

Covent Garden Community Association ('CGCA') **Trustees' report for the year ended 31st March 2015**

The Trustees present their report and financial statements of the charity for the year ended 31st March 2015. The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the accounting policies set out in note 1 to the financial statements and comply with the charity's trust deed, and with applicable law and the requirements of the Statement of Recommended Practice, 'Accounting and Reporting by Charities'.

Chair's note

When the CGCA was started 44 years ago we had a specific remit, focussing on campaigns to protect our neighbourhood from the Greater London Council's brutal designs for a 'modern' Covent Garden. Looking back, the victories really were an amazing achievement, providing as they did so many new homes, and saving all the beautiful buildings that make the area so special. But now we have a wider task, and much of our work is dealing with the fruit of the area's undoubted success, some of which comes at the cost of our community.

Our current objective is to keep a liveable balance in Covent Garden. We deal with seemingly endless late night licence applications, constant planning applications to exploit every inch of the area, complex environmental challenges, and issues that risk our community's safety. This is set against a difficult financial background that has affected both our councils to our detriment. Without regular grant aid from either London Borough of Camden or Westminster City Council, we now rely even more on the generous support of our members, and friendly local businesses of all sizes.

Our vast volume of work is divided largely between our Executive Committee members and other volunteers according to their expertise and experience. Without these volunteers, we would not be able to give Covent Garden the voice that it needs, and our heartfelt thanks go to them again this year. We have two part-time members of staff: Meredith Whitten, an urban planner who ably co-ordinates and advises our Planning Subcommittee, and Kathy Pimlott, whom we welcomed in November to help get our website up and running and to support us in other areas.

Objectives, Governance and Structure

The Association is governed in accordance with the Constitution dated October 1971 as subsequently amended. It aims to maintain and improve the quality of life for residents and workers in the Covent Garden area..

We give a voice to local people and work closely with our local councils, businesses and other service providers. We promote high standards of planning and architecture, secure the preservation and improvement of buildings and features of historic or public interest including those in the public realm, and seek to stimulate public interest in the area. The Association is recognised by both City of Westminster and London Borough of Camden as the amenity society to be consulted on matters relating to the geographical area set out in our constitution.

The charity is run by a voluntary Executive Committee of Trustees as detailed below and elected at our last General Meeting on 16th November 2014. Delegated authority is given to specialist subcommittees of trustees and others in the areas of Planning, Licensing, Environment and various events.

Membership of the Association is open to those who live or work in the Covent Garden area; Associate membership is available to those from elsewhere.

Activities, Achievements and Performance

Over the year we held or were represented at over 150 meetings. Most of these involved serious and detailed discussions of issues, policies and activities which have a profound impact on us all. However, we were also invited to represent the community at more light-hearted occasions. These included the unique Covent Garden Rent Ceremony in June, the charity Quiz Night in October sponsored by Capco, the opening of the revamped Film Museum, the unveiling of the statue of St. Paul by Dame Judi Dench, the installation of Simon Buckley as rector at Soho with the Bishop of London, and St. Clement Danes School's ever-delightful annual Oranges and Lemons Service in March.

Licensing

During the year the Licensing Subcommittee, chaired by David Kaner, considered 25 licensing applications submitted to either Westminster or Camden Councils. We worked in depth on 16 of the applications for new licenses or material variations to existing licences where there was a threat to residential amenity. This was a higher number than the previous year. They included several new licences for premises that are neither bars nor restaurants, such as coffee shops with an alcohol element in the evening.

Increasingly applicants are willing to negotiate conditions with us directly in advance and come up with something which is felt to be satisfactory on both sides. We resolved 9 of the 16 applications in this way. This is valuable because it takes less resource for everyone involved and usually results in a better set of conditions than will emerge at a contested hearing.

Some of the applications that we were involved in were for the new Bow Street Hotel (for which we agreed licence conditions, although it is likely to be revised by new owners), a new 'Five Guys' on Villiers Street, two new coffee shops (Grind in High Holborn and Maiden Lane) as well as a new venture for an indoor food market, 'Startisans', on Shelton Street.

At the end of the year we received an application from McDonalds to vary the licence for their new site at Cambridge Circus, which was licensed previously as a traditional restaurant and as a result has a 'supper hours' style licence until 1am. This is a major concern because of the risk that a late opening fast food premises will change the nature of this part of Covent Garden by attracting people to the area and retaining them here after other premises close and after we would normally expect them have left. A lot of work in response to this application has been taking place in 2015/6.

Planning

Our Planning Committee, Chaired by Elizabeth Bax, meets on a fortnightly basis to consider planning applications made in (or affecting) the Covent Garden area. Attendance can be as many as 20 people depending upon the level of concern or interest in a particular application, with a core committee of 8. We also host presentations on major developments, and attend hearings at our Town Halls.

During the period we discussed 248 applications: 163 in City of Westminster and 85 in London Borough of Camden, with an average of 20 applications on the agenda for each meeting. These varied across a wide range - from major demolition and construction works, to minor revisions or changes of use. Some applications return to us for further consultation following developers' negotiations with the council planning department and comments made by CGCA, or with changes made to the proposals due to initial refusal of permission.

In the last two years there has been an emphasis on changes of use being from office to residential. Whilst we generally welcome extra residential units, these are rarely of a type that would suit primary residence living, and are often in locations that are subject to a lot of extraneous noise; they are more suitable for holiday or short term lets to which we almost always object. The new change in legislation to dilute Section 25 of the Greater London Council (General Powers) Act 1973 - which currently prohibits all rentals of less than 90 days - may encourage holiday and very short term letting, which is often detrimental to our long term residents. This is proposed in the Deregulation Bill which we started work on in the Autumn. CGCA is representing the amenity societies of central London in lobbying the House of Lords for amendments to protect our communities.

We have again seen a number of applications for a change to 'dual use', to which we always object. It would grant the applicant permission to change use at some point in the future, typically between A1 and B1 (shop and office) or A1 and A3 (shop and restaurant) or B1 and C3 (office and dwelling), without the need to apply for planning permission or consult with neighbouring residents at that time. This effectively removes the premises from planning control, whereas the planning system is set up in a way that otherwise gives local people the opportunity to voice their concerns before a change of use is granted.

Presentations this year these included, amongst others:

- The Royal Opera House, to open up the internal areas of the building, improve disabled access, alter the terrace restaurant, add a new terrace and provide a new ballet studio. The ballet studio aspect was withdrawn having drawn many negative comments; the rest of the application has gained approval.
- More works to the old Bow Street Magistrates Court. Although these were since suspended again, we continue to monitor the situation not least because of the police museum element for which we campaigned.
- Covent Garden London (Capital and Counties), a major landowner and developer in the area, with new plans for the historic Sanctuary Spa sight in Floral Street; work has yet to commence on this.

Some new proposals of note this year included:

- Conversion of Hudson House in Tavistock Street. CGCA and local residents objected strongly to the loss of this unique Grade II* listed office space. The building was a purpose built office designed in 1904 by Edwin Lutyens for Country Life magazine, who remained there until the mid 1970's. It would be a real loss to the area should they receive consent. The Luytens Trust also objected.
- The highly contentious proposal to demolish a 30 year old Seifert building at 90 Long Acre (First Chicago House) and replace it with two buildings of greater mass containing over 100 residential units, office and retail uses. Surrounding residents are already dreading the thought of 2 years of dirty, noisy works and living in the shadow of a new building which is a number of stories higher in parts than the existing already overly large block. Consent has not yet been received for this and we very much hope that Westminster council will ask the developers to think again.

Major developments that carried over from last year included:

- Mixed-use redevelopment of the former post office site just north of Drury Lane. Working jointly with Bloomsbury Association, CGCA met with the developers, organised public meetings and gathered feedback from local residents. This massive block is likely to have a wide impact on its neighbours, despite a number of concessions from the developer in response to our campaign to include more social housing and publicly accessible space into the design. Consent was finally granted this year.
- Conversion of Victorian offices into 38 residential units on the block bounded by Tavistock, Wellington, Burleigh and Exeter Streets.
- Parker House, a former hostel, being privately redeveloped. We are sad that Camden council has missed what we see as a prime opportunity to create a mix of social and market housing on the site. This denies key workers the chance to live as part of the community in which they work, an opportunity which we believe also brings us far better services. Our police commute in from cheaper suburbs and can't really get the feel of their patch, while our nurses sit exhausted on public transport after punishing shifts; this is not what we fought for 40 years ago.
- Kings Court and the Carriage Hall, involving development of high-end residential units, shops and restaurants. A new cut-through is to be created from Long Acre to King Street via Floral Street, and the demolition of a sturdy 1980's office building will alter the character of Floral Street. We are most sorry to see that the beautiful open space within the Carriage Hall is set to be enclosed and leased as a retail unit.
- The complex St. Giles / Denmark Street site. The development seeks to take advantage of the massive increase in footfall anticipated after the redevelopment of Tottenham Court Road station. CGCA has been working on this with Soho Society and Bloomsbury Association, successfully arguing to keep residential uses on St. Giles High Street and to retain the unique character of Denmark

Street. The developer will contribute affordable housing close-by in Endell Street.

- Redevelopment of Centre Point tower. Floors of the tower are to be converted into more than 80 high-end flats and some mixed commercial uses, with affordable housing on the site of the old Intrepid Fox pub at the back of Centre Point House. The creation of a piazza here also responds to the anticipated increase in footfall. To quote the developers: "With the completion of Crossrail, Tottenham Court Road station will be almost as busy as Heathrow Airport. As St. Giles will become a focal point for those who visit the capital, it is important to create attractive public space around the revitalised Centre Point".
- Mercers 'Block C' between Long Acre and Shelton Street. This mixed-use redevelopment includes a new cut-through linking Mercer Street and Langley Street, to increase shopper footfall and access for servicing.

Servicing new developments is an increasing issue for the community. Deliveries and refuse collection may add hundreds of new vehicle journeys into Covent Garden over the next few years. CGCA is negotiating for more stringent servicing conditions, and we are currently speaking with local landowners and developers about using shared servicing providers so that the number of large delivery lorries and refuse/recycling vehicles are kept to a minimum. We look for reversing tones to be switched off at night and early in the morning, and for simple solutions such as rubber wheels on cage trolleys to be used to reduce noise. We press for bottle crushers and pulverisers to minimise the noise of tipping glass bottle, and most new premises now comply with this.

We continue to comment on table and chair applications, and considered 93 new, extended or renewal applications during this year. There were almost twice as many on the Westminster side of our area than on the Camden side. When managed well, tables and chairs can be a welcome addition to life in our area. Our aim is to ensure safe passage for pedestrians along the pavements and to minimise the noise nuisance that can be caused to residents nearby - usually those living above. We press to maintain the 2 metres clear pavement width that is recommended by TfL, and speak with or report premises that are in breach of their consents and causing problems. We also seek to secure suitable end of day times for the use of tables and chairs, so that they are safely stowed away and do not cause a nuisance by attracting late night revellers or by being dragged inside late at night.

Air conditioning units are always an issue, with numerous office and retail premises causing problems, and also some new residential developments. We welcome replacements with new and more efficient units and re-siting away from residential windows.

We continue to monitor planning breaches, some of which have been flagrant in our area, and to ask the authorities to take the necessary enforcement action. This can include obliging the offending party to meet with residents who are affected, to reach a solution; many of our residents are vulnerable and they rely on CGCA to take up their cause. An example this year was a pizza cafe on Drury Lane which erected a home-made extraction system without consent that is seriously affecting the health of elderly residents living above and behind. We also advocate for residents who are being 'decanted' to make way for more expensive development, in some cases after many years as part of our community. If

possible we seek an alternative solution from the developer, an example this year being in Drury Lane as well.

Meredith Whitten, our planning advisor, continues to forge a good relationship with planning officers on both sides of the area which enables us to engage more fully and have a greater depth of knowledge of some of the larger developments.

The West End Partnership Board

The Chair of the CGCA's Licensing Committee, David Kaner, served during the year as a member of the West End Partnership Board. This was set up in 2013 as a response to the report of the West End Commission chaired by Sir Howard Bernstein. The Board comprises representatives of various stakeholders in the West End of London, including TfL, the Police, Business Improvement Districts, landowners, and both Westminster and Camden Councils. David Kaner and Matthew Bennett (Soho Society) represent the amenity societies who are members of the West End Community Network (WECN), and so are there to represent the interests of residents.

The West End Partnership Board has a number of working groups covering areas such as Transport and Infrastructure, Evening and Night-Time Economy, and the Public Realm. The WECN has representatives on each of these. The focus for 2014/5 has been the progress of the work of these groups in order to feed into a Vision document for the whole West End including the Covent Garden area – a vision which is shared, hopefully, by all of the stakeholders and makes sure that the interests of residents are fully taken into account. Associated with the Vision is a Delivery Plan which will turn the Vision into reality over the 2015-2030 period.

At Board discussions it has become clear that there is a tension between the objective of both Councils and Businesses to make the area busier and more vibrant, and the view of residents that it is already busy and vibrant enough. As the Vision and Delivery Plan develop it will be important that we identify ways in which we can mitigate the impact of growth in activity, including what comes from London-wide developments such as Crossrail.

Policing

We continue to work on many levels for our community, with both our local police forces.

We attend both Westminster and Camden Safer Neighbourhood Team meetings to highlight problems and to set priorities on issues that affect our area. In Camden, our Holborn and Covent Garden Safer Neighbourhoods Team continues to do sterling work. In Westminster we have the Covent Garden Safer Neighbourhood Team based at Charing Cross police station.

An area of serious concern to residents is the recent return of blatant drug related activity to our streets, particularly in Camden where beat officers tend to be less in evidence. Many of us remember the appalling situation in the late 1990's and early 2000's, and the hard work put in by us and others on the West End Drug Partnership

to change things for the better. With the dissolution of that body, there seems to be less co-ordination across boroughs and agencies. A focus for us for the coming year will be to encourage more work between police based at Holborn, Charing Cross and West Central stations (the latter covering Soho). We are also planning localised meetings with senior officers after the disastrous decision to disband the night time tasking team around Cambridge Circus and Shaftesbury Avenue, which kept things under control.

Environment and Public Realm

With pollution high on the political agenda, we continue to press for greening of the area at every opportunity. Trees are essential to this, but they are vulnerable to traffic and to careless contractors. We held a 'walkabout' with Camden officers in June Camden to examine locations where they need to replace damaged or destroyed trees.

We play an active part in Westminster's plans for the area's public realm, as reflected in the Covent Garden Action Plan. This deals with the Westminster half of Covent Garden by splitting it into 4 areas. Areas 1 and 3 were again busy this year, with Area 3's activity again spilling-over into useful 'cross-border' work in Camden, as far as Cambridge Circus.

Work took place with both councils on 'decluttering' - removing odd or obsolete elements from the street. As part of this, the long-awaited street lighting project in Seven Dials and neighbouring streets was rolled out last year and was subject to testing and trouble-shooting this year. The project is led by David Bieda of the Seven Dials Trust in partnership with Camden, Westminster, English Heritage, Shaftesbury plc and the Mercers' Company. It is the fruit of many years' work, and CGCA has been involved through the Area 3 steering group. The old lighting columns have been replaced with gas-lamp style lanterns on buildings, incorporating 21st century technology in a way that is an international first and may well be replicated elsewhere.

Enforcement is still weak against dangerous street clutter such as 'A boards', random furniture, and piles of refuse being left out. We continue to take 'walkabouts' with council officers to deal with some of this, but liaison with responsible landlords to put pressure on their tenants seems to yield more success.

The major Crossrail project also affects our area. We continue to be represented at meetings that are held to discuss its progress and forthcoming proposals, but are concerned that the excavations are creeping under so wide a swathe of Covent Garden – under Shorts Gardens, through to parts of Seven Dials.

The CGCA regularly reports highway defects such as potholes, flood points, defective paving and street lighting, fallen trees etc.

We look forward to working on the re-vamp of Earlham Street and its market. CGCA responded in detail in 2012 when Camden consulted on a new Street Trading Strategy, as did the local landowners and the Seven Dials Trust. There is an opportunity here to create something worthy of what is Covent Garden's 'Western gateway'.

Covent Garden is a magnet for film makers. This activity, like many others, is interesting and good for the area as long as it is done with sensitivity to residents. This year we negotiated the first 'filming agreement', with Camden Film Office, to cover any shoots taking place in the Seven Dials area. It incorporates agreed notice periods, rules of behaviour and hours of work.

Events and Partnership working

As usual, we took part in the annual May Fayre at St. Paul's churchyard, with our ever popular plant stall. Although the day was unseasonably cold, many old friends stopped to catch up with us amid the crowds who always pass through during the day to watch the Punch and Judy shows, Maypole dancing and varied entertainment.

In contrast, our Covent Garden Street Festival in September was blessed with sunshine; it was a resounding success. The festival is gathering momentum, providing an opportunity for the local community to come together and celebrate. Our festival committee did an excellent job in organising stalls and entertainment and persuading local businesses to donate a sparkling array of raffle prizes. It follows hard on the heels of the St. Giles Agricultural Show and Fair, where we always disseminate information, and which is now becoming a regular feature of the Covent Garden calendar.

Our annual community carol service, held at St Paul's church was another great success. The event was well attended, as ever, and enabled the community regardless of their religious beliefs to come together and enjoy the friendly atmosphere in a magnificent setting.

Our work continues with our fellow amenity societies nearby, such as The Soho Society (Jo Weir, our Chair, sits on their executive), Bloomsbury Association, Fitzrovia Neighbourhood Association and other smaller groups. We share many similar problems, and collaborative work highlights our shared concerns for the whole area and the welfare of our residents, workers and visitors.

We took part in an important campaign with Soho over unsatisfactory rearrangements for the GP surgery there, of which many Covent Garden residents are also patients, setting up the 'Soho Patients Action group'. We helped to circulate flyers for the first public meeting and our members attended a noisy march through Soho in July, complete with Chinese musicians led by a dancing lion.

We continue to be an active part of the West End Community Network, founded by amenity societies from across Central London to tackle issues together: everything from deliveries at antisocial hours, to elements of the Mayor's London Plan.

We work closely with other community organisations in Covent Garden, such as Dragon Hall, the Phoenix Garden, Seven Dials Trust, and the Seven Dials club. We consult with active local tenants associations, and encourage residents to set them up in new buildings.

We are also represented on The Covent Garden Area Trust, The Jubilee Sports Hall, Friends of Lincoln's Inn Fields (of which we are founding members), Save London's Theatres, WCC Civic Watch, and the West End Amenity Society Forum (WASF).

Financial review

The Association continues its work mainly through the efforts of committed volunteers, many of whom live or work in the Covent Garden area. Our costs are met through a mixture of member subscriptions, donations and grants.

We are grateful to the London Borough of Camden, Westminster City Council, and many local people and businesses for their financial or other forms of support during this period.

Our income as stated in the accounts decreased from £18,555 in 2013-14 to £8,268 this year, while expenditure dropped from £20,097 to £11,753. The variation was due to a spike in income and expenditure in 2013-14 for a project that was mainly funded by a £10,000 grant from the Heritage Lottery fund. The project enabled CGCA, working with Westminster City Archives, to distil the best materials from our archives and create a permanent record of local history in an exhibition and film, and on the internet.

We have managed to control core expenditure in recent years by moving to a small office within the Seven Dials Community Centre, which is far cheaper to run than a stand-alone unit, and by working without a full-time paid administrator. We pay for specialist support work only for our Planning subcommittee and have taken on a part-time administrator for one year.

Amid greater pressures on the voluntary sector, we are nevertheless confident that Covent Garden's community will find a way to afford to continue to stand up for our unique area at the heart of the Capital.

Reserves policy and risk management

The trustees continue to review any major risks which may be faced by the charity and reserves are set to provide sufficient resources in the event of adverse conditions.

Our policy is to hold a general reserve of at least 1 year's expenditure, being the greater of the mean of the past 2 or 3 years' turnover as deemed appropriate by the trustees. Past years' turnovers were 2014-15 £8,268, 2013-14: £18,555, 2012-13: £8,554, 2011-12: £40,340. Our general reserve should therefore be at least £11,792. It currently stands at £3,978, with an allocation of £17,500 for a project to which we are committed in relation to recent planning legislation. We have two designated reserves: a £20,000 relocation fund to move from our current office, and a £30,000 legal fighting fund. We judge the financial position to be sustainable in the medium-term, although the operational position is more critical because of the lack of paid-for capacity. We are seriously concerned that our services are constrained by low income. This year we covered a £3,485 loss from reserves, and last year it was £1,542. We are likely to have to continue to meet a portion of our operating costs from reserves next year.

There is a strict system of financial control in place. The trustees have also examined other operational and business risks which we face and confirm that they have established systems to mitigate the significant risks.

Trustees

The trustees who held office during all or part of the period are:

J. Weir (Chair)
A. Rigby (Vice Chair)
E. Bax (Honorary Secretary)
R. Bent
B. Bhuiya (who did not stand for re-election in December 2014)
S. Gray
M. Houston
M. Leeson (who did not stand for re-election in December 2014)
M. Zini-Lopes

Trustees are nominated by members of the Association, and they stand for election at a General Meeting. Additional trustees and committee members may be co-opted outside a General Meeting where the trustees believe that they have the necessary skills to contribute to the charity's development.

The trustees are required to comply with statutory accounting and reporting requirements, preparing statements for each financial year that are compatible with the Charities (Accounts and Reports) regulations 2008 as they apply to smaller charities.

Voluntary help and gifts in kind

Once again, it is difficult to record the true number of hours spent in a voluntary capacity during this last year. We have benefited from countless volunteers who gave of their precious time willingly in order to maintain the high standards of response expected of us as a recognised amenity society, especially in the areas of licensing, planning and public realm. The trustees are very grateful to these volunteers without whom the pressure of work would have been overwhelming.

We are also grateful once again to those businesses in the area who have chosen to help us in a range of ways.

Approved and signed on behalf of the Trustees



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Date: 20th November 2015

J. Weir
Chair