



Comments on application ref. 2019/1710/L, applying to knock together two small office buildings for conversion into three 1-bedroom dwellings at 2 & 3 Ching Court (frontages on 53 & 55 Monmouth Street)

Covent Garden Community Association (CGCA) objects to both this listed buildings application and the related planning application ref. 2019/1646/P for these two buildings on the grounds of:

1. Damage to the fabric and character of two listed buildings with parts dating from Stuart times.
2. Damage to the character of Ching Court, an award-winning development made up of 18 listed buildings including these two.
3. Loss of residential amenity in relation to overlooking and disturbance.
4. Loss of residential, commercial and public amenity in relation to security.
5. Loss of interesting and affordable offices for small businesses in the West End of London.

Issues relating to listed building consent overlap somewhat with those relating to planning consent. However, we concentrate on issues 1 and 2 in this submission, being more specific to the listed building application.

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At the outset it is important to understand the reason for these applications. The applicant, Shaftesbury, owns many of the buildings around Ching Court, and others around the Seven Dials area. The company is open about its commercial strategy being to shift uses around in their estate, to meet higher investment returns as the property market shifts.

At present:

- a. rental prices on small, unmodernised offices are under pressure, and higher returns can be made in the residential private rental market;
- b. rental prices on larger 'family' flats are less than the same square footage split into little flats or converted and modernised as open-plan offices.

So the applicant wishes to turn two small offices with staircases on Monmouth Street into 1 bedroom flats, and to turn a 3 bedroom flat on Shorts Gardens with lift access into a modern office (the latter being the subject of two separate applications, 2019/1709/L and 2019/1294/P).

We do not believe that the increased financial return projected for Shaftesbury by this exercise justifies the damage to important listed buildings, damage to the character of this unique post-modern mixed-use development, and wide-ranging loss of amenity.

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1. Damage to fabric and character of two listed buildings dating from Stuart times.

Seven Dials was laid out by Thomas Neale in the early 1690's. It is well known as the only quarter of London remaining from late Stuart England. The layout of the central streets, and some of the original buildings remain. Many buildings were rebuilt, partially rebuilt, or re-faced in the 18th and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. 53 & 55 Monmouth Street are important examples of buildings replaced in the 18<sup>th</sup> century on the 17th century model. They should be left intact, not knocked together to create a modern, lateral layout.

When the Comyn Ching Triangle was redeveloped in the early 1980's by Terry Farrell, some of the buildings had already been modified or badly damaged, but some could be left as they had been laid out in the 17th and 18th centuries. 53 & 55 are the only two such on the Monmouth Street side and we believe that they should be left as examples for future generations. Also, number 55 has a rare surviving 17th century panelled interior and stairs.

2. Damage to the character of Ching Court, an award-winning redevelopment made up of 18 listed buildings including these two.

The redevelopment of the Comyn Ching Triangle in the early 1980's was hailed as a triumph of early post-modern design and urban mixed-use development within a conservation area. The mix of uses is key to its character.

The location of the mixes was chosen deliberately. That is why the whole works so well, and still attracts so much interest from architects and social historians. All along the Monmouth Street side of the Triangle is offices from 1<sup>st</sup> floor level upwards. All along the other sides is residential from 1<sup>st</sup> floor upwards. Retail is at ground floor level. If the use of 2 & 3 Ching Court, or any other buildings along the Monmouth Street side, were changed from office to residential then the balance would be ruined.

All buildings that have elevations overlooking Ching Court were listed in 2016, or previously listed and had updates / additions in 2017. (Sadly, one building on the outer South corner had been subject to strip-out by the applicant the previous year, and not enough survived for listing. But this does not overlook Ching Court). The intention was to preserve everything about the compilation, fabric, design and character of

Ching Court. We believe that this would be seriously damaged by any modifications to the buildings or changes of use, such as those proposed in these applications.

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We ask you to refuse this application.

We believe that it would also be helpful to have a clear statement of policy by Camden as the Local Planning Authority in relation to the Comyn Ching Triangle, so that its special character can be preserved to resist more applications of this type.

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ENDS