

FEEDBACK ON CHING COURT ENTRANCE 11 – 13 AND 15 – 19 SHELTON STREET, LONDON, WC2H9JN

Application number: 2018/0371/P

Application type: Full Planning Permission

This report is to be seen in conjunction with the planning application for the modifications at 11 to 19 Shelton Street, the Southern Ching Court entrance and tunnel.

The need for these building modifications are driven by **an exceptional need to prevent serious crime, to minimise the fear of crime and provide for the immediate and long-term health and safety** of the residents, business users, guests and workers to these buildings.

THE “IDYLIC” SOUTHERN CHING COURT ENTRANCE AND TUNNEL AS OTHERS SEE IT IN PHOTOGRAPHS



THE REALITY OF WALKING THROUGH CHING COURT ENTRANCE AND TUNNEL

Evenings



Between 40 and 60 drug abusers use Ching Court regularly for shelter and exchanging drugs, turning the passageway into what is commonly described as a “crack den”. Here, three of the abusers use Ching Court to unpack belongings. One strips naked, one prepares drugs, one has a dangerous dog.

Daytime



Four drug abusers and a drug dealer on look out

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1) INTRODUCTION - THE ORIGINS OF THIS EXCEPTIONAL NEED TO DESIGN OUT CRIME

This application must be seen in the light of the exceptional circumstances under which it has been made, including the immediate and future need to protect residents, business and estate workers, guests and visitors, to provide crime prevention and to minimise the health and safety risks faced by all who must use the entrance at 11 to 19 Shelton Street.

Although Ching Court is an area of historic significance, with listed buildings, its entrance and tunnel at 11 to 19 Shelton Street has suffered a very serious problem, having been regularly used by habitual drug abusers, drug dealers and criminals for illegal activities for at least the past 6 years. In the past year (2017) the problem has escalated resulting in the installation of emergency boarding at the entrance in October 2017 to protect the residents.

As any legitimate user of the entrance who has had to push past these unwelcome gatherings of drug abusers and their criminal hangers on will testify, it is terrifying to have to confront this level of danger on a daily basis.

The current design of 11 to 19 Shelton Street, (i.e. the Ching court entrance on the south side) uniquely attracts drug abusers, and criminals.

It is set back from the street, the tunnel allows extended use and a double exit escape route for intruders, while the stone steps provide seating areas for illicit users to conduct their activities in a degree of comfort. The entrance provides an environment for six to eight abusers to meet without being seen from the street. They only become visible, when the visitor or passer-by is within a few feet of the court area. When the gates are open the drug abusers can just move further into the tunnel either to ensure they are not seen at street level or escape if needed (Ching Court has two exits, the other being on Monmouth Street). The entrance has become what is commonly described as a “crack house” or “shooting up gallery”.

A summary of the dangers that are faced when the courtyard and tunnel are not closed include:

- **Likelihood of robbery/physical and sexual assault/burglary.** It is well-known that abusers require substantial funds to maintain their habits. . The clear majority of the 40 to 60 addicts (many of whom appear to have serious underlying mental health issues) and criminals who use the entrance appear to be unemployed and unable to fund their addictions by anything other than begging or crime. Residents of the flats at 11 to 19 Shelton Street encounter these people at a moment when they are most vulnerable to attack, as they open their front door, an intolerable pressure on residents and legitimate visitors. one hand is occupied, and the body is moving forwards. Once you understand this dynamic, knowledge that you have crack/heroin/spice addicts directly behind you is intolerable
- **Fear of crime.** The fear of any of the types of assault described above is a stress in its own right: There is up to a 50% chance ever day of meeting these drug abusers or their criminal associates as you turn the corner into Ching Court.

- **Reluctance to invite guests home**, female guests need to be met in the street before they come into the courtyard, while it is a profoundly distressing experience for parents to escort their children past these scenes.
- **Danger of being infected by either Hepatitis or aids**. It is well known that such diseases are common in abusers of this severity. It is an entirely justified fear that one addict may assault a resident, spit at them, bite them or cut them with their needles or glass vials. All these forms of assault bring a very real danger of passing on these types of profoundly unpleasant, even incurable infections. Some of the abusers have open wounds and sores to their face and hands, which increases the likelihood of contamination, while vials and drug paraphernalia are left broken in the courtyard, presenting a real health danger to residents, as well as a profoundly unwelcome drugs litter problem. Needless to say, this is a substantial danger to young children playing in the courtyard entrance.
- **Danger of drug “stashes”**: The tunnel is regularly used by the drug abusers as a place to store drugs or other paraphernalia, which contributes to all the dangers mentioned above.

The traditional ways the community can deal with this problem, including asking for help from the Metropolitan Police, are not working and will never provide a solution for many reasons, including:

- 1) **As is widely reported, Police resources are very stretched**, and they have limited capacity to deal with drug addicts
- 2) **If approached by a police patrol, the addicts and dealers immediately leave the area, only to return five minutes later.** (the two entrances to Ching Court, provide a choice of escape routes)

2) PHOTOGRAPHS ILLUSTRATING THE IMMEDIATE DANGERS

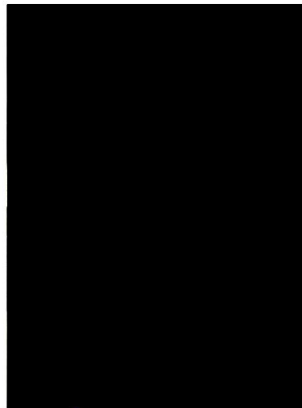
These photographs show the dangers and risks experienced by residents, their guests, their children, business owners, employees and service staff living and working in Ching Court. These dangers will remain until they are designed out by the changes proposed in this application.

These photographs were taken over three days at random times of the day, one week before the emergency boarding was erected. They were only taken by one resident at the times they happened to leave their premises and return to it. The likelihood of residents having to walk through what has already been described as a crack den up to 50% on any given day.

Saturday morning 9am. A drug abuser is blocking the one of exit doors to the building as they smoke their drugs in the corner. There is no way out of the flat other than trying to get this addict to move. The second photograph shows two more heroin or crack addicts "fixing up". **Total number of addicts: three**

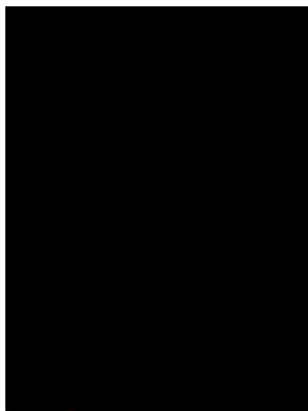


Drug addict smoking unknown substance, possibly crack cocaine or spice against the doorway entrance to the flats, preventing residents from exiting

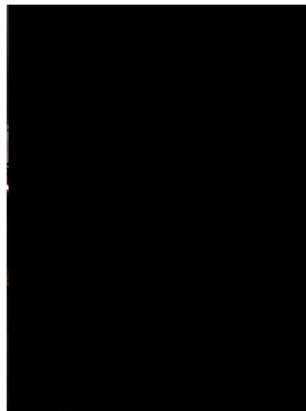


Two drug addicts preparing their illicit substances in pipes for smoking. Residents believe one drug being abused is 'Spice', a widely available drug which causes hallucinations, irrational behaviour and violence, thus posing additional risks to residents.

Saturday evening about 9pm. Drug abusers, possibly using crack, heroin or spice entering the enclosure to the flats. By the time the resident arrived, the two-seen standing in the first photograph were leaning on their side, their paraphernalia' spread out on the pavement in front of them. The only way into the flat was to literally step over the two abusers and their "gear". By this time a third addict had also joined them and was "fixing up" on the opposite side, as seen in the third photograph. **Total number of addicts: Three**



Two addicts entering, Ching Court entrance

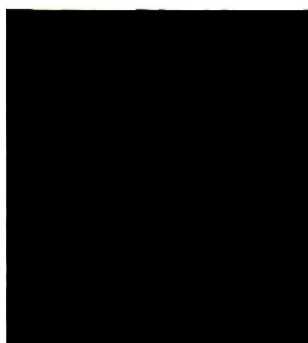


Same two addicts preparing to take illicit substances (possibly heroin, cocaine or spice). Any resident wanting to enter their flat must literally walk over them



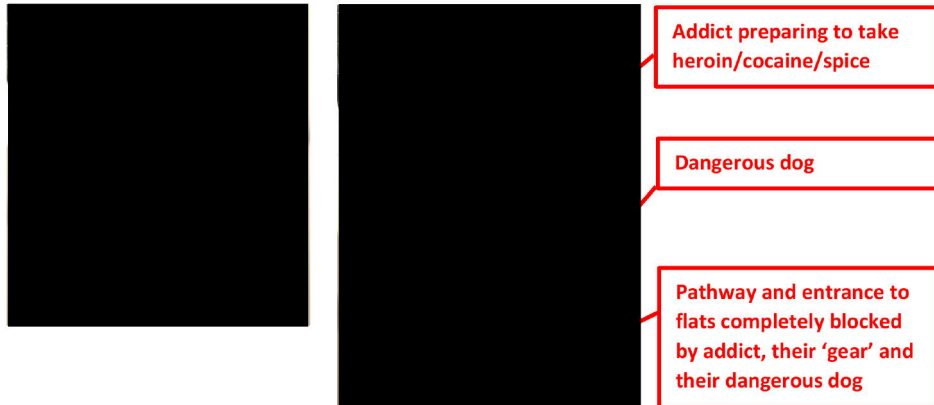
Third addict joins and sits opposite, again preparing to take heroin, cocaine, spice, or similar. Any resident wanting to enter their flats on this side also must walk over them

Monday morning about 8.15am. Drug abuser loading his pipe, possibly containing crack, heroin or spice. So "high" is this individual that he did not notice the resident directly behind him, nor pay any attention to people walking past him on their way to work in Ching Court. **Total number of addicts: One**

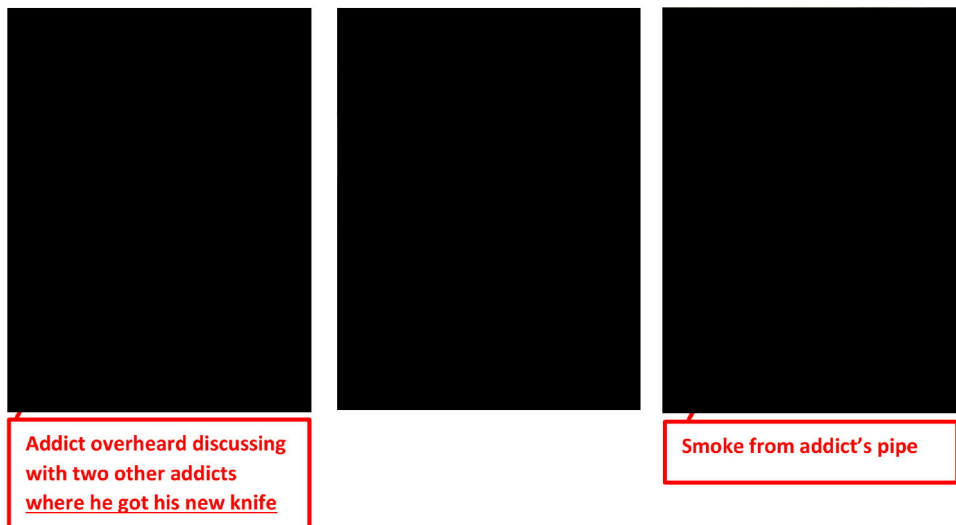


Addict preparing to take heroin/cocaine/spice, the southern tunnel area is also frequently used by addicts at all times of the day.

Monday evening about 6pm – Part A, A drug abuser with her dangerous dog squats immediately outside the front communal door, blocking the exit. The addict then lights up her drug pipe. A female visitor of one of the residents (at 11 – 19 Shelton Street), arrived moments later and had to ask the addict to move forwards while she carefully walked past her and the dog. The visitor, once safely inside responded to what she had just experienced by exclaiming, ‘Oh my god that is terrible!’ **Total number of addicts: One**



Monday evening about 6pm – Part B, on the other side of the entrance way, blocking the entrance to the second communal hallway were three more substance abusers taking their drugs. Even more worryingly, their conversation comprised one male addicts asking another where he got his '*shiv*' from. *A shiv is the slang term for a knife.* **Total number of addicts: Four**



Summary over Three Days

Number of occasions:	Three random entries and exits to property am and pm
Total observation time:	Approx. 15 minutes
Number of crack/heroin/spice addicts:	Eleven (1 possible repeat, 8 different)
Number taking crack/heroin/spice:	Ten
Other factors:	One woman accompanied by dangerous dog
	One man carrying a knife

In the week following (October 2017), an urgent request was made to Ching Court private security patrols by contractor CBRE to prevent crime, provide safety and prevent health and safety risks. Although there was an increase in security patrols, the result was:

- 1) No change in addicts' behaviour
- 2) No reduction in addicts' numbers
- 3) The area remained squalid during the day, in the evenings and at week-ends

The reason:

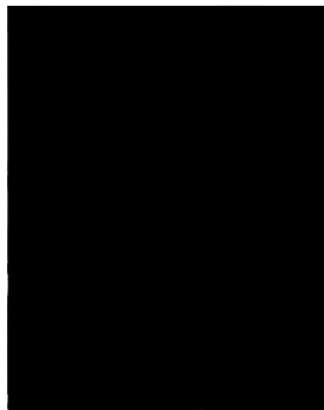
Unless security guards/police stand outside the courtyard 24/7, every day of the year, the addicts immediately return. All the following photos are taken after the increase in security patrols:

Photographs taken after an increase in security and implementation of 2 hourly patrols

a) Addicts not moving when residents return



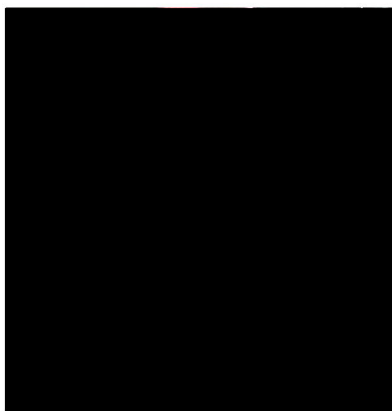
Addict starting to undress



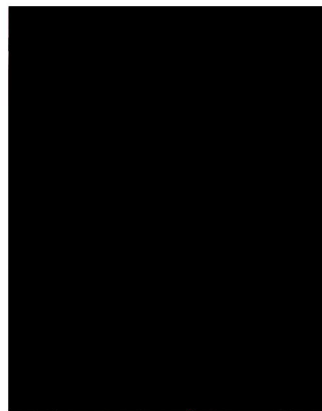
Addict starting to prepare drugs

Dangerous dog, surrounded by addict's belongings

b) Addicts and a dealer using the courtyard in broad daylight



Four of the addicts who use the entrance with a drug dealer on look out – these drug dealers can be more dangerous and violent than the addicts themselves.



Flare from addict's pipe when lighting up

3) HOW SERIOUS AND DANGEROUS ARE THESE NEW AND CHEAPER DRUGS?

The drugs residents believe are being used by drug addicts and dealers in Shelton Street and Ching Court are exceptionally dangerous. These two newspaper articles explain the extent of these dangers.

[Article 1 - Jailed Spice addict 'snarling' like animal in attack \(2017\) – BBC, South Wales, May 2017](#)

A man addicted to the synthetic drug Spice was "snarling and growling" like an animal as he bit a police officer, a court has heard.

Leroy Parry, 24, **sank his teeth into the bicep of PC Gareth Phillips for nearly a minute.** Swansea Crown Court heard **it took seven officers to restrain him.** Parry, from was jailed for 20 months after admitting affray, assault occasioning actual bodily harm and three assaults on police.

PC Phillips described it as the worst violence in his 14-year police career, and said he had to punch snarling Parry three times before he let go of his dog-like bite. The court heard Parry has been addicted to drug Spice for five-and-a-half years and was having withdrawals when he carried out the attack.

It happened during a disturbance in Swansea city centre on 7 April. Prosecutor Tom Scapens said the officer described the pain as "excruciating from the outset". Mr Scapens said: **"He could feel this bite through a long sleeve work shirt and two fleeces. "He said Leroy Parry was 'animal-like'. "He was in so much pain he was going into shock."**

The court heard the officer looked at his arm when he got into the police van. Mr Scapens said: "Looking at it made him feel physically sick." Parry later apologised to officers, telling them he was "clucking for Spice". The drug Spice is the name commonly used to describe a laboratory-created cannabis substitute. It is banned in many countries, including the UK. It has been blamed in recent months, along with another variant called Black Mamba, of turning users into "zombies" collapsing in the streets around Wrexham bus station in north Wales.

The court heard Parry had convictions for some 41 offences and a history of assaulting police officers. Speaking after sentencing, Insp Mark Davies said Parry had carried out a "vicious attack". "Nobody can justify this level of violence for somebody just doing their job," said Insp Davies.

"This incident demonstrates the very real potential dangers that officers face on a daily basis. "When an officer leaves the station, they simply do not know what they might have to deal with at any given time."

Source: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-south-west-wales-39922889>

[Article 2 - Prisoners say 'spice' use has tripled, fueling violence, illness and debt \(2016\) – The Guardian, June 2016](#)

A survey by inmates of their fellow prisoners suggests regular use of the 'bird killer' has reached epidemic levels the attraction of spice for prisoners is that it has the effect of blurring out time, so a sentence can pass in a haze.

Recent mobile phone videos and TV footage have shone a light on prisons. They appear lawless and chaotic places, where drug use is widespread. One video illegally filmed on a banned mobile phone by prison inmates captured disturbing footage of a semi-naked prisoner dressed in tea towels, apparently high, dancing for the entertainment of others to get a fix of a synthetic cannabis known as "spice", which the chief inspector of prisons said last month is "having a devastating impact in UK prisons".

In a new report, prisoners reveal the prevalence and effects of new psychoactive substances (NPS), of which spice is by far the most common, on their minds and bodies. 'Your problems disappear,' said one inmate. Of 805 prisoners surveyed in nine jails, a third had used spice in the previous month. The majority of survey participants estimated between half and nearly all prisoners had used spice in prison. The peer-led inquiry, conducted by ex-offenders' organisation User Voice, also **found the growing popularity of spice had contributed to an increase in violence, bullying, mental and physical ill health, and even death.**

"Spice has taken over the drug culture in prison," said a respondent. "It's reached epidemic levels."

The survey, conducted between December 2015 and April 2016 found spice use in the previous month was three times higher than reported in the chief inspector of prisons' 2014-15 annual report.

Spice has the effect of blurring out time and has become known as the "bird killer" ("bird" being slang for a prison sentence – you can pass your time in jail in a blur). Its categorisation as a synthetic cannabinoid masks the fact it is much stronger than cannabis, and has a hallucinatory dimension. Prisoners say they have seen "people come out of their cell, run along the landing and go straight towards the gates because they think they can run through the gates ... or run towards a wall and actually think they can run through the wall".

Other stories include a prisoner saying he had seen someone high on the drug **eating their own vomit in a bowl and dipping bread into it; another saw someone drinking water from the toilet and eating salt. "When I had my last experience of spice, I felt my brain was being ripped out," one inmate said.**

Number of prison deaths linked to legal highs rises steeply. The report was commissioned by the NHS, which is concerned by the increase in medical emergencies in prison seemingly brought on by use of legal highs. Callouts of all emergency services to jails have risen by 52% from 14,475 in 2011 to 22,055 in 2015. "Fifty-seven ambulances came to this wing in one month," said a prisoner. Another counted **17 ambulances at his prison in one day.** Last month the prisons and probation ombudsman reported that there had been 39 deaths in custody linked to NPS between 2013 and 2015, compared with a previous figure of 19 for synthetic cannabinoids between 2012 and 2014.

Given what is known of the risks – and the associated effects of palpitations, seizures, paranoia – **what is the attraction for so many prisoners? For some the answer is obvious: "Your problems disappear cos you don't think about them," said one inmate.**

Until last week, when a law banning all legal highs came into force, the use of NPS were permitted in England and Wales, except for inside prisons, where they have always been banned. However, prisoners and staff had developed a variety of methods for getting substances past security systems, even using drones to fly them in. With no drugs test available for these laboratory-made compounds, prisoners still have little need to worry about getting caught.

For User Voice founder, Mark Johnson, **the theory that prisoners are taking spice because they are bored ignores a deeper issue: "People are going into prison – and coming out – with undiagnosed and untreated existing mental health and substance abuse issues,"** he says. **"This report quite clearly shows the current health and substance misuse services are not fit for purpose."**

None of the regular users interviewed knew what was in what they were taking, and none cared. For some, the escapism was enough, but for others, spice has seen an unravelling of mental and physical ill health, and addiction. And with its high price combined with prisoners' low incomes, **spice addiction has led to users becoming indebted to dealers in prison and suffering violence – one reports a fellow inmate being sexually exploited to get his fix of spice.**

Last month the Guardian reported on the case of Sam Johnson, a schizophrenic addicted to spice. Mobile phone footage of Sam being beaten for fun by dealers he was in debt to emerged, to the horror of his family. "Every single member of my family who has watched that video has broken down and cried their eyes out, hysterical," said his sister Kelly Johnson.

Indeed, the exploitation of habitual users has provided grim sport for prisoners: "They think it's funny to watch a man drop to his knees, shake uncontrollably on the floor, go white as a ghost, nearly kill himself," said a survey respondent. "Recently, I've been going back to the free pipes, where people give you a pipe for free," admitted another. "You don't have to pay for it, but you're going under on it, and they're going to torture you. **"With sharp spikes in suicides, self-harm, violence and attacks on staff in prison [pdf] according to Ministry of Justice figures, the chief inspector of prisons,** Peter Clarke, told the Guardian last month: "There need to be clear strategies to deal with the supply of these drugs into prisons, and to care for those who suffer from their effects."

"However, we must do more, which is why we are investing £1.3bn to transform the prison estate, to better support rehabilitation and tackle bullying, violence and drugs."

Prisoners themselves want urgent action. They say the situation seems to be getting worse, not better. "The amount of people I see die from it," said one prisoner, "and serious mental health issues – there's only one way you're gonna go."

Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/jun/01/prisoners-reveal-regular-spice-use-tripled-legal-high-violence-illness-debt>

4) GLASS BACKING FOR NEW GATES WILL PREVENT CRIME AND REDUCE HEALTH AND SAFETY RISKS

A glass backing to the iron gates is imperative

Drug addicts and drug dealers will return to this entrance if it in anyway facilitates drug activities: this entrance will always attract addicts, dealers and criminals, because of their habitual use of Shelton Street as a walk through.

The purpose of the glass backing is to prevent crime

If the gates do not have a glass backing behind them to make them solid, the areas behind the iron bars of the gates will become an ideal storage area for the drug addicts, drug dealers and criminals to use. It will enable them to easily store drugs, drug paraphernalia, knives and other weapons etc... through and behind the iron bars of the gates and in the recessed areas located there. The drug addicts have a ten-year history of this behaviour in Ching Court.

Gates without glass also facilitate immediate disposal of illegal items, If the addicts/dealers are approached by police they will easily be able to throw anything illegal through the gates (the security cameras will not deter them from doing this, because with their backs to the camera you cannot either see their faces, but more importantly you cannot see who is doing what).

A glass backing will increase health and safety

A glass backing will prevent drugs paraphernalia from being left on the floor and so will improve the health and safety for residents and their guests, business users, visitors and particularly the cleaner (who must clean the area daily) and any young children (who out of curiosity might easily pick up the pipes, needles, silver paper (some of which will be infected by aids/hepatitis).

Once the iron gates are installed, if they do not have a backing, the amount of dirt and dangerous products being thrown into/being blown into this courtyard entrance will also increase exponentially again. The serious and dangerous issue of noxious and infected rubbish being blown into this entrance is also increased because the long uninterrupted length of Shelton Street creates a wind tunnel. The Ching Court at 11 to 19 Shelton Street entrance is a natural stopping place for this extra noxious rubbish being blown along the length of the street (which is further aggravated by a slight curve in the road around the Ching Court entrance)

The addicts will again use the gates as a convenient place to urinate through and there is a very high probability this urine will be infected by aids/hepatitis. Unlike letter boxes many of which have strong spring shutters (which would cause even the most determined addict to think again), the gates will provide both safety and a certain level of privacy as the addict who is urinating will not be seen from the street side, because of the two-small side wooden buttresses to this entrance. This will be to the detriment of everyone who must live or work near 11 to 19 Shelton Street or in Ching Court.

The glass backing to the gates will reduce these risks of crime and health and safety risks considerably.

Cleanliness of the glass backing will be of the highest order

The reason being right now a cleaner cleans the Shelton Street entrance to the Ching courtyard every week-day morning. The actual tunnel section is scrubbed with a disinfectant/bleach, is then hosed with water and brushed down Monday to Friday (without the addicts, and all that they leave on the floor their used paraphalia, their saliva from spitting and their urine, the disinfectant/bleach may not be necessary)

A glass backing will improve Ching Court proper

Another benefit of the glass backing to the iron gates is that Ching court itself will become more attractive to visitors and safer – the glass backing on the gates will mean that Ching Court looks much cleaner, safer and inviting. All of this will enhance the reputation of Ching Court as a safe and enjoyable place to visit and relax in. Any enhancement of reputation also enhances the reputation of Seven Dials and Covent Garden as a whole.

5) CONCLUSION

The purpose of these proposed modifications is to protect residents, and all who use 11 to 19 Shelton Street and the Southern Ching Court entrance, from the very real dangers of crime, including physical and sexual assault, robbery and many unacceptable health and safety risks that they face. These risks will continue if the necessary preventive measures to design crime out of this entrance and passageway are not taken.

The measures include all the modifications outlined in the building application with one critical exception:

There is an absolute and imperative need to keep the gates at 11 to 19 Shelton Street closed and keep the main entrance to Ching Court as it is currently (and has been since October 2017) - via the Northern Entrance in Monmouth street.

If this is not the case, the drug addicts and dealers will return immediately to 11 to 19 Shelton Street, and the tunnel into Ching Court and the residents are back to "square one", with legitimate users exposed to a completely unacceptable level of crime and danger.