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Public Artwork  
St Martin's Theatre, London

Heritage Statement

April 2022

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## Notice

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## Document History

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# 1.0 Context

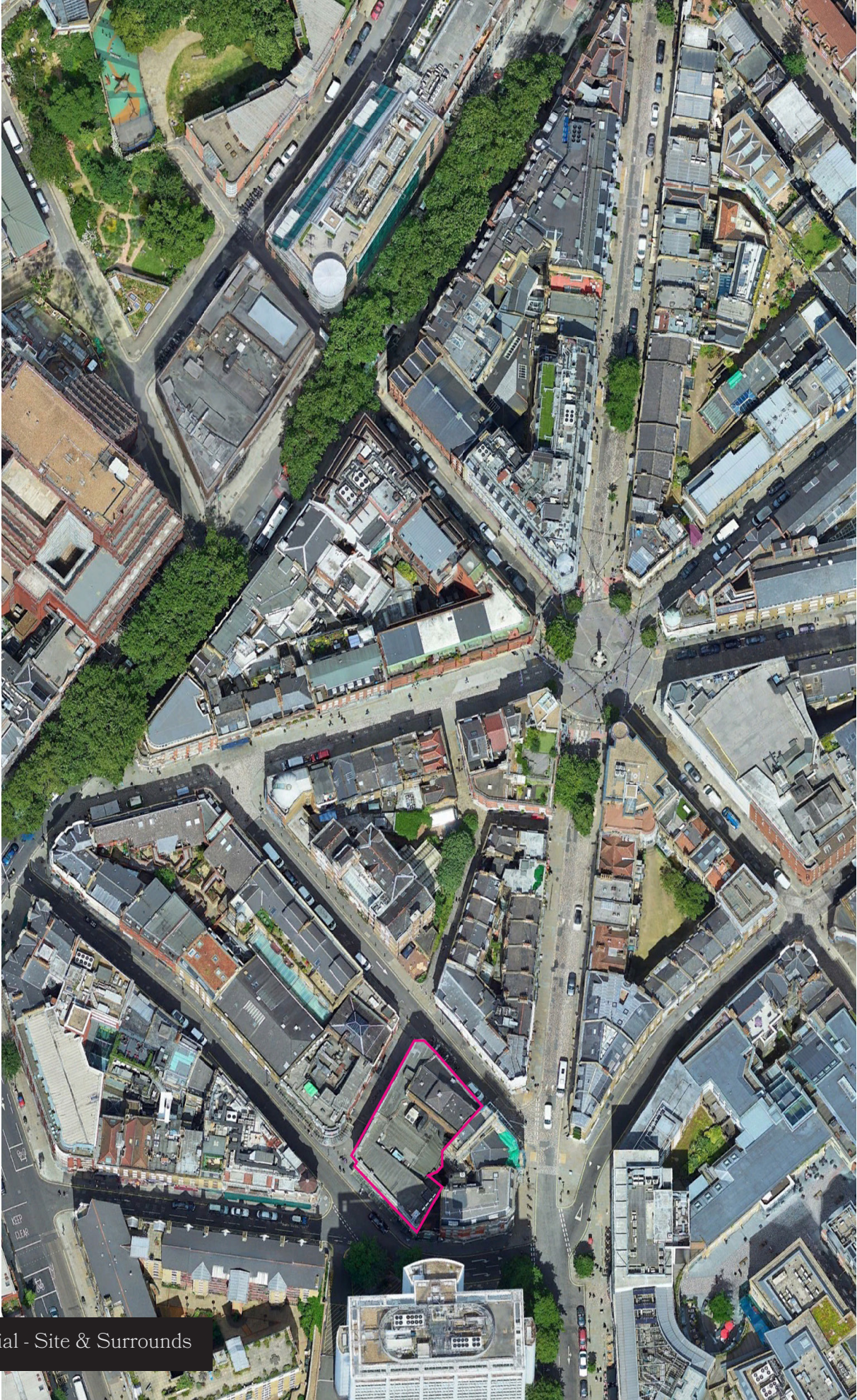
## 1.1 Introduction

This heritage statement is written in support of an application to install a painted, public artwork on the northern elevation of the St Martins Theatre in London. The statement is prepared on behalf of Adam Spiegel Productions who are the operators of the theatre and Wood Street Walls, the Community Interest Company commissioned to install the artwork. This statement should be read in conjunction with the Design and Access Statement, application form and plans which also accompany applications to the London Borough of Camden for Listed Building Consent and Advertising Consent.

## 1.2 Site & Surrounds

The entrance to the theatre is located on West Street, opposite the junction with Litchfield Street, where The Ivy restaurant is located. Tower Court runs adjacent to the north western side of the theatre, Tower Street along the north eastern (rear) elevation, and to the south east is a commercial office building, occupied in part by the entertainment trade union, Equity.

The surrounding area is dense, with low to medium scale buildings arranged between the historic radial street pattern of Seven Dials. Buildings are predominantly used for cultural or office purposes, with the site being located at the heart of London's famous West End theatre district.



Aerial - Site & Surrounds

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## 2.0 Historic Value

### 2.1 St Martins Theatre, West Street (1379186)

The property is registered by Historic England as being of Grade II significance for its heritage value:

Designed in 1916 by WGR Sprague as a companion to the Ambassadors Theatre (1913), West Street (qv), but for different owners. Built by Lenn Thornton and Company, the building has an Ashlar facade with banded rustication to ground floor.

The exterior of the building extends to 4 storeys, arranged in 5 bays with 10-window left return. As per the listing, 'At the ground floor there are round arch openings and a wide central entrance surmounted by a plain 20th Century canopy. Giant engaged Ionic columns in antis with rusticated end pilasters rise through the 1st, 2nd and 3rd floors, supporting an entablature, with triglyphs in the frieze, and parapet. First floor windows have Tuscan pilasters supporting pediments, above shouldered architraves and keyblocks.'

The interior of the building comprises a '2-tier auditorium, in Classical style, of polished hardwood. Turned balusters to balcony fronts. Side walls of auditorium have large Doric engaged columns and pilasters on pedestals supporting bold entablature which continues over the rectangular proscenium arch. Glazed domed ceiling. Stage machinery: nearly complete example of Edwardian (1916) wooden stage, marred only by alterations made to accommodate dimmer room in the sub-stage space. Represents one of the final stages in the development of timber stage machinery in England and an exceptional survival'. The



St. Martin's Theatre



St. Martin's Theatre - site



Architectural Review 'noted a change in style of decoration from the lavish showy palace to a traditional English domestic interior implying a more select audience'.

The St Martins Theatre has a cultural as well as historic value, being home Agatha Christie's play, The Mousetrap, since 1974 - making it the longest continual run of any show in the world. 2020 (the year in which the artwork was initially proposed), also marked 100 years since Agatha Christie published her first novel - The Mysterious Affair at Styles. In celebration, the Producer of The Mousetrap wishes to celebrate her achievements by painting a mural on the theatre wall.



The following listed buildings are located near the site:

### **2.2 The North Wing (1379047)**

A Grade II listed building on Tower Street adjoining the eastern side of the St Martins Theatre. Described as 'shop with accommodation over forming part of Guild House, No.18 (qv). C19 earlier. Yellow stock brick. Stucco cornice and blocking course. Shop front with pilasters and consoles carrying cornice. Shop window and doorway altered. House doorway with fanlight and panelled door. Gauged flat brick arches to recessed sash windows with original glazing bars'.

### **2.3 Guild House - South Wing (1379045)**

A Grade II listed building adjoining the North Wing and wrapping around the corner of tower Street and Upper St Martin's Lane. Listed as 'shop with accommodation over, the right hand bay of the right hand return forming No.18 North Wing (qv). Early C19. Yellow stock brick with rusticated stucco dressings. On corner with 1 window returns. 4 storeys. Stucco shopfront with pilasters and consoles carrying cornice. Shop windows and doorways altered. Gauged flat brick arches (painted) to recessed tripartite sash windows with original glazing bars. Rusticated stucco corner treatment with blind openings, 1st and 3rd floor round-arched. Stucco cornice and blocking course'.

### **2.4 The Ambassadors Theatre (1379185)**

A Grade II listed building on the opposite side of Tower Court, also designed by W G R Sprague. Listing describes the architectural interest of the building as '1913 theatre designed by W G R Sprague,

one of the most important late C19 and early C20 theatre architects; Completeness of design: both the Classical style exterior and the interior in Louis XVI style were designed by Sprague and include foyer, circle bar, auditorium and some original backstage features; Degree of survival: both exterior and interior are little altered; Historical interest: the theatre saw the West End debut of many famous artists including Ivor Novello, Hermione Gingold, Paul Robeson, Margaret Lockwood and Vivien Leigh and it was the original home of 'The Mousetrap', the world's longest running show; Group value: adjoins St Martin's Theatre of 1916, also by Sprague (Grade II) and 24 West Street (Grade II)'.

### **2.5 24 West Street (1379184)**

Grade II listed building 'St Giles (All Saints) Mission Church, now studios. c1700. Built by J Ardwin, facade rebuilt early C19. Yellow stock brick & stucco. Rectangular plan. 2 storeys, 3 bays. Round-headed, recessed windows through both floors with round-headed windows with modern glazing and stucco panel below. 2 entrances below windows at each end with stucco architraves and cornices. Stucco cornice below brick parapet'.

### **2.6 22 Tower Street (1379048)**

Grade II listed building. 'Board School, now converted to offices. c1874, altered late C20. Yellow stock brick with red brick and stone dressings. Steep slated roofs with gabled end bays, tall brick chimney-stacks and parapets. EXTERIOR: mainly 4 storeys. Not quite symmetrical composition of 2:1:3:1:2 windows with projecting end bays; 5 storey bell tower bay to left of entrance. Moulded floor strings. Central 3 bays divided by pilasters supporting a parapet of blind panels;

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3rd and 4th floors set back with late C20 glazed wall and curved roof below original lunettes. Main central entrance with stucco doorcase of paired banded pilasters carrying an entablature and rectangular overdoor with pilasters, flanked by ball finials, supporting a scrolled pediment with ball finial; round-arched doorway with panelled door and fanlight. Most windows round-arched with keystones; those flanking overdoor have gauged brick flat arches. 4th floor left hand bay, window with apron of 3 carved stone plaques with floral and foliar enrichment and inscribed "For LSB"; left hand bay, window with similar apron inscribed "1874". Right hand return has chimney-stack rising full height of building with 2 pedimented features. To left of chimney at 3rd floor height, a carved stone plaque, in rubbed red brick surround, depicting an angel showing a book to 2 young children'.

The listed buildings around the site contribute to the designation of the neighbourhood as a Conservation Area, this is discussed in greater detail in the planning policy section of this report.

## 3.0 Proposal

**It is proposed to paint a bespoke mural on the rear, Tower Street elevation of the theatre.** The artwork would cover the surface of Tower Street elevation and around the chamfered elevation on the corner with Tower Court. The total surface area of the artwork would be 288.7 sqm. No changes are proposed to the Tower Court or West Street elevations.

The artwork would range from brown, sepia tones, to purple and magenta. The two archival portraits of Agatha Christie would overlap and be complimented by an abstracted pattern of leaves and flowers.

The artwork would be partly visible from Upper St Martins Lane, and able to be enjoyed by pedestrians day and night. The artist and designer ATMA is experienced in portrait painting at scale, having completed artworks for the postal museum and William Morris Gallery amongst others.

For further details on the proposed development, refer also to the Design and Access Statement and plans accompanying the application.

Listed Building Consent is required for demolition, alterations or extension to a listed building that affect its character as a building of special architectural or historical interest. In accordance with the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, works for the alteration of a listed building are authorised is written consent has been granted by the local planning authority, in this case the London Borough of Camden.

METAL BALUSTRADE

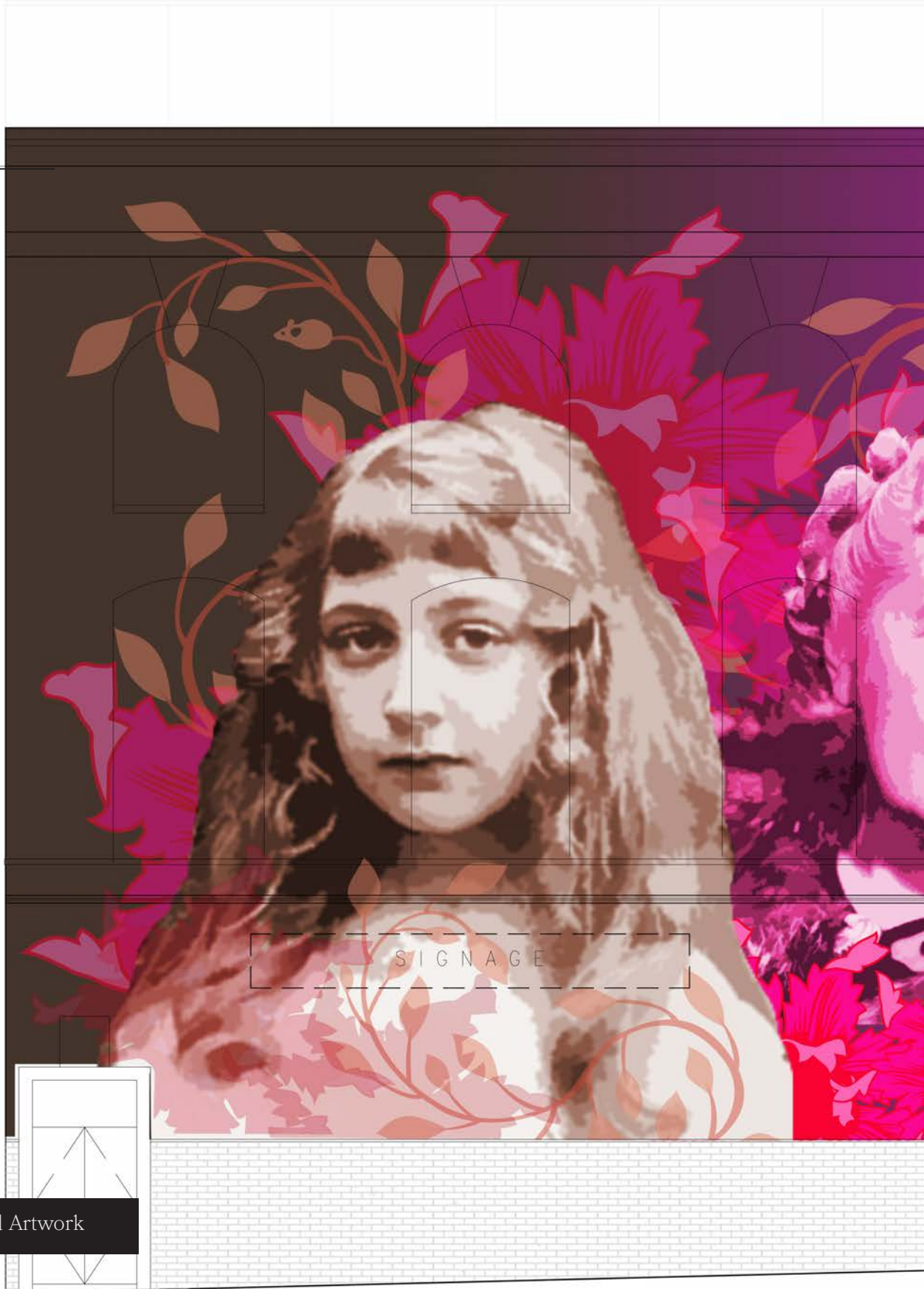
A J O I N I N G B U I L D I N G

S I G N A G E

Proposed Artwork

STAGE EXIT

T O W E R S T R E E T E L E V A T I O N





the secret  
of getting  
ahead  
is getting  
started

Agatha  
Christie

1870 - 1976



TOWER  
COURT

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## 4.0 Planning

### 4.1 Planning History

A number of applications have been made for Listed Building Consent (LBC) and planning permission at the site, the most recent and relevant of these are listed below:

- LS9804991R1 Works comprising the construction of signage on the rear elevation - Listed Building Consent granted, 1999
- AS9805073R1 The display of 200mm high lettering to the rear elevation - Advertising Consent granted, 1999
- LS9804991 Signage on rear elevation - application withdrawn, 1998
- AS9805073 Signage on rear elevation - advertising consent application withdrawn, 1998
- PS9704489 Removal of existing canopy and replacement with a new canopy - full planning permission granted, 1997
- LS9704411 Removal of existing canopy and replacement with a new canopy - Listed Building Consent granted with conditions, 1997
- AS9704488 Display of illuminated canopy sign - approval granted for advertising consent, 1997
- 9070161 Installation of three floodlights to roof parapet to illuminate building opposite (Orion House 5 Upper St. Martin's Lane) - Listed Building Consent granted, 1990
- 9000349 Installation of three floodlights to roof parapet to illuminate building opposite (Orion House 5 Upper St. Martin's Lane) - full planning permission granted, 1990



## **4.2 Planning Policy & Assessment**

### Designations

On the Camden Policies Map (2021), the site is designated as being within an Archaeological Priority Area and the Seven Dials Conservation Area.

### National

The National Planning Policy Framework (2021) sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied. It provides a framework within which locally-prepared plans for housing and other development can be produced.

Applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) says 'The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development' and that this is achieved through social, environmental and economic objectives.

There is no specific policy within the NPPF for culture, although it does describe theatres as a form of cultural and tourism development in the context of main town centre uses. The core land use planning principle within the NPPF that is considered relevant to this application is '16 - Conserving and enhancing the historic environment'. Paragraph 194 states that 'In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the

assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impacts of the proposal on their significance. As a minimum the relevant historic environment record should have been consulted and the heritage assets assessed using appropriate expertise where necessary'.

Tapestry consider that this document and the accompanying Design and Access Statement provide a sufficient level of detail for the large scale but otherwise relatively modest and reversible works that are proposed for the building. Tapestry is sufficiently qualified to assess the potential impact of a proposal on a listed building, having acted as a consultant to the National Trust, regularly undertaking Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments, and being a practice chartered with the Landscape Institute.

Paragraph 197 of the NPPF says that in determining applications for heritage assets 'local planning authorities should take account of:

- a). the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation;
- b). the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality; and
- c). the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness'. In considering the potential impacts of a proposed development, any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset should require clear and convincing justification.

The site is actively used for the purpose that it was constructed and minor works have recently been undertaken to assist with conservation of the buildings original features. The theatre continues to provide a source of employment and support London's creative industries. The proposal will create a feature that generates conversation and further enhances the experience of visitors to the area, many of whom are international guests attracted to the culture, heritage and hospitality of London's West End. The proposed artwork is a bespoke commission that would contribute positively to local character and distinctiveness.

As the only materials used in the artwork would be paint, it is a reversible intervention to the building. A limited amount of external lighting, not dissimilar to that already mounted on the building could also be removed at a later date. It is therefore contended that the proposal does not result in harm to the listed building.

Furthermore and for the following reasons, it is not felt that the proposal would harm the setting of other, nearby listed buildings:

- The site and surrounding listed buildings exist in a dynamic urban context, although included within a Conservation Area where proposals for development need to be carefully considered, there are nonetheless ongoing changes to the appearance of buildings to ensure they adapt to market need.
- The proposal would not obscure views of any listed building, nor would they change the layout, scale, materials, or form of any buildings.

- The proposal would not be visible from the primary façades of either the Ambassadors Theatre or the St Martins Theatre.
- There is a precedent for the use of contrasting colours on the surrounding shop fronts, including on Monmouth Street.
- The proposed colour scheme picks up on the reddish brown bricks on the rear of the adjacent Ambassadors Theatre. Magenta pink colours also feature in the neon light above the entrance to the St Martins Theatre.

#### London

The London Plan (2021) contains revised policy guidance on heritage and other matters. Policy HC1 Heritage conservation and growth states: 'Development proposals affecting heritage assets, and their settings, should conserve their significance, by being sympathetic to the assets' significance and appreciation within their surroundings. The cumulative impacts of incremental change from development on heritage assets and their settings should also be actively managed. Development proposals should avoid harm and identify enhancement opportunities by integrating heritage considerations early on in the design process'.

The scale, form, fenestration, materials and appearance of the listed building would remain unchanged. Viewed from West Street, the facade of the theatre would appear unchanged, retaining the same setting in a pair with the adjacent Ambassadors Theatre.

#### Local

The Conservation Area Statement for the Seven Dials (Covent

Garden) was adopted in 1998 and seeks to provide a clear indication of Camden Council's approach to the preservation and enhancement of the Seven Dials (Covent Garden) Conservation Area. The statement explains that West Street and Tower Street on the western side of the Conservation Area were laid out in the early 17th century before the Thomas Neale plan for Seven Dials and was subsequently incorporated into the radiating street plan.

The statement says that new development proposals should be guided by the Unitary Development Plan, however this has subsequently been superseded by the Camden Local Plan. The Camden Local Plan contains several policies that are considered relevant to the proposed development:

- Policy D1 Design - The Council requires development that respects local context or character and preserves or enhances the historic environment and heritage assets.
- Policy D2 Heritage - Camden Council will preserve, and where appropriate, enhance Camden's rich and diverse heritage assets and their settings, including conservation areas and listed buildings.

As per the National and London heritage conservation policies, it is not considered that the proposal would harm heritage assets or their setting. Indeed, the proposed artwork is considered an enhancement to a heritage asset, highlighting the theatres historic value through a creative, contemporary intervention.

The proposal is believed to meet these tests as there is a clear

historical connection with the proposed location; it is more than 20 years after the death of the individual depicted in the portrait; the area immediately surrounding the site does not have a high concentration of other artworks; the memorial artwork will be of the highest quality from an established artist specialising in this type of work; the celebrates the achievements of a female writer; would not pose any safety or security risks; has the support of the theatre owners; and it would require no maintenance.

Camden Planning Guidance on Advertisements (March 2018) says that 'the most satisfactory advertisements are those which take into account:

- the character and design of the property
- the appearance of its surroundings
- the external fabric of the host building.

Though the applicant team do not agree that the proposed artwork is advertisement, the position of the mural, its colour palette and the choice of a simple material (that is able to be painted over) also meet guidance on advertisements by respecting the host building and its surrounding.

Overall, the proposal is a temporary intervention on the rear elevation of a Grade II listed building. The proposed artwork would not be visible from the primary face on West Street and is not considered to harm the appearance of the listed building, or the setting of other listed buildings within its vicinity. The proposal is considered to meet the objectives of relevant national, London and local planning policies, and should therefore be approved.



