

Application No:	Consultees Name:	Received:	Comment:	Response:
2024/1187/P	Covent Garden Community Association (form completed by Amanda Rigby, Co-Chair)	12/05/2024 23:24:41	OBJNOT	<p>As the amenity society for the area, Covent Garden Community Association STRONGLY OBJECTS to this application to broadcast events from large screens outside dwellings until 20:00 all Summer for 3 months from 28/06/24 to 27/09/24.</p> <p>This type of activity is unsuitable for a residential area.</p> <p>---</p>

CONTEXT

The area is highly residential. 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 poorly 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 those hours too.

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

1. Noise nuisance. This is caused by the broadcast itself, and also by live crowds shouting and cheering just outside people's flats during sporting events. It penetrates people's flats even with their windows closed. But in the Summer people have to open their windows. Then they are not be able to have meetings, conversations at mealtimes, or even watch their own televisions without even greater disturbance.
2. Obstruction. 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.
3. Overlooking by crowds into people's homes on lower floors, so people are unable to enjoy their homes and/or small outside balconies.

Residents have repeatedly complained about this, and objected to the applications for Summer screens accordingly in the past. They are now exhausted and feel that they can't keep just saying the same thing to the council when the applicant relentlessly pursues this year after year.

ISSUES WITH THIS APPLICATION

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The application states that "the proposed screen ... will benefit the surrounding ground floor businesses bringing economic benefits to the area". This must not be 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 (about 4 metres high and 5 metres wide) 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.

It is notable that the latest noise assessment by the applicant has only measured background sound levels between 3 and 4pm. We believe that this assessment is not fit for purpose because the applicant proposes that broadcasts will continue until 8pm, when background levels are usually lower and sound peaks are much more disturbing.

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.

SUGGESTED MITIGATIONS

The only way in which we can suggest that something along these lines could be done in compliance with policy would be to relocate the screen further 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 would need to be made inside the most sensitive dwellings at the time, to ensure that there is no nuisance from crowds. The new location should 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, which could be during the holiday period when more people are away and children do not have to get to school in the morning.

SECURITY

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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 also 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 dedicated private security officer will be able to manage this. The OMP states that the officer and his non-dedicated colleagues will call the police if back-up is needed. However, such incidents are unlikely to be prioritised ('Category S') and police response is typically over 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 Centrepoint. 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 in addition to the applicant's own team.

CONCLUSION

Notwithstanding our view that this application should be refused, we would withdraw our objection if it were modified in the following respects as discussed above:

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 moved further away from the two nearest residential blocks, and turned at an angle to ensure that the audience is not facing towards people's living spaces.
3. The number of days on which events are screened is limited to a 1 month time period during school holidays, not an entire 3 month period as applied for.
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.
