these 5 respects, we would withdraw our objection:

1. Sound to be accessed only using mobile apps or headphones (ie: no broadcast speakers and therefore no amplified sound in the public realm).
2. The screen is turned around by 180 degrees, and moved to the opposite side of the piazza as shown on the plan below. This will draw the screen away from the two residential blocks and ensure that the audience is mainly facing in the opposite direction when noisy cheering etc. takes place.



3. The time period is limited to 4 weeks.

4. Intermittent reminders are flashed on the full screen, asking the audience to keep their personal noise down and to respect their neighbours since they are in a residential area. We suggest that this is shown every 20 minutes for 30 seconds.
5. The OMP is augmented to provide immediate back-up security in the event of an incident.

CONTEXT

As the applicant's covering letter notes, there are over 100 residential apartments close to the proposed screen. In fact there are over 109 flats in buildings only a few metres from the proposed screen, another 39 across the road to the West on Earnshaw Street, and more across the road to the South in St. Giles High Street. All have been affected by the broadcast from a similar screen in the past.

The largest buildings are:

- Matilda apartments – 53 flats (social housing).
- 5 Central St. Giles – 56 flats (private housing).
- White Lion House – 13 flats (social housing).
- Centrepoint House – 36 flats (private housing).

All flats start at first floor level, and many are lived in by families with children. It is also important to note that many people living here are now expected to work from home, and that they therefore need an environment that is not too noisy during the hours 08:00 to 20:00 as well.

We have heard many complaints about the screen in the past:

- These mainly focus on noise nuisance, notwithstanding the applicant's repeated claims that "The sound is minimal". No sound tests have been carried out in any residential units to support the applicant's position.
- There is some obstruction when people find it difficult to get past the back of the screen's structure to access their homes, or struggle to push past standing crowds when it is busy.
- There is overlooking by crowds into people's homes on lower floors, so they are unable to enjoy their homes and/or small outside balconies.

The noise comes from the screens, and also from crowds cheering during sporting events. It penetrates people's flats even with their windows closed. But with temperatures this Summer set to rise above normal again, people will have to open their windows. In this case they will not be able to have meetings, conversations or even watch their own televisions without disturbance.

WHAT IS REASONABLE?

The application states that "the proposal ... will increase footfall for the surrounding ground floor businesses ringing economic benefits to the area".

The opening of the Elizabeth line, and the post-pandemic boom, have brought higher footfall than ever to the West End. Notwithstanding this, if yet more footfall is desired then it must not be attracted at the expense of people who have made the West End their home.

People in our community, living in central London, are used to a certain level of activity. However, they still need to work from home, speak with their family at mealtimes and get some rest. Their children still need to do homework and their elderly relatives need to be able to access their homes without risk of falls. It should also be remembered that not everyone chooses to live here: half the housing is social.

It is not reasonable to erect a large screen structure (5 metres high, 6 metres wide and over 3 metres deep) only a few metres from their windows. And it is even more unreasonable then to switch on loud sports matches and encourage crowds to watch, shout and cheer in the direction of their homes.

If the applicant wishes to use a screen to boost income then this needs to be done in a way that does not cause these harms to neighbouring residential amenity, as stated in Camden's Local plan, policy A1.

The only way in which we can suggest this be done in this case is to relocate the screen away from flats, with the audience facing away from them too, and to use a bluetooth signal to deliver sound to mobile phones and /or headsets rather than having external speakers. However, even with this, a sound check should be made inside the most sensitive dwellings to ensure that there is no nuisance from crowds. The new location will also remove the instances of obstruction near people's homes.

Further, in order to make people aware that this is a residential area and to encourage them not to behave too loudly, the screen should be used for intermittent reminders by planning condition.

Finally, leaving the screen in place for one quarter of the year is not reasonable. We suggest that 4 weeks is reasonable, during the holiday period when more people are away and children do not have to get to school in the morning.

SECURITY

We are concerned that large crowds, distracted by looking at a screen outdoors in fine weather, will attract street crime. Incidence of 'thefts from the person' is likely to increase.

Aggressive begging is already a problem around Tottenham Court Road station, Charing Cross Road, St. Giles churchyard and Seven Dials during the day. It leads to safety, security and noise problems for residents, tourists and other users of public space. It is of particular worry to female residents when they are alone. The presence of these outdoor crowds is likely to amplify the issue and to carry it later into the evening

We are doubtful that one private security officer will be able to manage this. The OMP states that the officer will call the police if back-up is needed. However, such incidents are unlikely to be prioritised ('Category S') and police response is typically about an hour, so we do not believe that this is a workable solution. There are, however, private security teams employed at sites very close by such as Outernet and Centrepont. We would like to see an agreement attached to the OMP, by planning condition, that arrangements will be made that these neighbouring teams will provide immediate back up if needed.

Yours sincerely,

Elizabeth Bax
Chair, Planning Subcommittee

Email: Planning@CoventGarden.org.uk
Mobile: 07810 518446