

**Proof of Evidence for Covent Garden Community Association
re Loss of Amenity from Construction of hotels, and generally**

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My name is Ashtar Al Khirsan.

I have lived in Newton Street, Covent Garden for 18 years.

The experience of building development, particularly the development of a site for use as a hotel, has been one that has been an extremely difficult experience for our local community. Hotel development causes a huge amount of disruption for the surrounding area and has a terrible impact on amenity. These problems exist during the building work, and unfortunately continue with the site when the hotel goes live.

The development of a site for hotel use is usually long and drawn out. There is also the issue of amendments and possible requests to add more bedrooms and meeting rooms/eating areas which means that the building work can go on at intervals for years, as has been our experience of the Hoxton Hotel.

Two years ago I organised a public meeting because of the extent to which local people had been suffering from the impact of several building developments in this area, including one hotel at the time, and later two. The disruption to our lives had been going on for two years by then and, despite volumes of continual complaints, Camden had been unable to alleviate the situation.

The list of complaints that I collated at the time from my own experience and from my neighbours can be seen in the Appendix. It is hard to believe that such an extensive list was left unresolved for so long. The impact on people's health, wellbeing and even on our ability to do our jobs was immeasurable.

There was standing-room only for local people at the meeting. Several senior Camden council officers attended, including:

- David Joyce, Director of Regeneration and Planning
- Jamie Akinola, Head of Environmental Health, Business & Consumer Services
- Aaron Manku, Head of Community Safety & Emergency Management
- Steve Cardno, Principal Transport Planner.

Sadly, what became evident at the meeting is that Camden council simply does not have the resources to enforce Construction Management Plans (CMPs). Further, the legal tools available to deal with nuisance are ineffective because of the high triggers for nuisance readings, the need for them to be officially witnessed by Environmental Health officers, and the long drawn-out process to gather evidence and take action.

CMP's are rarely stuck to in our experience, and developers will try to get away with whatever they can. On one occasion the Hoxton Hotel attempted to bring a crane into Newton Street at 6am on a Saturday morning. They had no permission to do this but were determined to go ahead until the residents had it stopped.

Developments lead to road closures and the suspension of residents parking, including disabled parking bays.

Our experience is that the building work itself is noisy and dusty, and builders and trucks often turn up early and hang around on the street waiting for the site to open. Streets immediately outside people's homes are used as smoking areas by workers because sites don't provide appropriate facilities.

Intense noise and dust levels from sites mean that people can't use their balconies or outside space. This became particularly difficult when people were subject to Covid lockdown. People literally had nowhere to go. Many residents complained directly to the developers and the site manager about the impact of the work on their mental health, not even being able to open their windows some days, but none of this was mitigated against by the developers.

In the case of the Hoxton Hotel, the developers took advantage of government building regulations and continued major work on the site, including drilling and sandblasting, during the full lockdown. This caused particular distress to the local community who were unable to leave their homes and had to put up with very heavy drilling throughout the day including Saturday mornings.

Aside from the noise and dust a site generates, what we saw in the case of both the Hoxton Hotel and the Kingsway Hall Hotel during the pandemic was a lack of concern for the rules and for the health of our community. Complaints were made to the developer about builders gathering on the street with no social distancing. We observed there were no masks, gloves or social distancing within one of the sites either, and they were working very close to people's flats. Nothing was done until our local councillor, Sue Vincent, escalated the matter.

Once an applicant is granted planning permission, the local community are no longer a consideration in our experience. Lip-service is paid via newsletters and meetings here and there, but concerns raised by residents are for the most part ignored. The pressure to push our needs aside intensifies when the schedule for a development is at stake, where there are usually punitive financial penalties for delay.

Once a hotel is operational there is then, of course, also ongoing noise of servicing with unsuitable, large vehicles using narrow streets and parking/making deliveries and collections very close to people's homes.

APPENDIX

Problems caused by local developments affecting Newton, Macklin & Parker streets

- summary at September 2018

Hoxton Hotel – Newton Street

- Construction noise, dust, debris & traffic on Newton St especially before 08.00.
- No safe pedestrian/traffic routes during deliveries/removals.
- No notification of deliveries / working hours/ the out of hours deliveries.
- The illegal parking of deliveries on double yellow lines.
- Noise from Hoxton bottle banks.
- The new site is currently being prepped which will have a major impact on Residents.
- Residents request no entry to Newton Street by builders or vehicles until 08.00 from now on.
- We are also requesting no Saturday working inside or outside on any development on Newton and Macklin Street in the future.

Aviation House – entrance Newton Street

- Construction noise from Aviation House between 22.00 and 05.00.
- Vehicles parking on double yellow lines and using Newton Street as a site for taking away demolition material.
- Dust from demolition immediately outside people's homes, builders wearing masks.

Parker Tower – Newton Street

- Construction noise.
- Builders and vehicles arriving before 08.00.
- Concern over longer working hours requested. Parker Tower have emailed residents asking them if they prefer the hours of 6am to 8am or 7am to 8am then 6pm to 7pm or 6pm to 8pm. We have all objected but would like the support of our local Councillors and Camden officials.
- Concern over the commercial units in the tower, and what planning and development they are likely to be granted.

Parker House – Parker Steet, overlooking Powis House & Aldwych Buildings

- Initial planning stage comments/ responses/ objections from residents at Aldwych Buildings were not properly taken into consideration when planning was granted. Planning was rushed and passed to a developer of poor repute.
- Flats have lost a substantial amount of natural light to an extent not properly measured by the light survey undertaken prior to the permission being granted.
- Loss of privacy for 2 years, with rude and invasive treatment from builders.
- Excessive noise, so constant that a resident has already moved out and more want to.
- Excessive levels of dust and particulates, so bad that even insects have disappeared from the outside plants. Yet the council has not provided trigger reports.
- Mosquito infestation for 2 years, standing water near underground streams left exposed.
- Rats.
- Camden has been inconsistent in its treatment of local interests. Eg: the school next door was given double-glazing but Powis House received nothing despite the site having more impact on it.
- Countless complaints made by residents since the development started have not been dealt with and the council says they have not been logged.
- Breaches of the terms outlined in the CMP (Construction Management Plan) have not been enforced against.
- Camden granted planning permission to Parker House without due consideration of the context of other developments. Residents are surrounded by three building projects being developed at once: Parker House, St Joseph's School, and 23 Macklin Street.

St Joseph's School – Macklin Street

- Next door to two residential blocks on Macklin Street and Newton Street. A major development has taken place over this summer with no consultation with local residents.
- Builders and building vehicles arriving from 06.45 and parking immediately outside residential properties, people's bedroom windows.
- Building work commencing just after 07.00.
- Builders loitering/smoking causing a noise disturbance immediately outside residents bedroom windows from 07.00 continuously throughout the day.
- Builders parking on double yellow lines.
- Out of hours working on Saturday and evenings.

23 Macklin St - Alexander Maltby development

- Major residential development with builders arriving before 08.00.
- Vehicles parked on double yellow lines.

The Kingsway Hall Hotel - at the bottom of Newton Street

- Noise/dust/pollution. Newton Street being used to take away rubble and debris from the demolition work of this massive site

Smarts Place

- A huge development which for all vehicles are using Macklin Street for servicing and delivery of building materials.
- Vehicles arriving throughout the night and early hours of the morning via Macklin Street.

Stukeley Street

- as above all vehicles using Macklin Street for servicing and delivery of building materials.

Dragon Court - Office block on paved area opposite Wimbledon Buildings.

- Out of hours deliveries including at 03.00 / 04.00!
- Forecourt area attracts drug dealing and is used as a urinal by late night revellers.
- Forecourt is also used by cars and large vehicles as a parking area at weekends.
- Concerns that when school development comes down and rickshaws have access again to Macklin and Newton they will commence using it as a late-night rat run and place to park. Causes extreme noise disturbance in the early hours.
- Parking on double yellow lines very close to people's bedroom windows.
- We would like to request a barrier is erected to curb this behaviour by builders, late night revellers and vehicles.

