

Ref.: TC/2135

16 October 2024

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By e-mail: [dm@ipswich.gov.uk](mailto:dm@ipswich.gov.uk)

**Application:** 24/00583/LBC

**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. Alterations, renovations and restoration of front of house areas of theatre. Renovation and alterations to principle entrance area and associated canopy, foyer and crush bar incorporating restoration of original decorative ceilings and spaces. Renovation and alterations to first floor lounge bar and ancillary areas incorporating restoration of original decorative features and spaces and installation of replacement entrance canopy fascia signage, wall mounted/fascia name sign age, and digital poster screens.

## 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](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

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## **Comment:**

Thank you for consulting Theatres Trust on this application for listed building consent at the Regent. It seeks to undertake internal and external alterations and extensions as part of a project to improve the theatre's accessibility and front of house facilities. There is a corresponding application for planning permission covering 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. Similarly, we welcome plans to invest in the theatre's bars, foyers and general front of house.

We have provided comment on external alterations and extensions within our comments for application 24/00583/FPI3. These cover the two side extensions for a

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lift shaft to the north-west elevation, a WC block to the east/south-east elevation, revision to the accessible and back of house access next to the main entrance/foyer including a new glazed entrance, and an altered entry canopy with associated lighting and signage. We have supported all of these elements, which we consider to be sensitively designed. We consider the canopy to constitute a heritage benefit because it takes influence from historic design going back to the original canopy in 1929. With reference to paragraph 208 of the NPPF, the extensions and glazed entrance provide significant public benefits due to enhanced accessibility and audience facilities. The lift shaft also facilitates the removal or concealment of modern services which detract from setting.

Internally, the existing accessible entrance is of no decorative significance therefore its refurbishment will provide a welcoming environment for wheelchair users and will enhance this area. This was originally the 'paupers' entrance. The Design & Access Statement and the Historic England list entry refer to there being an original paybox which is now blocked. It is not clear from the existing plan where this is located but potentially there is an opportunity to reinstate this as a feature of historic interest.

The main foyer and linked crush hall at stalls level have been altered with later partitions for WCs and offices/back of house functions along with modern bar counters/merchandising. Decorative ceilings and plasterwork have been concealed. Although more recent refurbishments have taken place which has included partially revealed the ceilings, broadly these areas are functional but lack the grandeur of the original 1929 scheme. We therefore welcome that non-original ceilings will be removed. The WC extension along with the revised wheelchair route facilitate removal of later partitions will reinstate the space of these areas. Restoration of the ceilings and decorative plaster mouldings and the installation of new bars and shelving, with new carpets with an indicative heritage-inspired design, will significantly enhance the appearance and appreciation of these areas. This will provide a much better audience experience whilst also constituting a heritage benefit. This element is welcomed and supported.

A similar principle applies to the Circle Lounge. This has been used as a dance/rehearsal studio and general hall. Again, this will be refurbished with installation of a new bar reflecting those of the stalls level. This will provide the theatre with a flexible space which could operate as a bar serving audiences during performances, or could facilitate other events such as private hires and small-scale performances. This will enhance the Regent's flexibility and offer.

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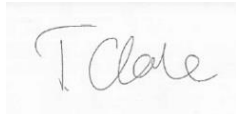
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# Theatres fit for the **future**

Existing WCs serving the stalls and circle levels will be refurbished. This will also serve to improve the audience experience, and has no impact on historic significance.

We welcome this project and the investment being made into the Regent and its facilities. We consider this to be a sensitive scheme from a heritage perspective which will also enhance the audience experience and the venue's operation. We therefore support the granting of listed building consent.

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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