

Fitzrovia News

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Post office reprieve

Workers at the Great Portland Street post office broke into a round of applause after receiving news that plans to privatise their branch and run it as a franchise had been dropped, writes *Enda Twomey*.

The seventeen workers at the busy "crown" post office on the corner of Mortimer Street had been told in February the branch would close in May this year, and a deal with private operators was being negotiated.

Such franchises often mean a reduction in services, staffing and a lessening in the quality of service received by customers, says the Communication Workers Union.

The branch is one of the last crown offices in the West End and the only one

serving Fitzrovia. But staff were told at a meeting on 3 November that they were to remain as a directly run crown office as the potential buyers have now withdrawn their interest.

"Upon receiving the news colleagues broke into a spontaneous round of clapping and cheers," said Garrie Bond, a Communication Workers Union representative.

A Post Office spokesperson told *Fitzrovia News*: "Earlier this year we consulted on plans to change the way we operate Great Portland Street Post Office by franchising the branch. After further consideration we will not be proceeding with any changes to the branch at this time. The branch will continue to operate as it currently does."

Street protest against Camden allowing noisy works

Residents in a council housing estate have held a protest against Camden Council which has allowed noisy out-of-hours work to carry on for months on end, writes *Enda Twomey*.

Grafton Way TRA held up road works on the morning of Sunday 29 November, waving placards saying "Peace on Sundays, please" and "Give us a break Camden".

Camden is constantly allowing noisy

construction and road works out-of-hours outside the housing block where 274 people live.

"We are very fed up. We have lost about half our weekends this year because Camden continues to allow works with no care for us," said Jo Hurford, a resident.

Camden apologised to residents and said it would be the final weekend of noisy works.

Whitfield Gardens opens

Whitfield Gardens re-opened in November after the completion of a major refurbishment project by Camden Council, allowing visitors to get a closer look at the newly restored Fitzrovia Mural, and take a break and relax in the only public open space along Tottenham Court Road, writes *Linus Rees*.

It was immediately used by a lot of people, and the extra seating, if not particularly comfortable, was a welcome rest for the feet of passers by and those wanting to briefly get outside during Lockdown.

Those who spoke to *Fitzrovia News* said the new lighting is an improvement. However, the greatly reduced greenery made the place look bare and was described as a "desert" in one comment.

Same again

It's another issue of *Fitzrovia News* with only two pages of A4, in miserable black and white, and no photos. We are pleased you like the new format (see letters, page 2).

This edition brings you a digest of the latest news since our last printed publication in September. See our website for the full stories, and much more.

We hope to produce a 16 page tabloid in glorious colour in March. Deadline for articles: Friday 5 February 2021.

Dispute over housing repairs drags on

Residents embroiled in a two-year battle with their housing association A2 Dominion over design and maintenance problems at their new homes at Rathbone Square were offered a lump sum to shut up, stop complaining, and engage their own contractor to carry out repairs, writes *Matthew Covell*.

The shared-ownership flats were built with a legal agreement between Great Portland Estates and Westminster Council to provide intermediate affordable housing, as part of planning permission gained in 2014.

In December 2019 A2 Dominion offered residents a payment to engage their own contractor to carry out the repairs. The residents refused.

A2 Dominion blamed developer Great Portland Estates for many of the problems. Steve Michaux, director of residential services at A2D said: "We are working hard to address all the issues raised by the residents at Rathbone Apartments. Due to design issues inherited from the developer, this is proving challenging but we will continue to do our best to represent our customers' interests in this matter."

Great Portland Estates said: "We recognise that some residents have experienced specific issues with their properties and we are working closely with them to find appropriate solutions."

Westminster Council said: "We are working closely with them to ensure this matter is resolved."

More news over ►

Fitzrovia News is produced by the Fitzrovia Community Newspaper Group, with support from the Fitzrovia Neighbourhood Association.

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Fitzrovia West Plan

Our neighbourhood plan was subject to further consultation over the summer and is now being considered by an Examiner appointed by Westminster Council, writes *Nick Bailey*.

We are in discussion with the Council's planners to iron out any differences. This will enable the Examiner to review the plan, recommend any further changes and enable a public referendum on the plan to go ahead.

Two further developments will affect the neighbourhood plan. First, the Council has been through an enquiry relating to changes to the City Plan. The Inspectors have announced that they would like to see changes in order to make it "sound". This will require a further round of public consultation running into the New Year so the final adoption will not be until well into 2021.

Secondly, the Government has also made changes to the planning system. The most important of these changes is to combine shops, offices, cafes, restaurants and several other uses into one category so that planning permission is no longer required to change from one of these uses to another. This makes the protection of local shops very difficult although betting shops, pubs, bars and hot food takeaways will still require approval if being established for the first time or if changed from another use. See fitzwest.org for details.

Our COVID-19 stories

2020 has been anything but a normal year, writes *Amy Lai*.

The COVID-19 crisis has restricted our mobility and with it brought huge challenge to people's lives. It has been a year of uncertainty and adjustment for everyone and councils across the country.

To grasp the impact of the crisis on people across our borough, Camden council launched a special website at the end of the summer. They invite residents to share their experience of the pandemic. Through poems, artwork and videos people across the neighbourhood provided glimpses into what life has been like and their hopes for the future of everyone in the borough. camden19stories.commonplace.is

Neighbourhood briefing

Habitat is to close its **Tottenham Court Road** store in early 2021, after more than 50 years of trading there.

Memorial plaques have been placed on buildings to remember firefighters in **Rathbone Street**, medical pioneers in **Cleveland Street**, and an anti-slavery campaigner in **Tottenham Street**.

Planning applications

Outline application for demolition of **(95-100 TCR & 76-80 Whitfield St)** and 7 flats (**88 Whitfield Street**) and construction of a new building to provide for a maximum of 17,275 sqm (GIA) of commercial business and service floorspace (use Class E) along with details of access, scale and landscaping and other works incidental to the application (ref 2020/5624/P). NB: Application is linked to redevelopment of **14-19 Tottenham Mews** (ref 2020/5633/P) and details for office building (ref 2020/5631/P) and details for lab-enabled building (ref 2020/5638/P). See:

planningrecords.camden.gov.uk

There were **17 applications registered by Camden** during November 2020 in Bloomsbury ward. See: planningrecords.camden.gov.uk

There were **16 applications validated by Westminster** in Fitzrovia during November 2020. See idoxpa.westminster.gov.uk

Licensing applications

226 Great Portland St: seeks to sell alcohol for on and off the premises, Monday to Sunday from 10am to 9pm. Westminster reference 20/10807/LIPN. Deadline: 17 December 2020.

22 Foley St: seeks to sell alcohol on the premises, from 10am to 10.30pm Monday to Thursday, from 10am to 11.30pm Friday and Saturday, and from 10am to 10.30pm on Sunday. Westminster reference 20/11005/LIPN. Deadline: 23 December.

114 Tottenham Ct Rd: seeks a licence for sale of alcohol for on and off the premises from 11.00 to 23.00 Monday to Saturday, and from 12.00 to 22.30 on Sunday. Camden reference: APP\PREMISES-NEW\103619. Deadline: 18 December.

71 Gt Titchfield St: seeks to operate until later hours for the sale of food and drink, and to add entertainment to their licence. Westminster reference: 20/11567/LIPV. Deadline: 6 January.

170 Gt Portland St: seeks Late Night Refreshment: Monday to Thursday from 23:00 to 23:30; and Friday to Saturday: from 23:00 to 00:00. Sale by Retail of Alcohol: Monday to Thursday from 10:00 to 23:30; Friday to Saturday from 10:00 to 00:00; and Sunday from 12:00 to 22:30. Westminster reference: 20/11485/LIPN. Deadline: 5 January. Check camden.gov.uk/public-licensing-register and idoxpa.westminster.gov.uk for the latest applications. *Residents in Westminster can contact licensingadvice.org for free advice.*

Letters to the editors

email: letters@fitzroviaanews.com

Miserable

I see what you mean about being "miserable black and white" (*Where's the rest of the paper? FN158*). I don't mind monochrome but the lack of any imagery was a bit of a shock. It is punchy and to the point although most of the content I had already seen in the online version.

2023 will be your 50th anniversary. Had you considered publishing a selection of past articles in a hard copy folio edition? *The London Review of Books* did something similar for their 40th anniversary last year and it was quite successful. You could do the same. **Stephen Heath**
Bedford Avenue

Missing street signs

You can probably tell from my name that I take an interest in what goes on in your neighbourhood and surrounding area.

On my most recent visit I noticed that there are no street name signs for Goodge Street at the Tottenham Court Road end. I know there has been work going on but was wondering if Goodge Street signs are going to return at some point?

Stephen Goodge
Portsmouth

Princess Alice survivor

My great, great grandfather Robert Haines lived at 15 Colville Place, when in September 1878 he survived The Princess Alice disaster, a collision on the Thames which resulted in the death of 600 to 700 people. He was the only member of the five-piece band who were entertaining the passengers to survive, as he was on deck at the time. Remarkable as he couldn't swim!

It would be wonderful to have a plaque on 15 Colville Place. Apart from this remarkable escape, Robert was not a famous person but this tragic disaster is hardly recognised or remembered, so it would be a way to spark some interest. A bit of social history about the common people.

Maureen Williams

Remember Toc H?

Does anyone know when Toc H moved out of 15 Fitzroy Square? Now it's a private residence. Does anyone know what became of the mews house behind it?

Paul Arnold

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