

Dear Gideon,

I have been trying to reach you by phone for a while, but I think that there may still be teething problems with the council's phone system as it keeps ringing out and then going dead (both for your phone and some other departments). So here's an email instead...

Firstly, I wanted to pass on to you the appreciation of local residents here for seriously considering our concerns on the previous application for St. Martin's House, 2014/4870/P. This was reflected in the conditions that you achieved, attaching to the consent and reflected in the decision notice dated last month.

It makes a massive difference to the daily lives of local people to have conditions that neighbouring premises must adhere to, relating to things like hours of operation, no emanating noise from music, no use of external areas at night, and mitigation of overlooking. These might be considered trivial matters, but they can be the difference between a flat being liveable for a family, or them feeling that they have to move. We are a community subject to so much commercial pressure – both from A class uses and from intense residential development that is often let out to people who have no stake in the area. So these types of small conditions on closely-packed units relieve some of the pressure, and make it more likely that long-term residents will stay and continue to contribute to community life.

Of course, we are experienced enough to understand that enforcement of any planning condition can be challenging. However, just having a condition in place allows neighbours to have a far more fruitful conversation with anyone who flouts it. This means that the council is unlikely to need to take enforcement action in most cases.

We are now looking at 2015/2738/P and 2015/1991/L for the same building. Our Listed Building application comments must be in by 11th June, and there is no date for the Planning application – presumably because the applicant claims that it contains 'non-material amendments'.

However, we beg to differ on the non-materiality because there are two big elements that are not related to their need to retain the existing stair core as described in the letter from Rolfe Judd dated 14/5/15:

1. all the previous basement storage for refuse from the shop, office and residential uses has been removed. With no consent required now to shift from A1 to A3, we are also potentially faced with no refuse storage for a restaurant use, too. Shaftesbury plc have been quite open with us that they would like to see a restaurant in the corner building ground floor, first floor and basement.

This loss of refuse storage seems very retrograde. You are no doubt familiar with all the problems that we have in relation to rubbish on the streets around Seven Dials. And while Shaftesbury themselves are quite strict with their tenants, we are fully aware that their property portfolio could be sold to a different owner at any time. Have they provided you with a refuse disposal plan?

2. the application itself states that it contains “significant improvements to fourth floor residential layout”, which doesn’t sound the same as ‘non-material’! These improvements include the creation of two open spaces at the top.

The larger, fourth floor space is shown on (i) plan drawing number (00)_115 which attaches to the Planning application and (ii) elevation drawing number (00)_113 which attaches to the Listed Building application. However, we’d like some clarification about the terrace balcony door arrangement which appears on the elevation drawing but does not show on the plan drawing. Clearly, any loss of a door here would have a significant impact on amenity.

The second, roof level space seems to be shown on the new elevation drawing number (00)_312 which attaches to the Listed Building application; it’s described as a ‘concealed terrace’ but as we can’t see it on the plan drawings we’d like clarification on that too.

I’m sorry to throw all this detail at you, as you have probably had quite enough of dealing with this building by now. However, as it’s proving so difficult to get through by phone, would it be possible for you to call me on _____ to clarify these matters? I can come up to the Town Hall this week if that would help.

Thanks again,
- Amanda.

Amanda Rigby
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