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Planning Solutions Team
London Borough of Camden
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via: Planning@Camden.gov.uk

21st July 2022

Dear Camden South Area Planning team,

Re application ref. 2022/2334/A - Neon signs at 63 Neal Street

Covent Garden Community Association, as the amenity society for the area, must object to this application and ask the council to refuse it.

The application form seeks consent for one fascia sign 4 metres long, and one hanging sign 0.63m square set above fascia level, both featuring bright red neon tube lighting and intermittent illumination.

The site sits well within the Seven Dials Conservation Area, characterised by streets laid out in the 17th century. The sign is unsympathetic to this character and harms the conservation area.

The site is opposite, and next to, a number of family flats. And the wider area is densely residential. Because the applicant has already installed the neon signs, we are fully aware of the problems that they cause. These problems include:

- Light pollution from the bright signs shining across the street into flats until very late at night.
- Red light dominating the street scene after dark.

The proposals are contrary to much of Camden's Local Plan Policy D4 (Advertisements), for example:

- Paragraph 7.85 states that advertisements should not become unduly dominant in the street scene or cause light pollution that disturbs residents at night. It also states that illuminated signs, both internal and external, should not be flashing or intermittent. Yet the lighting that has been installed is dominant when lit, causes light pollution and is intermittent.
- Paragraph 7.87 states that shopfront advertisements will only be acceptable at fascia level or below because advertisements above fascia level can appear visually obtrusive and unattractive and, where illuminated, they can cause light pollution to neighbouring residential properties. Yet the lighting that has been installed is above fascia level, is dominant when lit, causes light pollution and is intermittent.

It is worth noting that, in November 2021, we contacted the applicants before the business opened. We informed them of the context of the premises which they would be renting, and we discussed the operation of their transferred licence. This is standard practice for us if we have not been introduced to a licensee by their lawyers. We had a constructive discussion.

A short time afterwards they ceased to respond to our calls or emails. Their builders then installed an unconsented, partially opening shopfront. Soon afterwards there was an opening party characterised by late night noise and antisocial behaviour. This way of operating has been repeated very often since. It causes distress to local residents, particularly those in the social housing flats at 70 Neal Street directly opposite only a few metres away, whose children can't sleep. There have been numerous complaints.

The premises has also used unconsented tables & chairs late at night which cause nuisance, and has broken the terms of its alcohol licence. It is subject to enforcement action by both Camden Planning and Licensing departments.

All in all, the applicants have been really bad neighbours since before they opened last year, and have shown no respect for the locality or for the rules. It is no surprise that they have also been in dispute with HMRC and their workers.



Workers and union reps outside Macmerry's flagship Abandon Ship London (Image)

It is therefore also no surprise that the drawings accompanying the application are incomplete, as can be seen when compared with the photograph above published in March 2022.

It is also regrettable that some of the information on the application form is untrue:

- The maximum heights of letters and symbols are stated as 0.4 centimetres and 0.6 centimetres on the fascia and hanging sign respectively – these stated dimensions are obviously far too small.
- The applicant states that "Previous neon and fascia signage was removed prior to install" whereas there was no previous neon signage.

Please refuse this application outright and require the applicant to remove the unconsented signs. One might imagine that the signs could simply be turned off; but, given the behaviour of the applicant to date, such a requirement from the council is likely to be ignored, so the distress and nuisance would continue.

Yours faithfully,

Elizabeth Bax
Chair, Planning Subcommittee

Email: Planning@CoventGarden.org.uk, [REDACTED]