

Parnjit Singh

From: Eric Stuart [REDACTED]
Sent: 19 January 2025 23:21
To: Planning
Subject: 24 Neal Street - 2024/5469/P and 2024/5504/A

I am writing on behalf of The Seven Dials Trust to object to parts of the applications for planning and advertising consent for 24 Neal Street (2024/5469/P and 2024/5504/A). The Trust works in partnership with local authorities, landowners, national agencies and local amenity groups to protect the historic fabric of Seven Dials and to promote and bring about exemplary environmental improvements in the area.

The “Seven Dials Renaissance Study” is the key document in the work of the Trust. It provides a detailed framework for the care and enhancement of the total environment of the Seven Dials area. The first study was published in 1990 covering the Seven Dials area in parts of Camden. The latest revised and updated web-edition from 2023 has been extended across the borough boundary down to Long Acre in Westminster, covers an enlarged area in Camden and has been renamed “The Seven Dials in Covent Garden Study” (<https://sevendialscoventgarden.study>).

The Trust objects first to the proposed shopfront which is of a featureless design that will detract from the character of the Seven Dials Conservation Area.

The current shopfront received retrospective planning consent in 2021 having been installed sometime in 2019-20. It is metal framed with stall riser, central entrance door and detailed curved mullions. This replaced a timber framed fully glazed shopfront, with a central fully glazed entrance door (that had originally been wood) and transom flanked by two fully glazed side windows, not too dissimilar in appearance from the applicant’s current proposal albeit the current proposal has a wider central door without transom and narrower side windows.

Although the application for retrospective consent for the current shopfront elicited comments that a timber frame would be more appropriate than a metal frame, the Council officer’s delegated report stated that “The proposal retains the original pilasters, console brackets, and entablature and seeks to replicate a Georgian shopfront. The design, whilst using metal, introduces a small stall riser, transom lights and mullions. Curved mullions serve to create a transom light feature. Whilst a shopfront of timber would be preferable, the retention of the framework and inclusion of a shopfront with more detail and a more traditional design is welcomed. It is not considered that the material alone is sufficient to

warrant refusal”. That report also states that “the design of the replacement in comparison to the previous shopfront is considered to be an improvement”.

The applicant’s proposal, whilst retaining the original pilasters, console brackets, and entablature, is effectively a reversion to the style of the pre-2019 shopfront, with no stall riser, transom lights or mullions, and with stainless brass rather than painted timber frames. This is the opposite of an improvement.

Well-maintained traditional shopfronts or imaginatively designed new ones are important not just for the preservation of the character of the buildings but for the attractive overall appearance of the shopping streets of Seven Dials and their commercial success. Scale, detailed design, the use of correct materials and colour schemes are all important in making shopfronts attractive.

Whilst unlisted, 24 Neal Street is specified as a building that makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Seven Dials Conservation Area in Camden’s Seven Dials Conservation Area Statement. The Seven Dials in Covent Garden Study states that 24 Neal Street was “Probably built as a four storey, brick-faced warehouse in the late-19th century. However, its original appearance has been spoilt by being rendered and painted black, by the changes to the three windows at each level, and by the installation of modern fenestration. A projecting steel beam survives above the central window opening at second floor level. The extensively glazed shopfront at ground floor level is entirely modern, but is contained with potentially original framework of pilasters, cornice and frieze. As extensively and adversely altered, the street-frontage possesses only very modest architectural interest and townscape value, contributing only modestly to the character, appearance and significance of the Seven Dials Conservation Area. It is recommended that consideration should be given to recolouring the façade and reinstating more appropriate fenestration”. We note the current shopfront was installed subsequent to this assessment.

In 18th, 19th, and early 20th century buildings, Georgian, Victorian, and Edwardian shopfronts often had shop windows and doors with mullions and transoms set into an architectural framework composed of classical elements with pilasters, friezes and stall risers, as well as capitals, cornices, pedestals, plinth blocks and console brackets among other detailing. Although a modern replacement that could be improved by the use of timber framing, the current shopfront works with the retained original pilasters, console brackets, and entablature of this framework and provides interest through its mullions and transoms. The proposed design, of modern featureless brass and glass, does not fit with the character and period of the host building and removes this interest, and thus will detract from the character and appearance of the conservation area. The Trust believes there is scope for the current shopfront to be improved and would welcome the use of timber-framing in any replacement, but does not believe that the current proposal represents an improvement over the current shopfront.

