

Ref.: TC/544

2 September 2024

Elizabeth Ashworth
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By e-mail: development_management@bathnes.gov.uk

Application: 24/03020/LBA

Site: Theatre Royal, Sawclose, City Centre, Bath, Bath And North East Somerset, BA1 1ET

Proposal: Internal and external alterations for a new community venue within the existing theatre building.

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'.

Theatres Trust

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL

Telephone 020 7836 8591 **Email** info@theatrestrust.org.uk **Website** 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

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Comment:

Thank you for consulting Theatres Trust on this application for listed building consent at Theatre Royal Bath, which seeks to undertake internal and external alterations to provide a further performance space along with changes to the function of the theatre's back of house provision. There is a corresponding application for planning permission to which we have commented under separate cover.

We were engaged by the applicant on these plans at pre-application stage and provided them with a letter of support for the scheme presented to us. The submitted plans appear to be the same as those on which we commented.

Theatre Royal is a Grade II* listed heritage asset, which opened in 1805 and is described within our database as, "One of the most important surviving examples of Georgian theatre architecture". It replaced an earlier theatre and is notable for being the first theatre company outside of London to obtain a royal patent enabling the Theatre Royal name. The original interior was destroyed by fire in 1862 after which it was redesigned to the plans of notable theatre architect C. J. Phipps. Despite later redecoration the auditorium largely survives intact. The theatre is operated by a charitable trust, who have been able to expand and diversify provision by adding a studio theatre to the rear in 1997 (the Ustinov Studio) and a children's theatre in 2005 within the adjoining former Robins Cinema/St Pauls Church Hall which is called 'The Egg'.

This further expansion will provide a smaller flexible rehearsal and performance space within two interlinked units within the theatre's control. Indicatively this space will have an audience capacity of around sixty-eight people so will complement the existing secondary spaces within the Ustinov and the Egg. This also adds a small-scale capacity not currently offered in Bath as the Mission Theatre and Chapel Arts Centre both have capacities in excess of 100, thereby diversifying the city's theatre offer and its ability to facilitate emerging and experimental acts.

Currently the two units host a member's bar and administrative and back of house functions. Whilst these units do not form part of the theatre's listing, they are themselves Grade II listed heritage assets as late eighteenth century houses which have been internally altered but possess external interest and group value. To facilitate these proposals there will be internal alterations to layout within the two units. The existing '1805' entrance will provide a foyer and small bar with an accessible WC and three general WCs. There will be a platform lift to manage the

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level change making this area accessible. The new studio space will be within the ground floor of the neighbouring unit in place of existing office accommodation.

There will also be some alteration at upper levels, predominantly at first floor level within the current '1805' dining room where partitions will be removed to enlarge the space for replacement office accommodation. There will be a new opening to provide direct access into the Egg theatre.

In terms of heritage impacts, these units have had previous alteration and internally are considered to be less significant. With reference to paragraph 208 of the NPPF (2023), we consider the further development of the theatre's cultural and performance offer to constitute significant public benefit. The lower level of these buildings being made accessible with the platform lift also offering additional wheelchair accessibility into the main part of the theatre is also a substantial public benefit. Whilst there will be some loss of fabric to create the opening between the first floor offices and the Egg, this is limited in scale and impact and will make the building function better.

Alongside re-use of the two units, there are also some further alterations. The units sit alongside the theatre's stage door entrance and passageway which is beneficial operationally because they can be serviced directly from that. This is also being used as an opportunity to further open out the passageway by removing internal partitions which will make this area function better and enhance accessibility as there is the potential of level access through the new venue, although there would be constraints on this when the venue is in use.

Externally there will be new plant installed to the roof but we consider this an appropriate location as it will be shielded from view thus minimising impact. There will be alterations to the frontages of the units, with the staircase removed from the current office entrance and the doorway infilled. There will be alterations to the form and design of windows at ground floor across both units. There is evidence of these having been previously altered and we consider the replacement design to be sensitive to character and setting. We did in fact provide comment to the applicant that we considered signage and prominence of the new space to be understated compared to the Egg and other surrounding businesses and that there may be scope for further activation.

Efforts by the theatre to expand its provision and invest in its buildings and offer are to be welcomed. We consider that this scheme makes effective use of the limited

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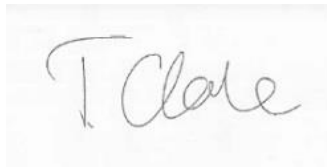
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space available to the theatre within its demise. Given the significance of the original theatre the re-use of existing adjoining buildings minimises impact and harm. As noted, we consider these proposals to provide substantial benefits which can override the relatively limited levels of harm arising from alteration.

We are therefore supportive of the granting of listed building consent.

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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