

CONSERVATION - REGENERATION

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39-49 Neal Street London Borough of Camden

A Heritage Appraisal of the Buildings and the Possible Impact of the Proposed Alterations

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1 Purpose of the Report

1.01 This report seeks to describe the heritage significance of Nos.39-49 Neal Street both intrinsically and as part of the wider historic environment. The proposed works will be viewed in terms of their possible impact on the historic significance of the buildings and the wider area.

1.02 The proposal will be discussed in the context of national and local policy for the management of change in the historic environment.

2 The Buildings

2.01 The site is composed of three distinct buildings in a terrace on the south side of Neal Street. No. 39 forms the corner with Shorts Gardens with Nos. 41-45 immediately to the west followed by Nos. 47-49.

2.02 **No.39** is a late 19th century red brick workshop building, three storeys in height to the Neal Street frontage, rising to four storeys to Shorts Gardens. The Neal Street front has twinned sashes to each floor with a single sash to the canted corner. The Shorts Gardens front has a 2-1-2 rhythm of openings with paired sashes either side of central loading bay doors. There is the substantially intact early 20th century shopfront.



No.39

2.03 **Nos.41-45** appear to date from the mid-20th century. The building is four storeys in height and faced in patched pale red brick laid in stretcher bond. The façade is three windows wide, each window having stone or concrete reveals surrounding steel-framed casement windows. There is a modern ground floor shopfront.



Nos.41-45

2.04 **Nos.47-49** are later 19th century in date, of warehouse or workshop character. The building is four storeys in height and built of red brick. The windows on each floor are disposed in a rhythm 2-1-2. Having paired sashes either side of a single central sash all under segmental brick arches. There is a good quality early 20th century shopfront.



Nos.47-49

3 History

3.01 The Neal Street area were originally developed in the 17th century with terrace houses on narrow frontages. Through the 18th and 19th century the area became more commercial and industrialised. This resulted in much rebuilding to serve the needs of Covent Garden Market for product storage and basket making. Nos.39 and 47-49 are good examples of this development. Despite the unifying of the original house plots for bigger buildings, the street still retains a distinct character of individual buildings making up a varied terrace.

3.02 The warehouse/workshop character of the buildings is displayed in the large scale of windows and, in the case of No.39, the goods doors in the centre of the Shorts Gardens elevation.

3.03 This medium to small workshop/warehouse use continued through the post-war years as is evidenced by the 1950s rebuilding of a warehouse-style building at Nos. 41-45.

4 Designations

4.01 None of the buildings on this site are Listed Buildings.

4.02 The Neal Street area is, however, situated within the Seven Dials (Covent Garden) Conservation Area, designated in 1971.

4.03 Camden Council have published a Seven Dials Conservation and Management Plan where Nos, 39 and 49 Neal Street are identified as buildings of value that contribute to the character of the area.

5 Policy Context

5.01 Government guidance on managing change in the historic environment is given in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Local planning authorities must take account of the desirability of sustain and enhancing the significance of heritage assets.

5.02 Conservation can make a positive contribution to sustainable communities and to their economic vitality through viable uses consistent with the asset's conservation.

5.03 The NPPF also states that new development can make a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.

5.04 The Mayor of London's Spatial Development Strategy recognises the value and importance of respecting the historic environment when considering development proposals.

5.05 London Borough of Camden have a suite of policies in their Local Plan (June 2017). In Section 7 Design and Heritage, Policy D2 calls for all development in conservation areas to preserve, and where possible, enhance the character of the area.

5.06 In Section 7.43 of the local Plan, the Council also recognises that development can make a positive contribution to the historic environment (for example at Kings Cross).

5.07 The Seven Dials (Covent Garden) Conservation Area Statement and Management Plan explains the heritage significance of the area, its individual buildings and spaces and provides policy advice for development within the area:

“New Developments.

SD1 Proposals should be guided by the UDP in terms of the appropriate uses. New development should be seen as an opportunity to enhance the conservation area and should respect the built form and historic context of the area, local views as well as existing features such as building lines, roof lines, elevational design, and where appropriate, architectural characteristics, detailing, profile and materials of adjoining buildings.

Design

SD2 The conservation area has a long history of development which is demonstrated in the variety of styles which are juxtaposed within it. The last twenty years has seen the development of a successful combination of refurbished and modern design, reflecting the dynamic changing character of the area, located in a unique historic context. Appropriate

design for the conservation area can reflect both the historic and the modern context and both traditional and contemporary materials may be appropriate.”

6 Heritage Significance

6.01 The heritage significance in this case rests in the level of contribution that the buildings make to the character and appearance of the conservation area. No. 39 is a 19th century building of architectural quality which forms a prominent corner location with Shorts Gardens. Nos. 41-45 is a plain and undistinguished mid-20th century building that contributes little to the areas character. It has been identified in the Seven Dials Conservation Area Management Plan as an opportunity for enhancement. Nos. 47-49 are of later 19th century date and of a robust quality and character. This building has a good shopfront which is relatively complete.

6.02 Both no.39 and Nos. 47-49 are buildings of architectural character which contributes to the appearance and special interest of the area. They both have shopfronts of good quality worthy of careful adaptation and restoration. They are a visual reminder of the 19th century workshop and warehouse economy that formed much of the townscape character of this area.

6.03 The essential townscape quality of this part of the conservation area resides in the plurality of building forms, scale and detail within the matrix provided by the 17th century street plots. The prevalent 19th century commercial/warehouse aesthetic is tempered with differing architectural compositions and detailing as well as a 20th century intervention.

7 The Proposals

7.01 The proposals are to renovate the buildings for a mixture of retail and office use. The most prominent change envisaged is the construction of mansard-like roof storeys to all the buildings, with a higher corner feature on No.39. The good quality window joinery on Nos,39 and 47-49 would be repaired or replicated. The existing

shopfronts on these buildings would be repaired and restored. Nos. 41-45 would be re-fenestrated and receive an improved shopfront.

8 Commentary on the Proposals

8.01 The façade of Nos. 41-45 would be enhanced by better quality fenestration, similar to the remaining two buildings. The shopfront would also be improved. These buildings are an important part of the special character of the conservation area. The proposal to renovate the buildings for mixed retail and office use offers the opportunity for a sustainable use for the future by meeting the modern needs of businesses.

8.02 The proposed mansard-like roof additions would be faced variously with raised seam copper, gold-coloured shingles and charred timber facing to the new corner feature on No.39. This would emphasise that each of the three individual buildings in the terrace group would retain an identity through a careful modulation of inset window rhythms and a variety of roof covering materials. The individual plot identity is further emphasised by a variation in the parapet heights, rather than simply having a continuous coping height. The new storey proposed on Nos.47-49 would be designed in matching traditional brick but marked as an addition by a stone band between the new and the original sections of the façade.

8.03 The sash windows of No.39 and Nos.47-49 would be retained and restored, with a similar fenestration introduced to Nos.41-45. This would be a marked enhancement, bringing the somewhat bland façade of Nos.41-45, to a degree, more in keeping with the warehouse aesthetic of the buildings either side. The strongly defined lintels now proposed will also give the façade a more muscular appearance. The existing bland 1950s elevation of Nos.41-45, whilst in itself of little merit, does represent a visually quieter moment in the street scene which is part of the overall varied quality of Neal Street. It is therefore appropriate that the new façade treatment here should be more restrained and deferential to the adjacent buildings to maintain the variety of urban grain and character. It would be harmful to the diversity of the conservation area if all the buildings “shouted with the same voice”.

8.04 The proposed roof form for No.39 would include a shaped roof, marking the important corner feature function of this building. The choice of charred timber facing is texturally strongly reminiscent of tarred timber associated with industrial, warehouse and dockside working buildings. The existing corner roof of No.39 fails to function as a local landmark that such a corner location demands. This is a case where a carefully designed modern intervention is an enhancement, adding to local character and distinctiveness. Distinctive corner treatments are a feature of the Seven Dials area, as indicated in the Seven Dials Renaissance Study.

8.05 The proposed addition to the roof form of No.39 would be likely to fail to perform its appropriate townscape function if it was designed in a tame imitation of some period building type such as a 19th century bell tower or lighthouse. Such self-conscious recreations may sometimes have veracity when the new work completes or restores a strong existing historic architectural statement. But here, the plurality of forms in the surrounding area and the lack of a previous strong roof form on No.39 indicates that a complementary or a counterpoint approach is appropriate. A counterpoint modern intervention, as is proposed, is a continuation of the existing tradition of change and diversity. It would introduce a new but contextual form that would enrich rather than detract from the wider historic environment, while maintaining a link with the rhythm of the windows of the host building below.

8.06 The shopfronts on all three buildings will either be retained or improved to the enhancement of the street scene.

9 Conclusion

9.01 This proposal represents a creative reuse of buildings of character as well the enhancement of a building (Nos. 41-45) which currently contributes little to the special interest of the area. The proposals meet the requirements of the Local Plan Policy D2 that calls for the conservation and enhancement of character of conservation areas. The proposed retail/office reuse of the buildings, the improvements and well-considered interventions will have a positive effect on the character and appearance of the Seven Dials (Covent Garden) Conservation Area.

9.02 The guidance offered in the Seven Dials (Covent Garden) Conservation Area Management Plan calls for the sensitive retention and

restoration of buildings of character, as well as quality contemporary design in new or altered buildings where appropriate. This scheme achieves the aspirations as set out in the Management Plan: appropriate office/retail use, respectful refurbishment of character buildings and their shopfronts, as well as the introduction of contextual modern design and materials in the roof storeys and the façade of Nos. 41-45.