

Ref.: TC/413

24 May 2024

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**Application:** 2024/0744/FUL & 2024/0745/LBC

**Site:** Albert Hall 27 Cradock Street Swansea SA1 3EP

**Proposal:** Refurbishment and conversion of the auditorium to include the introduction of a freestanding bar, food kiosks and food court, private dining experiences and Cabaret style seating, games and party rooms, and retention of the stage area

#### **Remit:**

Theatres Trust is the National Advisory Body for Theatres and was established by The Theatres Trust Act 1976 'to promote the better protection of theatres'. Theatres Trust is a statutory consultee in the planning system and local planning authorities in Wales are required to consult Theatres Trust on planning applications for '*development involving any land on which there is a theatre*', '*residential development within 50 metres of a theatre*' as well as for proposed theatres. The definition of theatres within the Act defines a theatre as 'any building or part of a building constructed wholly or mainly for the public performance of plays', and therefore applies to theatres, playhouses, arts centres, ciné-varieties or buildings converted for theatre use, old and new, in other uses or disused.

#### **Theatres Trust**

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL

**Telephone** 020 7836 8591 **Email** [info@theatrestrust.org.uk](mailto:info@theatrestrust.org.uk) **Website** [theatrestrust.org.uk](http://theatrestrust.org.uk) **Twitter** @TheatresTrust

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**Chair** Dave Moutrey OBE

**Director** Jon Morgan

**Trustees** James Dacre, Suba Das, Stephanie Hall, Annie Hampson, Lucy Osborne, Truda Spruyt, Katie Town

**Comment:**

These applications for planning permission and corresponding listed building consent have come to the attention of Theatres Trust because they are seeking to undertake alterations at the Albert Hall. We have not been formally notified.

The Albert Hall was built in 1864 as 'The Music Hall Swansea' and had a capacity of around 2,500. A number of well known figures spoke or performed there including Charles Dickens and Oscar Wilde. It changed its name to the Albert Hall in 1882, around this time it hosted variety shows and reportedly the largest Diorama across Great Britain and Ireland, depicting major events of then-recent times including the Zulu and Afghan Wars. Other events included social and political speeches, church services and occasionally marriages. It hosted Swansea's memorial services for Queen Victoria and the sinking of the Titanic. From 1914 it showed films and was remodelled in the 1920s to function as more of a cinema. Further alterations in the 1930s introduced Art Deco style. It closed in 1977 and was refurbished and converted to bingo use. Although it lost its stage to facilitate a bar and café some live performance returned. Bingo use ceased in 2007 and the Albert Hall has remained vacant and in a deteriorating condition since that time.

We note there are existing consents for this site - 2021/0560/FUL and 2021/0561/LBC. It is disappointing that Theatres Trust was not notified as is required through our remit outlined above. The delegated report appears to confirm there were no statutory external consultations carried out; other bodies should also have been notified.

A full appraisal of these plans is challenging due to the absence of a full set of existing and proposed plans.

It is stated there is to be a new upper level created through insertion around three metres below the auditorium ceiling to create new facilities, with structural support provided by new columns. The principle of this appears to have been accepted through the existing consent, although this results in a high degree of harm to the character and significance of the auditorium because it diminishes its volume and interrupts interior decoration. This is further compounded with the addition of columns, and it now appears the openness of the auditorium will be reduced further through extension of food preparation areas.

Whilst we are keen to see this building brought back to active use and welcome that live performance would be reinstated, we consider that these proposals result in a

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high level of harm in architectural and heritage terms which potentially could be avoided through more sensitive design.

We therefore urge revision to the proposed scheme.

Please contact us if we may be of further assistance or should you wish to discuss this representation in greater detail.



Tom Clarke MRTPI

National Planning Adviser

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The National Advisory Public Body for Theatres. The Theatres Trust Charitable Fund co-operates with the Theatres Trust, has the same Trustees and is registered as a charity under number 274697