

Ref.: TC/2009

9 July 2024

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Wisbech
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By e-mail: planning@fenland.gov.uk

Application: F/YR24/0507/LB

Site: The Angles Theatre 4 Alexandra Road Wisbech Cambridgeshire PE13 1HQ

Proposal: Internal and external works to a listed building to enable installation of internal lift and x 8 external air conditioning units

Remit:

Theatres Trust is the national advisory public body for theatres. We were established through the Theatres Trust Act 1976 'to promote the better protection of theatres' and provide statutory planning advice on theatre buildings and theatre use in England through The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015, requiring the Trust to be consulted by local authorities on planning applications which include 'development involving any land on which there is a theatre'.

Comment:

This application for listed building consent has come to the attention of Theatres Trust. It is seeking to install an internal platform lift with associated alterations and new external air conditioning units to Angles Theatre. There is a corresponding

Theatres Trust

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL

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Chair Dave Moutrey OBE

Director Jon Morgan

Trustees Vicky Browning OBE, Anna Collins, James Dacre, Suba Das, Liam Evans-Ford, Stephanie Hall, Annie Hampson, Tracy Ann Oberman, Lucy Osborne, Saratha Rajeswaran, Truda Spruyt, Michèle Taylor MBE, Katie Town

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application for planning permission covering the external installations only to which we have responded under separate cover.

Angles Theatre is an important community and cultural venue for Wisbech. It is a registered charity largely staffed by volunteers. Its programme includes its own theatre productions and shows performed by other local adult and youth groups alongside other shows and events. It also runs various workshops. Venues such as this are particularly important for the social and cultural wellbeing of local people, providing access to theatre and the arts and opportunities for participation and development of skills. Paragraph 93 of the NPPF seeks planning decisions to plan positively for facilities of this nature.

The theatre is also an important heritage asset. It was built as a theatre in 1793 although it is believed the external brickwork is older having been retained from a warehouse previously on the site. There was significant alteration in the 1890s. Evidence was discovered in the late 1970s of the original internal arrangement, namely a beam which supported the front of the stage, beams showing a rectangular arrangement of boxes similar to that of Georgian Theatre Royal in Richmond (also a Georgian market town playhouse which had been built three years previous), beams supporting the gallery and two cast iron columns supporting them. The auditorium's ceiling line is original and research of Angles added considerably to knowledge of typical Georgian country/market town playhouses. The building was within other uses from the late 1800s until the 1970s when local drama enthusiasts recovered it and restored it as a theatre. The present theatre does not precisely match original extent and form but the original layout is recoverable.

The theatre has ambitions to invest in and further develop its facilities. A site visit was undertaken in early 2020. This particular project focuses on improved accessibility and air conditioning.

There are some level changes within the building which prevent wheelchair access. To address this the lower hallway stairs will be replaced with a 'Flexstep' stair which works both as a staircase and stairlift. The current stairs appear to be of no particular significance, but there is significant public benefit in providing greater inclusivity and enhancing the theatre's social value through making its spaces accessible. This is supported.

To the upper hallway staircase the existing steps will be removed and a section of wall next to it will be opened out. The stairs will be widened which will improve flow

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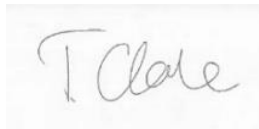
and enable installation of a cantilever system. Again this will provide wheelchair access, with similar public benefits.

Effective heating and cooling is important in maintaining the comfort of audiences and visitors and providing appropriate working conditions for performers, staff and volunteers. Whilst this necessitates the installation of external units, we consider the proposed locations to minimise impact on the theatre's significance and setting. As shown within the applicant's Schedule of Works document, two units will be placed on the flat roof area. Three will be located at high level to the north-east elevation and three at low level along the south-east elevation. The flat roof and south-east locations can be considered less sensitive in heritage terms, and whilst there is greater impact on historic fabric on the north-east elevation we consider this to be less than substantial harm.

With reference to paragraph 208 of the NPPF, we contend the impacts of these interventions where less than substantial harm is generated are mitigated by the public benefits of ensuring the theatre provides a safe and comfortable environment for its users and that it is accessible to its users.

We therefore support the granting of listed building consent.

Please contact us if we may be of further assistance or should you wish to discuss these comments in further detail.



Tom Clarke MRTPI

National Planning Adviser

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