



GENERAL INFORMATION LEAFLET

LEICESTER SQUARE Conservation Area

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City of Westminster

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND CITY DEVELOPMENT
DEVELOPMENT PLANNING SERVICES MAY 2004

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Designation: First designated in 1983 as part of an extension to the Soho Conservation Area. In 1990 redesignated and renamed as the Leicester Square Conservation Area.

Historical Background: Between 1630 and 1648, Robert Sidney, 2nd Earl of Leicester, acquired land from Henry VIII, and built Leicester House on a site between the existing Square and Lisle Street, with a formal garden on the site of the Swiss Centre. The area south of the House became known as Leicester Fields and was laid out in 1782. It had been used as common land for drying clothes and cattle grazing, and the Earl was obliged to compensate parishioners by providing a tree planted public area. Grand houses were constructed fronting the Square and no shops were allowed until the 3rd Earl permitted booths in front of the courtyard of Leicester House towards the end of the 17th century. The Square remained a fashionable area throughout the 18th century but by the end of that century, with the construction of New Coventry Street and increased traffic, private residents began to move out and craftsmen and commercial uses moved in. The original houses were converted or demolished to allow for this change. In Victorian times the Square was renowned for its Turkish baths, oyster rooms and theatres, such as the Alhambra, the Empire, Dalys and later the Hippodrome. The public garden fell into very poor repair until it was purchased by Albert Grant in 1874. Grant commissioned James Knowles to lay out the garden, including the provision of a marble fountain topped by a statue of Shakespeare. Around the Square were positioned busts of Reynolds, Newton, Hogarth and John Hunter, all of whom lived in or near the Square. Leicester Square continues to be a centre of entertainment, in particular of the film industry with large cinema buildings on the north, east and south side of the Square. In 1981 a statue of Charlie Chaplin was erected. The gardens have been recently refurbished by the City Council and the road around them pedestrianised.

Listed Buildings: The London Hippodrome (including the street block bounded by Charing Cross Road, Little Newport Street, Leicester Court and Cranbourn Street), No. 3 Coventry Street (former Rialto Cinema and Cafe de Paris), No. 1 Charing Cross Road and Nos 34-35 Lisle Street, are all Grade 11 listed, as are the fountain and statues in the gardens.

Key Features: Today Leicester Square is the quintessence of the West End, with its concentration of entertainment uses drawing many visitors from both Britain and abroad. The gardens in the Square, with their mature trees, form a quiet haven from the bustle of the Square. Most of the surviving buildings, both in and around the Square date from the 1930s onwards. A few earlier survivors include the Hippodrome (Frank Matcham, 1897-1900), No. 3 Coventry Street (the Rialto and Cafe de Paris, J. Blane and F.E.B. Blanc, 1913, described as probably the most sophisticated cinema design produced in Britain before 1914), the redbrick and terracotta Royal Dental Hospital (Young and Hall, 1899-1901) and Nos. 34-35 Lisle Street (1791) a pair of terraced houses with original shopfront and panelled door and fanlight features. Significant later buildings include the Swiss Centre (Aberdeen and Partners, 1961-8), Fanum House for the Automobile Association (Andrew Mather, 1923), the Leicester Square Theatre (Andrew Mather, 1930), the Odeon Theatre (Mather and Weadon, 1937) and the Warner

Cinema (recently extensively refurbished). These buildings house many of the entertainment, restaurant and hotel uses which characterise this popular tourist destination.

Adjacent Conservation Areas: The Leicester Square Conservation Area is bounded to the north by the Soho Conservation Area, to the west by the Haymarket Conservation Area, to the south by the Trafalgar Square Conservation Area and to the east by the Covent Garden Conservation Area.

Strategic Views: The strategic view from Parliament Hill to the Palace of Westminster cuts across the Conservation Area.

Areas of Special Archaeological Priority: The south west corner of the Conservation Area is within the Lundenwic and 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.

Planning Briefs and Design Guides: No specific guidelines.

Registered Historic Parks and Gardens: None.

Spaces protected by the London Squares Act 1931: Leicester Square.

Contacts:

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