



Samir Benmbarek  
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London Borough of Camden  
5 Pancras Square  
London  
N1C 4AG

25<sup>th</sup> April 2019

Dear Mr. Benmbarek,

Re application ref. 2019/1294/P by Shaftesbury to convert a  
3 bedroom family flat into high grade offices at 20 Shorts Gardens WC2H 9AU

Covent Garden Community Association (CGCA) objects to this application.

Firstly, we request that the application is withdrawn and submitted with correct information. The application is in error because it has been made for a '2 bedroom' flat on the third floor of 20 Shorts Gardens. This property is known to us and it is, in fact, a 3 bedroom flat. The applicant, Shaftesbury, has always marketed it as a 3 bedroom flat to tenants in the past. This is an important consideration.

Notwithstanding the above, we have the following 3 main grounds for objection:

1. Loss to the area of a rare, single-level, 3-bedroom family flat with lift access.

We object to the application for change of use because it would result in the loss of a single-level, spacious 3-bedroom family flat with lift access. There are very few such properties in the area.

The proposal is to replace it with three small 1-bedroom flats with only stair access in Monmouth Street. There is already a plentiful supply of 1-bedroom flats in the area and the tendency is for this type of property to be let to tenants on a fairly short term basis or as second homes.

This type of redevelopment is very, very damaging to our community. In recent years we have seen a pattern of 'real residents' being pushed out to make way for short term tenants who turn over regularly and have far less stake in the area. We have seen families who were active in our community have to move out of the area because they were unable to find suitable properties to which they could 'upgrade' when they had another child. We have seen elderly people who were active in our community have to move out of the area because they were unable to find a reasonably spacious flat with lift access when they could no longer manage more than a few stairs.

This 3-bedroom flat with lift access is therefore a valuable asset in the residential mix of Covent Garden and we urge you not to allow it to be lost.

2. Loss of a useful mix of uses in the building.

The applicant is keen to remove the mix of uses in this building. However, people like living above offices. It affords more privacy and less noise nuisance than living above other residential units.

**Covent Garden Community Association, continued...**

Moreover, we object to the applicant's claim that having a flat sharing a front door is 'a hindrance' to offices in the same building. The applicant has in fact successfully developed such shared-use buildings itself, a very recent example being Monmouth House at 5 Shelton Street.

3. Loss of lower cost office accommodation.

The proposals involve taking away office accommodation in two small buildings in Monmouth Street, and replacing it with office accommodation converted from this flat in Shorts Gardens. The applicant describes the new office accommodation as "high quality open plan", which will attract a higher rent than the current quirky offices.

Again, this type of redevelopment is damaging to our community. Small businesses that can only support lower-grade office rentals are being edged out. 'Gentrification' is not just a problem with residential space, but with commercial space too. As recent campaigns have testified, this is changing the character of the West End in a way that diminishes its richness.

These quirky offices in two small listed buildings are also important asset in the commercial mix of Covent Garden and we urge you not to allow them to be lost any more than the family flat.

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We understand that these changes may be being driven by the desire for expanded office space for the new occupant of the retail units across the Thomas Neal Centre. If this is absolutely necessary then the space should at least be swapped with space in another building that can accommodate an equivalent 3 bedroom, lift-accessible family flat.

