

**PROPOSED FIXING AND DISPLAY OF A SEVEN DIALS TIME-PLAQUE ON THE
CAMBRIDGE THEATRE, EARLHAM STREET, SEVEN DIALS, LONDON, W.C.2.**

A STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF THE PROPOSAL



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INTRODUCTION

The statement has been prepared on behalf of the Seven Dials Trust in support of its proposal to fix and display a Seven Dials Time-plaque on the grade II listed Cambridge Theatre consistent with other plaques of similar size and design already fixed on other (both listed and unlisted) properties around the Seven Dials urban space.

The Cambridge Theatre is one of seven buildings with narrow frontages to the historic Seven Dials urban space, centred on the reinstated Seven Dials column. The Theatre is located at the apex of the junction of Earlham Street and Mercer Street with a long, formal return-elevation to the former and a longer, less formal return-elevation to the latter. The narrow, principal frontage to The Seven Dials is emphasized as a tall, three-sided feature, with faces set back modestly from those of the adjacent street-elevations. The Theatre was designed by the architectural practice of Wimperis, Simpson and Guthrie and constructed between 1929 and 1930. The auditorium and other public areas within the building were designed by Serge Chermayeff. The Theatre has been included at grade II on the *Statutory List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest* since, January, 1999.

Two other buildings fronting The Seven Dials are also listed (at grade II) – *The Crown*, P.H. at the corner of Monmouth Street and Short's Gardens, and the former *The Grapes*, P.H., at the corner of Short's Gardens and Earlham Street. The Theatre, like the other six buildings fronting The Seven Dials, falls within Sub-area I of the Seven Dials (Covent Garden) Conservation Area, first designated in November, 1971.

In the detailed description accompanying the entry for the Theatre in the *National Heritage List for England*, it is noted that that 'The Cambridge Theatre is a rare, complete, and early example of a London Theatre adopting the modern, expressionist style pioneered in Germany during the 1920s. It marked a conscious reaction to the design excesses of the music hall and contemporary cinemas. Theatres looked for a new style appropriate to the greater sophistication of their entertainment and found it in the Germanic modern forms of simple shapes enlivened by concealed lighting, shiny steelwork and touches of bright colour; this was not taken up by cinema designers until 1935. At the time of designing Chermayeff was an interior designer with Waring & Gillow; the original colour scheme was dusky pink contrasted with pale blue and silver'.

The principal elevation of the Theatre to Seven Dials and the greater part of each the street-elevations to each side are faced in plain-ashlar Portland Stone with limited features and other details of restrained classical character. A projecting canopy extends around the corner of the

building above the semi-circular-headed openings containing the entrances and the adjacent semi-circular window-openings on the Earlham Street frontage, and carries signs displayed along its entire, leading edge and suspended from its underside. At high level, a large sign extends across the full width of the splayed corner of the Theatre above the canopy and runs through two storeys. To each side, a vertical, double-sided sign projects from the face of each street-elevation of the Theatre and runs through two storeys. At street level, a series of panel-signs are located between and adjacent to the three, arched entrance-openings at the corner and within a recessed panel on the Earlham Street frontage. Finally, two, Seven Dials-branded, enamel, Camden Council street-signs are affixed to the ashlar stonework – one on each street-frontage – see photographs below.

The significance of the Cambridge Theatre today not only resides in the substantial survival of the original architectural integrity of its street elevations and of key parts of its interior, but, importantly, in its continuing theatre function and, to a lesser extent, in the external signing that is a consistent visual feature of West End theatres today.

PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

The potential effect of the proposal has been considered with full regard to the following policies and guidance:

- The relevant objectives and policies of Central Government set out in *The National Planning Policy Framework* of March, 2012; in particular, Sections 7 and 12;
- The relevant policies of The Mayor of London set out in *The London Plan: The Spatial Development Strategy for London consolidated with alterations since 2011*, of March, 2015; in particular, Policies 7.6.B and 7.8.D;
- The relevant policies set out in *The London Borough of Camden Local Development Framework Camden Core Strategy, 2010-2025*; in particular Policy CS14, and in *The London Borough of Camden Local Development Framework Development Policies, 2010-2025*; in particular Policies DP 24 and DP 25.
- The relevant, published supplementary planning guidance of Camden Council set out in *Camden Planning Guidance 1 - Design*; and *The Seven Dials (Covent Garden) Conservation Area Statement* of 1998; and
- The relevant published guidance of Historic England set out in *Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning: 2 – Managing Significance in Decision-Taking in the Historic Environment* and *Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning: 3 – The Setting of Heritage Assets*, of March, 2015.

THE NEED FOR EXPRESS CONSENT UNDER THE CONTROL OF ADVERTISEMENTS REGULATIONS

The existing and proposed plaques are each 550 mm by 370 mm in size – i.e. 0.204 sq. m. in area.

In my opinion, contrary to the advice received from Camden Council's conservation staff, the proposed plaque on the Cambridge Theatre could be displayed with 'deemed consent' under the provisions of Class 2A of Schedule 3 of the *Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations, 2007* – 'Miscellaneous advertisements relating to the premises on which they are displayed – An advertisement displayed for the purpose of identification, direction or warning, with respect to the land or building on which it is displayed', providing that the advertisement is no greater than 0.3 square metre in area; that it is not illuminated; that no character or symbol on the advertisement is greater than 0.75 metre in height, or 0.3 metre in an area of special control; and that no part of the advertisement is more than 4.6 metres above ground level, or 3.6 metres in an area of special control. Camden Council would be acting wholly unreasonably if staff were to argue that the proposed plaques did not fall under this provision, and that instead, Express Consent was required.

In my view, were an application to be submitted for Express Consent for the display of the plaque on a *without prejudice* basis, it would be wholly unreasonable on the part of the Council as local planning authority, to decline the granting of such consent. However, if such an application were to be refused, an Appeal could be submitted. There is no fee payable for submitting an appeal.

THE NEED FOR LISTED BUILDING CONSENT

In my opinion, given the particular design and very modest size of the plaques, and subject to careful siting and fixing, contrary to the advice received from Camden Council's conservation staff, the plaque could be fixed without the need for Listed Building Consent, as, in my opinion, it does not constitute works of alteration that affect the character of the listed *Cambridge Theatre*. Under the provisions of Section 26H of the *Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act, 1990*, formal confirmation of such a view could be sought from the Council through an application for a *Certificate of lawfulness of proposed works*. If the Council were to refuse granting such a certificate, an Appeal could be submitted. There is no fee payable for submitting an appeal.

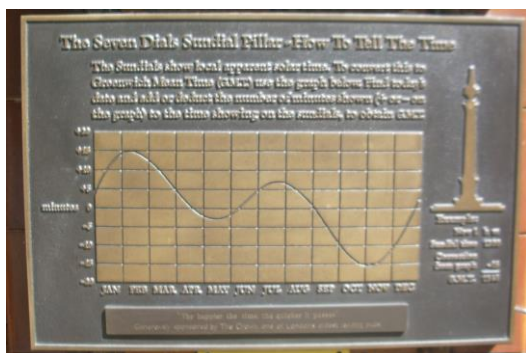
In my view, were an application for Listed Building Consent for the fixing of the plaque on a *without prejudice basis*, it would be wholly unreasonable on the part of the Council as local planning authority to decline the granting of such consent. However, if such an application were to be refused, an Appeal could be submitted. There is no fee payable for submitting an application for Listed Building Consent or an appeal.

My opinion on the acceptability of the proposal and its consistency with relevant national, London-wide and local planning and conservation policies and guidance is based on an understanding of the particular special architectural and historic interest and significance of The Cambridge Theatre and its setting, and the particular character, appearance and significance of the Seven Dials (Covent Garden) Conservation Area, and on my view that subject to careful siting and fixing, the proposal will have no harmful effect on the particular, special architectural or historic interest and significance of the listed Theatre or its setting, or on the setting of nearby listed buildings, or on the particular character, appearance or significance of the Seven Dials (Covent Garden) Conservation Area. Indeed, it is my view that the proposal will preserve the particular special architectural and historic interest of The Cambridge Theatre and its setting and sustain its particular significance, and preserve the particular character and appearance of the Seven Dials (Covent Garden) Conservation Area and sustain its significance.

THE POSSIBLE POSITIONS FOR THE FIXING OF A SEVEN DIALS TIME-PLAQUE ON THE CAMBRIDGE THEATRE

In my opinion, it would be entirely possible to fix a time-plaque on the listed theatre without materially affecting the character of the building, let alone adversely affecting its particular special interest or harming its significance if it could be fixed either centrally on the pier between the arched doorways on the Earham Street elevation, or centrally below the Council's Mercer Street street-sign on the Mercer Street elevation and aligned with the horizontally-proportioned windows to either side – see photos below. Both options would provide a seemly and sensitive setting for a time-plaque, physically and visually separate from the existing commercial theatre-signing.

I reject unreservedly the earlier suggestion by Camden Council's conservation staff that the installation and display of such a time-plaque would constitute 'visual clutter' or would in any way harm the special interest or significance of the building.



One of the existing Seven Dials time-plaques already fixed



The Earlham Street elevation of the Theatre at low level



The Earlham Street elevation of the Theatre at low level adjacent to the corner



The corner and the Mercer Street elevation of the Theatre at low level adjacent to the corner



The Mercer Street elevation of the Theatre at low level adjacent to the corner



The two arched openings and doorways on the Earlham Street elevation showing a possible location for the fixing of a Seven Dials time-plaque centrally on the pier between the two openings



The Mercer Street elevation of The Theatre showing another possible location for the fixing of a Seven Dials time-plaque centrally below Camden Council's street-sign and aligned with the horizontally proportioned windows to each side

Paul Velluet,

2nd September, 2016.