

PANTHER HOUSE, GRAY'S INN ROAD GETS GO-AHEAD FOR REDEVELOPMENT.

MPA represented local interests at the planning hearing on 23rd February 2017. You'll remember MPA held two local meetings with the developers, Dukelease, and Camden planners last year to sort out some of the details of this quite complex redevelopment.

By and large most of us liked the look of the new development and supported the plans; our concerns were about Right to Light and potential noise nuisances for the surrounding properties, retention of some workshop/studio spaces, rent levels for small enterprises, and adequate housing provision, including affordable housing.

Together with the developers we sorted out some of the issues of light and noise, retention of some studios/workshops and a small increase in affordable housing provision (2 extra flats). We found the developers to be very straightforward and open in their dealings with us. The submitted planning application included all these revisions, as agreed between us and the developers.

There were un-resolved issues concerning affordable rents for the new studio/workshop premises, and these have still not been clarified. MPA were pressing for some peppercorn rents for existing commercial tenants. We mentioned these issues at the planning meeting on February 23rd and are still following up on these details.

The Planning Committee accepted this planning application, although Cllr Sue Vincent objected to the whole design concept.

We'll let you know the final details of the Sec 106 settlement, in reference to rents for commercial premises, workshops and studios in due course.

APPEAL HEARING -FORMER CARPENTERS' ARMS KINGS CROSS ROAD – A PHYRRIC VICTORY!

We won! But will this victory bring this local pub back?

On 21 Feb 2017 MPA gave evidence at the Appeal Hearing about the former Carpenter's Arms public house, Kings Cross Road. MPA have always supported locals over the shameful destruction of this well-loved local pub, and we were invited, attended, and spoke at this Appeal hearing to add your voice to this local campaign.

It's a sad story – with some rays of hope in a bleak landscape of local pub buy-outs. But we are not sure what it tells us about the weight of planning law against the wilfulness of the developers.

The Carpenters was owned by Punch Taverns, a big pub company, who decided to sell off many of their smaller local pubs. The Carpenters was bought by developers, Mendoza, who have a history of buying up small country pubs and turning them into flats. The Carpenters tenant pub landlords, with locals, and with MPA backing, obtained a Community Asset ruling on the pub, which in theory protected the pub from being turned into flats. *(Co-incidentally Camden Council were in the midst of changing their planning policy to protect local pubs, in the backwash of the much publicised buy-out of the famous Black Cap gay pub venue in Camden Town).* So in theory, the Carpenter's Arms was "safe"..... Far from it!

Mendoza terminated the pub landlords' lease and closed the pub. Dave Whittaker, one of the pub landlords, lived in the flat above the pub, as did his bar staff. They were made homeless and the pub was boarded up and remained "empty" for the next two years, with mysterious "works" taking place at sporadic times.

Mendoza applied for planning permission to change the upstairs premises into residential flats, and to retain the bar and cellar as a "lock-up" pub. Camden Council refused this permission, and said the building had to remain as a pub with live-in accommodation for the landlords and bar staff. Camden New Journal publicised this "victory" and the local pub users formed a pressure group. MPA gave evidence at the Camden hearing in support of the locals. We were all jubilant – a local pub was "saved"! Sadly...our joy was premature.....

Mendoza took no notice of this planning refusal. The building remained closed and boarded up. They began to remodel the pub to change it into flats. They appealed to Camden to allow change of use. This was the Appeal hearing held on Feb 21 2017. The Appeal Hearing had its surreal moments when the Inspector decided to visit the premises and Mendoza had to disclose that they had tenants living in the flats upstairs, which they had remodelled in direct defiance of the Camden planning directive. *Well...well...well!*

Not surprisingly, the Inspector refused Mendoza's appeal. The Inspector found against Mendoza and said the building should be retained as a public house, with live-in accommodation for bar staff, as in the original Camden planning ruling.

So – we won, after a useless and complicated two-three year battle. However this sad story produces some questions.

- Does planning law have any strength, if a developer decides to ignore the rulings and carry on regardless?
- Will these developers be fined and punished for ignoring the law, for remodelling the premises in contravention of the original planning ruling, and for generally behaving as if the rulings did not apply to them?
- Will the developers be forced to restore the Carpenter's Arms to its previous condition as a working public house.?
- Will the premises ever become a local pub again?

MPA are following up on this matter, together with the Friends of the former Carpenter's Arms. We'll let you know what we find out.

We also note in passing that a new Neighbourhood Planning Act is wending its way through Parliament, which will give further planning powers to local people, and which removes the automatic ability to apply for change of use for public houses. Good in theory – we'll see what happens in practice.