



info@CoventGarden.org.uk

www.CoventGarden.org.uk

Neil McDonald  
Planning Solutions Team  
London Borough of Camden  
5 Pancras Square  
London  
N1C 4AG

via: Neil.McDonald@Camden.gov.uk

8<sup>th</sup> December 2021

Dear Neil,

### Re commercial bike stores

You have seen CGCA's comments in relation to bike store use in application ref. 2021/4663/P. And you have asked if we have any additional comments from recent experience of existing bike store units.

Given the promotion of cycling as a travel option in central London (which CGCA broadly supports), demand for this use is likely to become greater, and more applications will probably come up. Now seems a good time, therefore, to establish a set of planning conditions that could be chosen from by officers to mitigate potential problems while encouraging responsible cycling.

In Covent Garden we have had a few bike stores 'pop up' over the past couple of years, including the one that we mentioned at 74 Neal Street which is underneath housing association flats and opposite other dwellings. Those living and working nearby have described the following issues, and we suggest some possible conditions that could help things to work better in general.

#### A. General loss of amenity due to noise.

Moving bikes in and out of a storage unit can be noisy, even if the main entrance door closes (which is not always the case).

People who are working in the area sometimes leave their bikes overnight and collect very early in the morning, waking residents. Others remove their bikes late in the evening which can lead to loss of amenity for residents in areas where sound carries easily.

Residents report that parties of people often wait outside while one or two members go in to collect their bikes. When they are drunk this can cause an unacceptable level of nuisance for neighbouring families.

To mitigate this, hours of use should be limited in accordance with the context of the site – avoiding use early in the morning or late in the evening if the site is close to dwellings. In those residential areas our feedback has suggested the following hours of use would be acceptable:

- Monday to Friday: 08:00 to 21:00
- Saturday 09:00 to 21:00
- Sunday 10:00 to 20:00

Entrance ways should also be required to be adapted to the needs of people who are pushing bicycles through them, with ramps rather than steps, quiet door closing mechanisms, and enough width for both rider and cycle to pass easily.

**B. Loss of amenity for neighbours due to impact through the fabric of the building.**

Bike stores are hard spaces with no soft furnishings. Impact includes noise and vibration to flats above, from bikes being loaded and unloaded from racks.

Bike storage rooms are usually unheated and cold, taking the place of a formerly warm shop or office. Impact can include very cold temperatures for people living above and for adjoining units.

To mitigate this, provision for sound proofing and heat insulation should be conditioned in each planning consent, appropriate to the context.

**C. Pedestrian safety**

It is a sad fact that cyclists in London do not always prioritise the need of pedestrians over their own convenience. Cycling on pavements is rife, for example, despite being illegal.

When approaching cycle stores, our experience is that many riders do not dismount until they are near the door - even if this means cycling on a footway. This is dangerous for other footway users, who do not expect it.

It is difficult to mitigate this, but it would help if clear signage were conditioned in each planning consent. This could say “Cyclists must dismount on the footway or be excluded from using this facility in future”. With the addition of security measures and CCTV, it should be feasible for operators to enforce this warning.

**D. Crime and Antisocial behaviour.**

Without good security, stores have been a magnet for drug dealing and drug use. This includes gang members charging their phones!

Thieves have been seen parking stolen bikes in one of the stores and returning later to collect them.

From time to time there are issues with arsonists and people who inflict criminal damage roaming the area and taking random action – indeed one was arrested only last week. If units like bike stores are left open and unattended they pose more risk than an attended commercial unit. Residents have also mentioned to us being very worried when they see unattended bags left in bike stores.

At a lower level, people seeking shelter have been using bike stores in inappropriate ways, and others have engaged in activity like throwing the fire extinguishers out onto the street and kicking them around.

To mitigate all this, the way in which each store will be secured should be conditioned in planning consent, for example the maintenance of a list of keyholders and the applicant deadlocking the facility at night.

Where possible, live CCTV cameras should be installed. At 74 Neal Street, for example, there is no live camera, so even though the unit is occasionally patrolled by staff from the Seven Dials security team, there is no ability for them to see problems from the control room and take swift action.

-----

So, in summary, we suggest a set of planning conditions from which officers could pick, as appropriate depending upon the context of each planning application for a bike store. The full set could include:

1. Hours of use limited as appropriate to context. In residential areas we request:
  - Monday to Friday: 08:00 to 21:00
  - Saturday 09:00 to 21:00
  - Sunday 10:00 to 20:00.
2. Entrance way adaptations such as ramps rather than steps, quiet door closing mechanisms, and enough width for both rider and cycle to pass easily.
3. Sound proofing.
4. Heat insulation, or a requirement to maintain minimal room temperature.
5. Signage requiring cyclists to dismount on the footway.
6. Security measures to avoid open access and to register users.
7. Live CCTV camera coverage where possible.

We appreciate you asking about our local experience with this new sui generis use. We hope that our suggestions are helpful to you, both in considering application ref. 2021/4663/P, and in future cases.

-----

With particular reference to application ref. 2021/4663/P in Tower Court, the context is more densely residential than most. Every unit that is in use facing the site, and every unit above it, is residential.

The unit lies at the junction of three narrow pedestrian passageways behind Earlham Street and Monmouth Street. These are quiet at night, and every sound peak echoes in an environment with very little background noise late in the evening.

We therefore feel that the hours of use suggested in number 1 above would be appropriate, and the entranceway adaptations suggested in number 2.

We do not know enough about the structure of the building to know if number 3 would be appropriate, but number 4 would not be needed if there are changing facilities that mean customers require a warm room.

You have read the concerns of nearby residents that relate to the long footway, with corners, leading to the unit. We therefore believe that signage (number 5) would be appropriate here. We are happy to host a site visit to point out the reasoning.

The covering letter for the application states that this unit will be for the use of Shaftesbury's commercial tenants on a fob entry system. These tenants consist of restaurants, cafes, bars, shops and offices. Staff working late in the evening could either use a store in a less sensitive location, or space in racks very close by on Monmouth Street - which frees up outside office hours. We feel that fob entry and a keyholder register should be a condition of any consent, in order to prevent access being opened up later (number 6) and a live CCTV camera should be connected to Shaftesbury's Seven Dials security office (number 7).

Yours sincerely,

Amanda Rigby  
Vice-Chair

email: ARigby@CoventGarden.org.uk  
Mobile: 07957 388801