



Established in 1971

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Dear Neil,

Re Neal's Yard, Covent Garden

We discussed Neal's Yard in relation to various applications last year. We also spoke a little about the intensification that was happening there, and whether the location merited special policy considerations or some neighbourhood planning. You felt that these were not needed at that stage, but we agreed to keep an eye on things

However, the existing situation continues to cause problems for residents and for other businesses, and these problems are getting worse. Some premises cause issues in themselves, and some are part of a growing, cumulative effect in a space that is small, enclosed, and sensitive to noise.

For example, in a clockwise direction around the yard:

- 1 Neal's Yard: 26 Grains porridge is a pleasant restaurant / take-away with lots of activity inside and out. It was a shop until the 1990's, with much less intensive use.
- 2b Neal's Yard has recently been vacated by Salad Pride; it has been vacated to facilitate extension with a larger restaurant tenant. And 3 Neal's Yard is Native restaurant. The extraction flue serving both units continues to cause fumes and noise to residents behind it, and to customers of Neal's Yard Therapy Rooms. Restaurant staff also cause noise, hanging about in groups and drinking outside after 11pm. The units were shops until 2 years ago, number 3 being best known as the bead shop.
- 4-5 Neal's Yard: Souk gained permission for restaurant use in 2004. This is quite a large operation, which continues to cause fumes and noise and refuse problems.
- 6 Neal's Yard: Casanova & Daughters deli and wine bar continues to operate noisily and outside its consent. This unit was a bakery until a few years ago and does not have A3 permission. CGCA mentioned this to Camden in correspondence last May.
- 8-10 Neal's Yard: Compagnie Des Vins Surnaturel (CVS) restaurant continues to operate outside its consent by opening until well after 11pm. This infraction was brought to the attention of Camden enforcement last year. These units used to be the famous Neal's Yard Dairy.
- 13 Neal's Yard: Homeslice pizza restaurant continues to disturb residents above and all around the yard late into the evenings. With its after-hours staff activity, its 'bottomless' wine service, often open doors

and large unmanaged crowds outside, several interested parties have separately told us that “it is run more like a club than a restaurant”. It seems entirely unsuited to this location.

- 14 Neal's Yard: the Wild Food café sits above the one real retail unit left in Neal's Yard. It was converted to restaurant use in the 1990's.
- 16a Neal's Yard: Jacob the Angel is a pleasant cafe, but it is bustling. With benches and plenty of activity outside it contributes far more 'buzz' than when it was a shop until the end of last year.
- 16 Neal's Yard: The Barbary is a pleasant restaurant, but inevitably noise escapes from its often open door, refuse sacks are left out blocking the yard, and again far more servicing and activity goes on than ever happened when it was a shop until 2015.

The result of all this intensification is that the delicate balance of residential, retail, leisure and other business uses has been severely compromised, despite the good intentions of your policies such as CPG 5.

The facts are stark:

1. There are now 11 cafes / bars / restaurants around the yard and **only one retailer** (Neal's Yard Remedies). 7 of the bars / restaurants operate until 10pm or later.
2. In 2015 there were only 7 restaurants/bars/cafes in total, and 5 shops (4 of those 5 shops are now restaurants or busy cafes).
3. In the early 2000's there were more retail units than restaurant & café units combined, and no bar style operation.

For local people who love Neal's Yard, and indeed for many people who visit it from all over the world, this loss of the healthy mix of uses is concerning.

There is now an up-swell of feeling from residents and some non-leisure business owners that the situation needs to be addressed.

The latest application for 3 Neal's Yard (2017/6993/P) to be used permanently as a restaurant brings the issue into sharp relief. This A1 unit claimed temporary A3 use in 2015 under permitted development rights. As we all know, this legislation was designed to help property owners in difficult situations to breathe life into under-used buildings. It was not intended to increase the profitability of prime West End retail spaces by turning them into restaurants that cause the sort of direct and cumulative impact issues that we have seen here.

Obviously some local people will object to the specific planning application mentioned above, but a wider group would welcome a holistic, strategic discussion about how the place that is Neal's Yard should be allowed to evolve more generally as well. So far the evolution has happened piecemeal, and increasingly fast, in a way that they feel has not addressed their needs nor supported family life. The community has not enjoyed the benefits intended by CGP5.

How would you suggest that we engage with the planning authority to start this strategic discussion? For example, we would welcome you coming down to join us for a discussion with local stakeholders. If you could do this, please let us know if you would be available in the next few weeks.

With good wishes,

Amanda Rigby

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