



GENERAL INFORMATION LEAFLET

# COVENT GARDEN Conservation Area

# 15



City of Westminster

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND CITY DEVELOPMENT  
DEVELOPMENT PLANNING SERVICES MAY 2004

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**Designation:** First designated in 1971; extended in 1974, 1978 and lastly in 1987 when the west end of Long Acre, the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, Dryden Street and parts of Chandos Place, Agar Street and Bedford Street were all included.

**Historical Background:** Covent Garden comprises the area on the north side of the Strand which developed as the link between the settlements of the City of London and Westminster/Thorney Island. In medieval times the Strand was lined with large houses and palaces set in substantial gardens. On the north side of the Strand were Craven House (site at the south end of Drury Lane), Bedford House (site south of the Piazza) and Exeter House (site opposite the Savoy) as well as the Garden of the Convent, which provided food for Westminster Abbey. In 1553 the Garden was given to Sir John Russell by the Crown. In the 1630's the Russell family began to develop the estate with the Piazza (by Inigo Jones), St Paul's on the west side and terraced houses with arcaded ground floors on the north and east sides. The south side of the Piazza was not developed due to the location of the garden wall to Bedford House. In 1670 a small fruit and vegetable market was established on the south side of the Piazza. This grew to dominate the whole area, resulting in the original residents moving out. The area became characterised by bawdy-houses, taverns, coffee houses and prostitutes. In 1790 St. Paul's burnt down and a facsimile replacement was built by Hardwick. In the 19th century a number of major building schemes resulted in changes to the character of the area including the Covent Garden Opera House (Smirke, 1808) which replaced an earlier theatre, the Drury Lane Theatre (Wyatt, 1811) the fifth theatre on the site, the Central Market Building (Charles Fowler, 1830), the current Royal Opera House and the Floral Hall (E.M. Barry 1857-8), the Flower Market (1887 - 91) and Bedford Chambers (1880). The latter development on the north west corner of the Piazza is in a similar form to and replaced the last surviving part of Inigo Jones' scheme. Warehouses linked to the market function were constructed north of the Piazza such as in Floral Street and Shelton Street. The market moved to Nine Elms in 1974 but, following considerable public opposition, plans for comprehensive redevelopment of the area were abandoned. Subsequent development in the area has been steered by the Covent Garden Action Area Plan (1978) which covers both those parts of Covent Garden in the City of Westminster and London Borough of Camden. The area has now become a popular shopping and entertainment location.

**Listed Buildings:** The Royal Opera House, St. Paul's Church and the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane are listed Grade I. The Central Market Building, Nos. 37 & 43 King Street, the Garrick Club, Lyceum Theatre, Nos. 26-27 Southampton Street and Zimbabwe House, 429 Strand are listed Grade II\*. There are over 150 Grade II listed buildings in the Conservation Area.

**Key Features:** At the heart of the Conservation Area is the Piazza, dominated by the Central Market Building and St. Paul's Church. Around the Piazza the 17th century and 18th century street pattern survives and important buildings from that period can be found in King Street, Henrietta Street (to the west) and Southampton Street (to the south). The other streets leading to the Piazza, James Street (to the north) and Russell Street (to the east) provide important views of the Piazza. St. Paul's Churchyard provides a secluded green oasis in the midst of this densely developed area. The southern part of the Conservation Area between Maiden Lane and the Strand is characterised by buildings occupying long thin medieval plots, divided by historic alleyways such as Exchange Court and Bull Inn Court. The northern part of the Conservation Area, including Long Acre, Floral Street and Shelton Street contains a mix of Victorian warehouses and commercial buildings.

The Royal Opera House and Bow Street Police Station dominate the north end of Bow Street. Broad Court forms a quiet residential passageway off Bow Street whilst the Theatre Royal comprises the majority of the street block of Catherine Street, Russell Street and Drury Lane. Important groups of 18th century buildings are found in Tavistock Street, Wellington Street and Exeter Street. To the west of the Piazza in St. Martin's Lane are a number of theatres such as Wyndham's and the Albery, and pedestrianised alleyways running through to Charing Cross Road. Garrick Street is dominated by the Garrick Club whilst New Row and Goodwin's Court contain terraces of 18th century buildings. The whole area is a popular shopping and tourist destination comprising a mixture of retail, entertainment, restaurant, office and residential uses.

**Adjacent Conservation Areas:** The Covent Garden Conservation Area is bounded by the Strand Conservation Area to the south and east, the Savoy and Adelphi Conservation Areas to the south, the Trafalgar Square Conservation Area to the south west and the Leicester Square Conservation Area to the west. The London Borough of Camden is located to the north.

**Strategic Views:** Not affected.

**Areas of Special Archaeological Priority:** Within the Lundenwic & Thorney Island area of special archaeological priority.

**Article 4 Directions:** None.

**Regulation 7 Directions:** The whole area is affected by the requirement that any advertisement for the sale or letting of land (including estate agents' boards advertising shops, houses, flats or offices) must be given consent by the City Council as local planning authority. Displaying an advertisement without having first obtained consent is a criminal offence.

**Design Guides and Planning Briefs:** No specific Design Guides. *'The Environmental Study for Central Covent Garden'* was approved in April 1997.

**Spaces protected by the London Squares Act 1931:** None.

**Registered Historic Parks and Gardens:** None

**Contacts:**

**Built Environment**

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