
From: Eric Stuart
Sent: 08 September 2024 23:27
To: Planning
Subject: 50 Earlham Street London WC2H 9LJ: 2024/2819/P; 2024/2858/L; 2024/2820/A.

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Dear Sir/Madam:

I am writing as a local resident to object to the change of use for 50 Earlham Street London WC2H 9LJ as per the applications referenced above (2024/2819/P; 2024/2858/L; 2024/2820/A), which would result in the loss of premises for a food-led restaurant in favour of an alcohol-led sports and games themed bar, “Bat & Ball”, on the following grounds:

(1) The change of use does not further the goals of the Council’s emerging evening and night time strategy. The premises are located in the Council’s Covent Garden Specialist Shopping Area in the Seven Dials part of Covent Garden. It sits in Earlham Street east, with the Donmar Theatre directly opposite and the Cambridge Theatre on further along on the same side of the street. For many years the premises were occupied by Belgo Centraal, a large popular family-friendly restaurant that unfortunately suffered from under-investment in its latter years as the brand was not a core part of its private equity owners’ strategy. The proposed change of use takes a relatively large space suitable for a food-led business that could cater to a wide section by age and gender of residents of, and visitors to, Covent Garden and replaces it with an alcohol-led sports and game themed bar that will likely cater to a much narrower customer base. Section 9.94 of the Council’s Draft Local Plan 2024 states that, with respect to its evening and night time strategy, that “emerging strategy has a focus on widening participation in the evening economy as a means of achieving both social and economic benefits. Local surveys suggest that older residents, women and some of our most easily ignored communities can feel excluded or have concerns about personal safety. There is also under-provision of attractions oriented towards families.” The restaurant use is also much more complementary to the uses of the surrounding area as visitors often want to eat before or after trips for shopping or to the theatre whereas demand for a games and sports theme bar before or after those activities would appear to be more limited. Although the capacity of “Bat & Ball” is left blank in the documents supporting the application, it appears as though it will hold around at least 150 customers. The provisions of 3 table tennis tables, 2 pool tables, 4 darts areas, 2 shuffle boards and 1 nine hole mini-golf course would seem to indicate that a maximum of about 50 of these customers could possibly be actively engaged in these activities at any time. Thus, for the majority of the customers, the game activities will likely not be

the focus of their time at “Bat & Ball” and there should be legitimate concern that the venue will effectively just function as a large bar to the detriment of the surrounding area.

(2) The loss of restaurant premises may encourage the loss of other retail premises elsewhere to accommodate demand for restaurant space. The Covent Garden Specialist Shopping Area has lost a notable amount of retail space in recent years to restaurant uses - most significantly the Thomas Neal’s Centre was converted into Kerb’s Seven Dials Market but also 17 Shorts Gardens had been a shop and is now a restaurant, and 15 Shorts Gardens was also a shop before being combined with 2 Neal’s Yard to form a restaurant space. This demonstrates a continued demand for space for food-led businesses in the area. With the Council’s consent no longer required to convert Class E retail space into Class E restaurant space, additional demand for restaurant space due to the loss of the restaurant use at 50 Earlham could result in the loss of additional retail space in the Specialist Shopping Area.

(3) The change of use will be harmful to residential amenity. Seven Dials is a highly residential part of central London. On Earlham Street east, there are flats on the upper floors of numbers 29, 31-33, 36-40 and 43(b) - it is very much a mixed-use street and not just commercial. Monmouth Street and Neal Street, the main routes to access and exit Earlham Street east by vehicle, are mostly residential on the upper floors, with hotel use on Monmouth Street as well. Section 3.6 of the Council’s Planning Guidance on Town Centres and Retail 2021 states that “policy TC4 of the Local Plan on town centre uses seeks to make sure that new food, drink and entertainment uses do not cause harm to our town centres, the local area or the amenity of residents. *Managing the impact of uses on local amenity is a particular issue in Central London where residential communities are closely mixed in with a range of other uses* (emphasis added)”. Further, Section 3.50 recognises that “additional food, drink and entertainment uses may cause harm to residential amenity and the mix and balance of uses in the area” and states that “[n]ew entertainment uses will be allowed only when they have minimal impact on amenity for the local residential population”. Seven Dials is also within the Council’s cumulative impact policy area where the Council recognises the detrimental impact of licensed premises to the local residential community. The applicant’s operational and management plan calls for later opening hours (midnight during the week and 11pm on Sundays) than other alcohol-led licensed premises in the area, most of which close by 11pm on Monday-Saturday and 10.30pm on Sundays, which will lead to additional noise on the narrow streets of Seven Dials where noise tends to carry and be amplified as customers leave the premises during hours when most residents are trying to sleep. It also asks for the ability to operate until 3am on certain occasions which is completely inappropriate for an area with a significant residential population. Although I believe that the change of use should not be granted it all, should it be granted it should be subject to the condition that the venue will close by 11pm on Monday-Saturday and by 10.30pm on Sundays. Additionally, the operational and management plans indicates that there are expected to be 30-40 deliveries per week to the premises between the hours of midnight and 7am. This alone will make life unbearable for local residents as the number of deliveries is excessive and the hours proposed for those deliveries is unbelievably detrimental to the

local residential amenity. Kerb, which operates the Seven Dials Market opposite 50 Earlham Street, has made considerable efforts to aggregate shipments offsite to minimise delivery numbers and has those deliveries made at hours that are least disruptive to local residents - this fact just highlights the applicant's failure to do so and the negative impact its operations would have on the local amenity. Again, although I believe that the change of use should not be granted it all, should it be granted it should be subject to the condition that there be no more than 2 deliveries per day and that these take place between the hours of 8am and 12pm when they will cause minimum disruption.

Sincerely,
Eric Stuart