

Ref.: TC/443

30 August 2024

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**Application:** 24/05029/LBC

**Site:** Royal Opera House Covent Garden London WC2E 9DD

**Proposal:** Replacing all fire escape signs in the auditorium with new fire escape signs, installation of five new downlights at ground and first floor levels in the auditorium and rewiring the tier-front candelabras.

**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:**

Thank you for consulting Theatres Trust on this application for listed building consent at the Royal Opera House. It seeks to undertake upgrading and replacement of

**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** 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

The Theatres Trust is the national advisory public body for theatres. The Theatres Trust Charitable Fund supports the work of The Theatres Trust, has the same Trustees and is registered as a charity under number 274697

internal lighting and fire escape signage.

The Opera House is a Grade I listed heritage asset with what is described as “the most beautiful auditorium in Great Britain”. Our database entry states it to be “the oldest theatre building executed to a single design now standing more or less intact in London”, for which “its architectural importance cannot be overrated.”

These proposals will see replacement and standardisation of fire escape signage. The existing signage was installed during refurbishments in the late 1990s. They are not of historic interest and detract from significance but provide a necessary public safety function. As is described and illustrated within the applicant’s Heritage Statement, they are of inconsistent design and installation and in some instances do not give correct information. The improved design and installation of replacement signage therefore constitutes a minor heritage benefit, as well as being of public benefit in helping ensure the safe operation of the Opera House.

On a similar basis, replacement of downlights to illuminate darker areas of the Opera House for public safety is also supported as it will have a neutral or minor positive impact on significance.

The additional installation of linear lighting to the saucer dome within the auditorium results in the loss of a small quantum of historic plasterwork. Whilst this constitutes less than substantial harm in heritage terms, with reference to paragraph 208 of the NPPF (2023) this is mitigated by the public benefits of enabling the dome to be illuminated and appreciated as currently the existing lighting no longer functions and is in poor condition.

Lighting will also be upgraded within the candelabras. Whilst the candelabras are highly significant, the lamps within them are from the refurbishments of the late 1990s and therefore historic impact is neutral.

On that basis we 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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