



Application for the designation of the Covent Garden North neighbourhood area

APPENDIX 3: Annual report of the Trustees of the organisation making the application

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**Covent Garden Community Association ('CGCA')
Trustees' report for the year ended 31st March 2014**

The Trustees present their report and financial statements of the charity for the year ended 31st March 2014. 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 43 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 area's undoubted success, some of which comes at the cost of our community.

We all know the problems arising from such success, and our current objective is to keep a liveable balance. We deal with seemingly endless late night licence applications, constant revamping of old buildings, complex environmental problems, issues that risk our community's safety, etc. etc. And all this is set against a very 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 between our Executive Committee members and other volunteers according to their expertise and experience. Without these volunteers, we would not be able function at all, and our heartfelt thanks go to them again this year.

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. 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 approaching 200 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 such as the Quiz Night at the Film Museum sponsored by Capco; our neighbour the Soho Society's fortieth birthday, held at The House of St Barnabas; and St. Clement Danes School's delightful annual Oranges and Lemons Service.

Licensing

During the year we considered 20 licensing applications submitted to either Westminster or Camden Councils. We worked in depth on 10 of the applications for new licenses or material variations to existing licences where there was a threat to residential amenity. This was a lower number than in previous years. We believe that this is because most existing licence holders have concluded that they are unlikely to get an extension of hours because of the combination of Council policies and pressure from local residents.

We also appeared at fewer hearings because, in most cases, applicants were willing to negotiate conditions with us directly in advance and come up with something which was felt to be satisfactory on both sides. This process is important because the council Licensing Panel hearings which determine licenses can be something of a lottery. In at least one case this year where we did go to a hearing the decision was one which did not satisfy either the applicant or the CGCA. We continue to press the Councils, particularly Camden, to improve the training of the Councillors who sit on these panels. Training did take place in 2013 and there appears to have been some improvement in the operation of panels.

Last year we noted the increasing number of applications for food led venues which are not traditional restaurants. Our concern was that, although they offer alcohol with food, they do not provide a full table meal and so cannot operate under the usual "alcohol ancillary to food" conditions. As well as these we are now seeing coffee bars that wish to offer a bar style service with alcohol in the evening. These are usually small premises and alcohol only forms a small proportion of their total sales, but in the evening period the focus can be on alcohol rather than coffee. They also have the effect of causing people to stay in the area for a last coffee or nightcap rather than leave. This disturbs residents around them. So far we have been successful in limiting these operations but we need to keep a careful eye on them.

Planning

Our Planning Committee, chaired by Mike Leeson during this period, meets on a fortnightly basis to consider planning applications made in the Covent Garden area. Attendance can be as many as 30 people depending upon the level of concern or interest in a particular application, with a core committee attending of 7. During the period we considered an average of 20 applications per meeting. These varied across a wide range - from major demolition and construction to minor changes of use.

For major developments we host one or more presentations, enabling the local community to understand the plans and ask questions of the developers and their architects. It is also a forum to make suggestions to

mitigate any concerns. In some cases these meetings include council officers as part of a wider negotiation that may take many months. We are fortunate to have a good relationship with the major landowners in Covent Garden; our views are listened to and often incorporated in their plans.

Some new proposals of note this 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 and gathered quite a lot of concerned feedback from local residents. This massive block is likely to have a wide impact on its neighbours and we anticipate a good deal more work on it.
- The new Hoxton hotel, a conversion of an office building on the corner of High Holborn and Newton Street. This development was of concern when permission was previously given to Premier Inn, and became even controversial because of the nature of this more boutique style hotel whose sister establishment in Shoreditch sells rooms at an hourly rate. The greatest concern, however, was of servicing from the back and side streets which are highly residential, and after a prolonged dialogue a number of concessions were won.
- Conversion of Victorian offices into 38 residential units on the block bounded by Tavistock, Wellington, Burleigh and Exeter Streets.

Major developments that carried over from last year included:

- The recent sell-off of Parker House, a former hostel, to private developers. 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.

- Bow Street Magistrates Court redevelopment into a hotel after many years sadly lying empty in this important location.

Last year we reported a sharp increase in applications to convert offices to residential units, and this has continued. This is of concern to us because the residential units are usually studios or one bedroom flats that are not intended for long term occupation as people's main residence, and we know that tenants who are here for less than 3 years tend not to become involved in the community. Importantly, we are losing low cost office space and driving out the fledgling or small businesses that have long been part of the character of Covent Garden. As local people and businesses realise the implications, there is a groundswell of opinion against such 'gentrification' across the West End.

Smaller flats are also very tempting for 'short lets' which are illegal under Section 25 of the Greater London Council (General Powers) Act 1973 that prohibits any let of less than 90 days without planning permission. The rule was introduced in the 1970s in response to concerns that a proliferation of short-term lets was leading to a loss of community and reducing the number of permanent homes. However there was a move by Government to remove these protections with the introduction of the Deregulation Bill in the early part of 2014 – a change that we are vigorously opposing.

There have also been a number of applications for 'dual use', to which CGCA always objects as it is granting the applicant permission to change use at some point in the future, typically between retail and office or residential, without the need to apply for planning permission or to consult with neighbouring residents at that time. The planning system is set up to give local people the opportunity to voice their concerns before a change of use is granted, and we believe that this type of application removes those rights.

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 increasingly strongly with developers, to put in place acceptable management servicing plans upon which our councils can make planning permission conditional. Issues tend to centre around noise, so the timing of deliveries is crucial, as well as the provision of waste processing within buildings. CGCA is pressing for consolidation to be used to merge loads before they reach our neighbourhood to reduce the number of vehicle movements.

We continue to monitor flagrant planning breaches in our area and to ask the authorities to take the necessary enforcement action. This often includes 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.

We continue to comment on table and chair applications, and considered 87 new, extended or renewal applications during this year. Whilst 'pavement society' is part of life in our area, it is still important that we strike an acceptable balance between commercial pressures and what will have an impact on our residents and on pedestrians. We press to maintain the 2 metres clear distance that is recommended by TfL for pavement use, and regularly report premises that are in breach of their consents. We also seek to ensure that there are suitable end of day times for the use of tables and chairs, and that they are then safely stowed away so as not to cause a nuisance with late night noise.

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.

Shop front alterations are treated with caution. In the Seven Dials area we are fortunate to have as a reference the Renaissance Study to protect the character of the conservation area. However, in some parts of Covent Garden shop fronts have been removed prior to any planning application and unfortunately enforcement is rare.

Due to pressure of other work at CGCA, the neighbourhood plan project was not developed further during this financial year.

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 contains 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 set up 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 Board is also working on a Vision document for the West End which sets out a vision for the area, including Covent Garden – a vision which is shared, hopefully, by all of the Stakeholders and makes sure that the interests of residents are fully taken into account.

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 encourage cross-border liaison on issues that affect our area. In Camden, particularly, our Holborn Safer Neighbourhood Team continues to do sterling work – an example of best practice, we believe, especially under the chairmanship of Alison McWinnie.

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 are 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.

We are still awaiting the changes to police/neighbourhood liaison proposed by the Mayor in 2012/13.

Environment and Public Realm

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 spilling-over into 'cross-border' work in Camden. A trial closure of the end of Earlham Street was successful and traffic is no longer able to make a cut-through to avoid congestion on Shaftesbury Avenue only to create it on Seven Dials. Improvements to traffic flow and pedestrian lights on Cambridge circus have been laid out. The raised crossing and junctions on Shelton Street were finished in improved materials.

The long-awaited street lighting project in Seven Dials and neighbouring streets was rolled out during the 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 over 7 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' 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. as well as campaigning on issues such as more greening.

We look forward to working on the re-vamp of Earlham Street market. CGCA responded in detail last year 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 'west gateway'.

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. Though dogged by persistent rain, many old friends stopped to catch up with us amid the crowds who passed through during the day.

In contrast, our 42nd year Covent Garden Street Festival was blessed with sunshine and 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.

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.

Over the year we worked closely with Westminster Archives, St. Clement Danes School, King's College London and the Seven Dials Club on our multi-faceted local history project. This involved digitalising our vast archive of fascinating material from the forty plus years of our existence. We are very grateful to the students who helped us undertake this mammoth task. We launched an exhibition using some of this material, to show the evolution of Covent Garden and the battle to save it from demolition in the 1960s and 70s. We held several 'memories' days to capture oral history and photographs from local people. To coincide with the Street Festival in September we also premiered a film made by year 6 pupils of St. Clement Danes School, working with students from Kings College London and DigitalWorks. They filmed interviews with a wide range of people involved in the fight against unsympathetic development which gave birth to CGCA. The film can be seen on the Covent Garden Memories website, and our Exhibition is on permanent display in the Seven Dials Club.

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 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, Save London's Theatres, WCC Civic Watch, and the West End Amenity Society Forum.

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 increased from £8,554 in 2012-13 to £18,555 this year, while expenditure rose from £10,844 to 20,097. The variations were largely due to a grant of £10,000 from the Heritage Lottery fund that enabled CGCA, working with Westminster City Archives, to distil the best materials from its archives and create a permanent record of local history in an exhibition and film, and on the internet.

Core expenditure has decreased in recent years because we have moved to a small office within the Seven Dials Community Centre which is far cheaper to run than a stand-alone unit, and because we have no paid administrator. We do pay for specialist support work for our Planning subcommittee, and covered half this cost during the year with a small project grant kindly made by the St. Giles Court Section 106 Community Fund which was partly used last year and partly this year. This fund has proven invaluable in aiding local groups to build capacity to carry out essential work. Moneys due to the locality from planning gain on large developments have a history of being dispersed by councils with little measurable benefit for the local community. However, in the case of St. Giles Court, Councillor Vincent had the foresight to arrange with Camden council for a portion of the moneys to be allocated by local people and recognised community groups acting in partnership themselves. We hope that this 'pilot' will be extended to future situations. Such a policy would alleviate some of the pressure on central grant funding, while directing funds to the front line of communities affected by property development.

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. The past 3 years' turnovers were 2013-14: £18,555, 2012-13: £8,554, 2011-12: £40,340. Our general reserve should therefore be at least £22,483. It currently stands at £24,867. We also have an emergency reserve of £20,000 in place to deal with the uncertainties around our recent relocation and future funding, and a legal reserve of £30,000, so we feel that the financial position is comfortable. However, this is tempered by a serious concern that our services are constrained by low income. This year we covered a £1,542 loss from reserves, and we may have to continue to meet a part 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
S. Gray
M. Houston
M. Leeson
M. Wilde, who sadly died during the year, in July 2013
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.

Charity law requires the trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year which give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charity at the year end, and of its incoming resources and resources expended during that year. In preparing those financial statements, the trustees are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and apply them consistently;
- make judgments and estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- state whether applicable accounting standards of recommended practice have been followed subject to any departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements; and
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is appropriate to presume that the charity will not continue in business.

The trustees are responsible for keeping proper accounting records which disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charity and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Charities Act 2011. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

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 different ways.

Approved and signed on behalf of the Trustees

..... **Date:** 26th January 2015

J. Weir
Chair