

Ref.: TC/2135

16 October 2024

Ms Anita Kittle
Grafton House
15-17 Russell Road
Ipswich
IP1 2DE

By e-mail: dm@ipswich.gov.uk

Application: 24/00582/FPI3

Site: 3 St Helens Street, Ipswich, Suffolk, IP4 1HE

Proposal: Erection of new extensions including new lift tower and WC block and installation of glazing within covered walkway to create an alternative entrance with security shutter.

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 planning permission at the Regent. It seeks to extend the building as part of a project to improve the theatre's accessibility and front of house facilities, providing a new WC block and a

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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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lift giving access to the Circle level. There is a corresponding application for listed building consent covering further internal alterations to which we have responded under separate cover.

The Regent is a Grade II listed heritage asset which opened in 1929 as a cine-variety theatre. It was designed by notable cinema architect William Edward Trent. Architecturally its facade is of Georgian style and its interior a mix of Art Deco and Neo-Classical. Unusually it incorporated a manager's cottage to the rear into the design. It offered a capacity of 2,000 across stalls and balcony with fourteen boxes along with a café and restaurant. Although built with capability for live performance it was predominantly operated as a cinema in its early years, except during World War II when it hosted a number of stage shows and civic events. It was renamed to the Gaumont in 1955 and then the Odeon in 1987. During those years several notable live bands and artists played including Buddy Holly, The Beatles, Walker Brothers, Jimi Hendrix, Ian Dury and the Blockheads and Gary Numan. The Odeon closed in 1991 at which point the building was acquired by the Council and restored and refurbished for full live performance use. Various later additions were removed and there was re-equipping front and back of house areas.

The Regent is the largest theatre in East Anglia with a busy programme predominantly consisting of theatre, comedy and live music. It is an important cultural asset for the town which contributes to the cultural well-being of local people as well as drawing people in from a much wider catchment which benefits the local businesses and the economy. Paragraph 97 of the NPPF (2023) seeks planning decisions to plan positively for facilities of this nature.

As is common with older theatres the Regent has sub-optimal accessibility and a lack of WCs. For the former this reduces the theatre's inclusivity and social value. For the latter, queueing detracts from the audience experience and in turn reduces bar spend which is important for supporting the venue's viability. We therefore welcome attempts to seek to address this.

The current accessible entrance utilises a back of house service route which therefore segregates wheelchair users from the main audience entry through the foyer. Whilst the same entry point will be used, this will be upgraded with a glazed entrance replacing the current gate and internal redecoration will provide a better and more welcoming experience. There will be a modest side extension off this route towards the southern end of the north-west elevation to provide the lift shaft and

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associated upper lobby giving access for the first time to the Circle level. Internally an existing office will be converted to provide a level route into the main foyer. This element is supported, and we consider the proposed design with glass and standing seam zinc with large 'Regent Theatre' lettering to complement the existing building. We also consider this will enhance setting through enabling the removal or concealment of insensitive modern services.

To the east of the existing building there is a vacant plot within the theatre's demise. It can be challenging within older and listed theatres to identify appropriate capacity to expand facilities, therefore this space presents an opportunity to expand footprint and add much-needed WCs. In heritage terms this part of the building externally is of less significance, being typically utilitarian in character and function. The extension will be single-storey and finished with black vertical boarding as is the case with the recent back of house extension. This area can only be viewed to a limited extent from the end of Silk Street and surrounding properties, nonetheless we consider the design and appearance of the block to be appropriate. There will be a significant uplift in WC provision and the block will include a Changing Places facility thus further enhancing the Regent's social value. The new block also facilitates the removal of existing WCs within the stalls which helps enhance that area. This extension is similarly welcomed also supported.

We note the plan for the WC block shows an emergency escape route into Silk Street and this is referenced within Section 6 of the Design & Access Statement. It is currently fenced off and blocked by planting, therefore it will need to be ensured there is a clear route which may require engagement and coordination with a third party.

To the main entrance, the entry canopy has been altered and replaced over time. The current example is less ornate than that of the original with lettering that has a dated appearance. This will be refurbished to better reflect the original 1929 scheme and will have a 1950s Gaumont era lantern design to its underside and lighting around the edge and above the foyer doors. There will be illuminated 'Regent Theatre' lettering which matches the stone lettering to the top of the foyer block. We consider this to be a sensitive and heritage-influenced design which will help enhance the theatre's visibility.

Policy DM28 of the Core Strategy and Policies Development Plan Document Review (2022) supports the enhancement of existing arts, cultural and tourism facilities with

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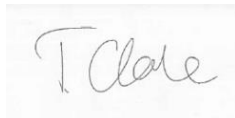
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supporting paragraph 9.267 further emphasising specific support for improvement of the Regent. Furthermore, the target under Objective 7 aims to deliver a 10% increase in attendance to the Regent and Corn Exchange by 2036. These plans are consistent with those policies and aspirations.

We support the granting of planning permission.

Please contact us should you wish to discuss these comments further, and continue to engage with us should plans be revised.



Tom Clarke MRTPI

National Planning Adviser

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