

Sophie Bowden
Planning Solutions Team
London Borough of Camden
5 Pancras Square
London
N1C 4AG

20th November 2023

Dear Sophie,

Re applications ref. 2023-3619-L & 2023-3502-A:
works including signage at 38 Earlham Street WC2H 9LH.

As the amenity society for the area for over 50 years, Covent Garden Community Association objects to these applications.

Our objection relates to the proposals for the fascia sign and the projecting blade sign on an important frontage in the conservation area, as well as to the advertising vinyl. Fascia lettering should be painted and signs should be hung from iron brackets. Everything should enhance the conservation if possible, and at least act neutrally upon it.

If the application were modified as follows, we would withdraw our objection:

1. Fascia lettering painted onto the wooden fascia board.
2. Sign hanging from an iron bracket.
3. Advertising vinyl applied for a maximum of 6 weeks.

We welcome creative hanging sign designs, however; these are a historic hallmark of the area.

CONTEXT

The retail unit at 38 Earlham Street lies at the heart of one of the Seven Dials conservation area, one of only 38 (among 6,000 in England) given Outstanding status in the 1970s. The application site is prominent in key views from the Seven Dials monument.

Its shopfront is important, being one of very few that retain their shuttered, 19th century design. It is named in the Conservation Area statement as a shopfront of merit.

POLICY

Planning guidance that applies here includes The Seven Dials Study produced by the Seven Dials Trust in partnership with Camden, in addition to The Seven Dials Conservation Area guidance and the SPG that urges signage to be use that is in keeping with the host building.

The relevant section of The Seven Dials Study may be found at <https://sevendialsoverground.studio/specifications/shopfronts/fascia-hanging-signs/>

HANGING SIGN

On the subject of hanging signs the Seven Dials Study says:

“A well-designed, imaginative sign suspended from a traditional iron bracket can enhance the quality of a shopfront and add vitality to a street. Such signs should be related to the character and scale of their building.

Hanging signs need not necessarily be lettered boards. Geometric shapes, heraldry or other symbols, cut outs, decorative ironwork and other examples of modern or traditional craftsmanship are all appropriate, and give variety and life to the streets. Seven Dials already has many good hanging signs of different dates, such as Comyn Ching’s carefully preserved Victorian ironwork sign, and it would be a worthwhile enterprise to add some new examples to adorn the streets.”

It is unfortunate that in the past some signs have been replaced with blade models, in error. Sadly this includes both important frontages at 36 and 38 Earlham Street. But this unsympathetic pattern is generally being reversed in recent years throughout Seven Dials. And, in the case of 38 Earlham Street, the shopfront is of such traditional appearance as to demand a traditional approach.

A further advantage of hanging signs is that they support the council’s sustainability goals. When a shop changes hands, a sign like the ones proposed in this application must be thrown away and another one manufactured with all the resultant carbon release. Whereas a traditional wooden sign that follows the guidance can simply be repainted. Or, if it is a creative 3-dimensional sign the bracket can still be retained.

FASCIA SIGN

On fascia signs, the Seven Dials Study says:

“A well-designed or imaginative fascia sign can give a shop individuality and character without being at odds with its surroundings. In the 19th century, shop signs were a minor art form and Victorian Seven Dials had several sign-painters among its resident craftsmen.

The lettering of signs should relate to the fascia size and be well laid out. Ideally, the letters should occupy two thirds of the space and be centred, leaving a gap above and below and at either end. Painted lettering is always appropriate, though a range of gilded, enamel or other applied lettering can also be effective. In a conservation area good classic typefaces (in particular serifed forms) are preferable to more transient graphics but such details need to be treated on their own individual merits.”

We appreciate that the business has an established logo and identity. For this reason we do not wish to be overly prescriptive, but suggest that thought is given to the background colours, paint type and font size on the fascia sign to achieve a finish that is in keeping with the host building.

ADVERTISING VINYL

The design of the advertising vinyl proposed for the shutters does not in our view enhance, or even act in a neutral way, on the conservation area; it is therefore contrary to policy. It is too garish to the context of the listed building, and it is plastic rather than painted.

The applicant proposes that it be used temporarily. However, an entire year is applied for. In the spirit of practicality, we would not object if it were up for 4-6 weeks.

We would, though, prefer a more subtle design, or no vinyl at all.

We hope that our comments are helpful.

We are always happy to discuss proposals with an applicant and aim to be constructive. This is obviously preferable at pre-application stage; however, if you are able to pass our details on to the applicant in this case we would be glad to speak with them as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,

Elizabeth Bax

