



From: Eric Stuart <nealstreet@yahoo.co.uk>
Sent: 15 May 2020 02:00
To: Sild, Thomas <Thomas.Sild@camden.gov.uk>
Subject: Objection to 2020/1133/P - 68A Neal Street WC2H 9PA

[EXTERNAL EMAIL] Beware – This email originated outside Camden Council and may be malicious Please take extra care with any links, attachments, requests to take action or for you to verify your password etc. Please note there have been reports of emails purporting to be about Covid 19 being used as cover for scams so extra vigilance is required.

Dear Mr Sild

I am unfortunately writing to object to the proposed change of use requested in the application referenced above. The premises have been used by Alcotraz for their “immersive theatrical experiences” since late last summer. I like the team that operates and works at Alcotraz. They are aware of the impact that their operations have on the surrounding community and have been doing their best to minimise that impact,

however, there still is a significant impact in terms of noise and nuisance, and sadly the premises are just in the wrong location to be used for an immersive theatrical experience.

The premises occupy a rear building located in between the buildings that front onto Neal Street and Endell Street. The surrounding buildings are almost exclusively residential on the upper floors. I have attached to this email an area map, showing properties with residential upper floors outlined in red, the premises itself highlighted in amber and buildings in purely commercial use outlined in green. As can be seen, the premises are located in the middle of a highly residential community.

As a general matter, groups entering and leaving the premises can and do result in noise and nuisance to local residents, in particular during the evening and later at night when Neal Street is generally quiet once the shops have closed. The problem is exacerbated as this results not only in noise from the street side of the properties but also the rear side of the properties (due to the premises being located to the rear of the residential properties, with access by an open passageway). The rear side of the residential properties is otherwise quiet and protected from street noise. Groups linger in particular when leaving the premises, speaking, smoking and sometimes drinking, as they check their phones and decide their next move. Large groups also congregate before entering the venue, contributing to noise and congestion on narrow and, what are during the day and early evening, crowded streets.

Although the use applied for is sui generis for an “immersive theatrical experience”, the impact on local residents is equivalent to use of the premises as an A4 drinking establishment as it effectively operates as a bar operated on a prison theme. Alcotraz’s website (attached to this email) describes the premises as “a secret basement home to a speakeasy prison”. It further states that “the working inmates of Block Six Eight will be serving unique, personalised cocktails behind bars using liquor that visiting convicts will have smuggled in. All convicted criminals, dressed in their orange prison jumpsuits get their inmate number upon arrival before experiencing the bar behind bars, learning the secret of smuggling contraband”.

The applicant seems to recognise that the proposed use is effectively equivalent to an A4 use through the submission of an operations management plan. The applicant should clarify whether this is the current operations management plan - I expect that it is and, as mentioned earlier, although the applicant is doing their best to try to minimise the impact on local residents, even with the best controls there is still significant impact on local residents given large groups entering from, and exiting into, a narrow residential street and the alcohol involved despite the steps Alcotraz have taken to try to minimise that impact through that plan.

The Council has recognised the impact that establishments where alcohol is served can have on the local community. The premises are located in the Seven Dials area of Covent Garden and Holborn which is designated in Camden’s Statement of Licensing Policy 2017-2022 as a cumulative impact policy area. This means that “there is a presumption

that the Council will normally refuse an application for a new premises licence or a variation of an existing licence which is likely to add to the cumulative impact of licensed venues in the area". The proposed use would effectively add an additional licensed premise to the area against the goals of the Statement of Licensing Policy.

The Council's Local Plan 2017 also recognises that "alcohol related crime and late night disorder have been identified as significant issues, particularly within . . . the Seven Dials area of Central London". In respect of Central London, the Local Plan states that the the Council "will support residential communities within Central London by protecting amenity and by managing the location and concentration of food, drink and entertainment uses and their impact".

In the Council's Planning Guidance for Town Centres and Retail, the Council further recognises that "food, drink and entertainment uses are an important part of the mixed use character and function of Covent Garden however additional food, drink and entertainment uses may cause harm to residential amenity and to the mix and balance of uses in the area. The dense built form, fine grained mix of uses in the area means the area is particularly sensitive to the impacts of food, drink and entertainment uses . . . New entertainment uses will be allowed only when they have minimal impact on amenity for the local residential population, taking into consideration the cumulative effects".

The proposed entertainment use will unfortunately have more than minimal impact on amenity for the local residential populations. Local residents deal with groups of noisy patrons disturbing the relative evening and night time quiet of a residential corner of Covent Garden - a corner that is not entertainment focused and for which the proposed opening hours are neither suitable nor will cause minimal adverse effects. On the contrary, local residents have been living with the more than minimal effects at unsuitable hours for some time now.

In addition to the impact on the local residential community more generally, my immediate neighbours and I have specific additional concerns as we live in the flats at 68A Neal Street and share a common entrance door with the premises. As a result, we are most impacted from noise of patrons entering and exiting the premises. Due to the common entry door arrangement, the flats have been disturbed by patrons ringing the buzzers of the flats for entry despite a clearly marked separate buzzer for the premises itself. The flats also suffer from noise and vibrations caused by the opening and closing of the common door to the street - it is a heavy door with a strong automatic closing mechanism (which is needed for security purposes) but which is very clearly both heard and felt throughout the residential parts of the buildings which is a particular problem when groups leave the premises late at night. Residents have also on occasion been delayed in being able to enter the flats as groups are briefed as part of the theatrical experience before entering or in leaving the flats by inebriated patrons. Cigarette smoke from patrons has also been a particular problem for the first floor flat.

The applicant has not provided plans or elevations which show the proximity of the premises to local residents or the shared entry arrangements, which in my view are serious omissions from the application. I do not know whether it is possible for someone from the planning team to visit the premises to see these arrangement given the unfortunate current lockdown situation but this would be helpful. I also note that I know of two neighbours who have spoken to me about the problems they are having with Alcotraz who are not in London during the lockdown and thus are not aware of the application and cannot make their own objections.

For the reasons set out above, I object to the application and would be grateful if it could be denied as the change of use is not appropriate for the location of the premises. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at this email address or at the address or number below.

Best regards

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature and contact information of the sender.

