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Jonathan McClue
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via Planning@Camden.gov.uk
and Jonathan.McClue@Camden.gov.uk

31st May 2019

Dear Mr. McClue,

Re Applications ref. 2019/1998/P and 2019/2370/L for refurbishment and alterations of Elms Lester Painting Rooms for continuing office use at 1-5 Flitcroft Street London WC2H 8DH.

Covent Garden Community Association (CGCA) objects to this application as it currently stands.

While we support the refurbishment of this building, and its being brought back to life through sympathetic use, elements of the proposals seriously compromise the character of the building and have the potential to damage neighbouring residential amenity.

Our objections fall into two areas:

1. Roof terraces: impact on residential amenity.

Proposed Elevations D& E show a roof terrace at second floor level. Proposed Elevation F implies a second roof terrace at third floor level. We appreciate that the applicant acknowledges the need for privacy screening so that the neighbours will not be overlooked, and that a "50mm timber slatted fence to terrace edge" is therefore shown on the plans in each case. However, we do not feel that the addition of terraces is sympathetic to the building nor necessary for its effective function as an office and would ask that these elements be removed from the plans.

If the Local Planning Authority is nevertheless minded to allow any terrace/s then we ask for planning conditions to protect neighbouring residential amenity requiring:

- a) Use of the terraces only during the time window of 9am to 7pm Monday – Saturday.
- b) Height of the fence to be at least 2 metres.
- c) Maintenance of the fence to repair any gaps within 2 weeks of them being reported to the freeholder.

2. Painting frames & winches: destruction of characteristics key to the unique historical integrity of the building and to community interest.

We understand that Elms Lester 'painting rooms' house one of only two remaining theatre scenery painting frames & mechanisms in the west End of London, the others being those that are currently part of the

refurbishment of the Theatre Royal Drury Lane. This machinery is a key part of the history of London's 'Theatreland' and it is important to preserve them in a state whereby their use can be demonstrated.

It is proposed that the existing basement will be waterproofed to that it can provide good quality accommodation. It is also proposed to clean, repair and repaint the frame and mechanism. We support this, but we do not accept that the painting frames need to be shifted and fixed, nor the winches removed, in order to achieve this.

We ask that you add planning conditions to:

- a) Refurbish the painting frames in situ and in such a way as to maintain movement.
- b) Refurbish the winches in situ.
- c) Allow public access once every six months to see the mechanisms in action. One of these could be part of 'Open House' every Autumn.

We would be happy to see the frames protected by glass, and the winches boxed-in but at least partly in glass so that the workings remain visible. Such 'boxing in' would render the basement space around them more usable, and result in little loss of viable office square footage. We believe that the winches could be presented almost as sculptural exhibits in cases, in a way that would enhance the appeal of this building to prospective tenants.

Further points

Notwithstanding our comments above, we support other elements of the proposals for the refurbishment of the building and appreciate the applicant's commitment to do so "to a very high quality". We ask that you make explicit the quality of the materials to be used, though, because we have unfortunately seen some recent cases where our expectations of quality based on planning applications have not been met in the final execution of those plans. This is not necessarily an applicant's fault, but that of the contractors' own choice of materials if the planning consent does not give clear guidance.

It is also worth mentioning that we would support the use of double-glazed window panes on this building, and indeed on many buildings in the conservation area notwithstanding their Grade II listed status. The appearance of double-glazed panels has improved immeasurably since the formation of thinking that questioned their appropriateness in such cases. They are no longer unsightly 'add-ons'. Nor do they require alterations to window frames because the distance between glass is now minimal. Indeed they are usually far less visible from the street than secondary glazing, and often hardly visible at all.

In an era where communities must work hard to reduce power consumption, double glazing is an important insulator. This is especially the case in a building like this where much heat is lost through the windows. We ask you to re-think this aspect.

Finally, we have not made any comments regarding the plant but trust that you will impose the usual conditions to ensure that it runs silently and only within working hours (to protect both neighbouring amenity and reduce power consumption).

Covent Garden Community Association, continued...

In a case such as this we would normally expect the applicant to make a short presentation to us at one of the CGCA's regular Planning meetings before submitting their application. This helps to share knowledge and ideas, and applicants usually give feedback that our input is useful, very often incorporating at least some of our suggestions in revised plans. It also provides a channel for future communication between us.

We appreciate that it is too late in this case, but ask you as the Local Planning Authority to remind applicants who seek your pre-app advice that we make this service available to them too.

Yours sincerely,

Elizabeth Bax

Chair of Planning Subcommittee
