

Ref.: TC/1431

15 November 2024

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Development Management
London Borough of Tower Hamlets
Mulberry Place
Clove Crescent
E14 2BG

By e-mail: development.control@towerhamlets.gov.uk

Application: PA/24/01316/A1

Site: 490 Commercial Road, London, E1 0HX

Proposal: Demolition of two-storey ancillary block to the rear of the Troxy building and construction of a seven-storey plus mezzanine hotel (C1 Use Class) and ancillary accommodation for Troxy with associated cycle parking, roof plant, hard landscaping and access; and refurbishment of the existing Troxy building and adjoining former Brewery Tap (Sui Generis) comprising i.) External works: Refurbishment of faience façade and glazing; repair and restoration of original canopy; reinstatement of glazed and leaded timber doors to Ground Floor front entrance; installation of rooftop PV array; repair and extension of existing chimney to rear; and repair and reinstatement of external façade and signage of the adjoining Brewery Tap. ii.) Phased Internal works: Reinstatement of double-height foyer and mezzanine; repair of original ceilings; installation of new lift in lightwell; installation of plant in basement; and general internal refurbishment works on ground floor to former Brewery Tap.

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

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Director Jon Morgan

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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 planning permission has been brought to the attention of Theatres Trust by the applicant because it is seeking development and alterations at the Troxy, including redevelopment and extension to the rear of the building, external refurbishments and repairs, the addition of PV panels to the roof, and internal alterations. This includes works to the adjoining former Brewery Tap pub which is now within the Troxy's control.

We have been aware of these plans for some time, as we have been actively engaged by the applicant and their design team. These follow previous applications which have formed a wider programme of development, improvement and restoration, some of which have already been undertaken.

There is a corresponding application for listed building consent to which we have responded under separate cover.

The Troxy is a valued cultural and community asset which serves not just its immediate catchment within Tower Hamlets but also contributes towards London's internationally renowned arts and cultural offer. It is an important larger-scale venue which attracts high-profile artists and events. It is a Grade II listed heritage asset located within the York Square Conservation Area. It was built as both a cinema and a theatre, opening in 1933, and was designed by renowned architect George Coles. As such its continued success, sustainability, viability and conservation is to be supported. Efforts to improve the Troxy's facilities, the audience experience and its ability to attract shows are to be welcomed, subject to significance as a heritage asset being preserved and enhanced.

This application covers a number of works. There is to be significant development to the rear of the building entailing demolition of the current back of house extension and construction of a seven-storey building adjoining the Troxy which will be used for

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short-stay accommodation. There will be external repairs and restorations including installing new signage and the installation of PV panels to the roof. Internally, there will be various alterations primarily covered within our comments on the associated listed building consent although we are making some operational comments in this submission where they are linked to the new development.

General external repairs and restorations

As set out in our comments on the listed building consent, we welcome and support repairs and restorations to the front and side elevations which constitute heritage benefits that will enhance the character of the Troxy and its setting.

Addition of PV panels to the roof

We similarly welcome the installation of PV panels to the roof. Paragraph 164 of the NPPF gives significant weight to supporting energy efficiency and low-carbon improvements including through installation of panels. This will help enhance the Troxy's environmental sustainability, and is a reversible change.

Alterations and return to use of the Brewery Tap

The pub closed around 2012 and subsequently the upper levels were converted to residential use. The ground floor pub area has since been in brief unauthorised retail/commercial uses but has otherwise been vacant for some time. It is now within the control of the Troxy. The proposed use of the former pub as a café and community space is welcomed as this will bring it back into use for a purpose similar to its original function. This constitutes a heritage benefit, and will also provide active frontage within the designated Limehouse district town centre.

Redevelopment of rear block

This is a significant element of the proposals, not just the scale of the development but because of the internal and functional rearrangements it facilitates.

The current rear block contains two dressing rooms, stores, a workshop and other back of house services to the ground floor and a further five dressing rooms on the

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upper level. It is a later addition to the rear of the Pitsea Street elevation, which itself is of typically utilitarian form and character and lacks the decorative significance of the front elevation. Therefore the principle of loss of this block is not something to which we would object. This block occupies the south-west corner of the site. The south-east corner consists of a yard, which since the earlier phases of works has had a marquee installed which functions as the Troxy's get-in.

These plans would see that block demolished and replaced by a new seven-storey development adjoined to the rear of the Troxy. That will largely function as short-stay accommodation along with back of house functions and the get-in at ground floor level. There will be internal reorganisation to re-provide dressing rooms and other functions elsewhere.

We are supportive of the design approach for the new building in terms of scale and materials, which we consider to be sensitive to the character and significance of the Troxy and its setting. There is some buffer between the fly tower and the rooms at upper levels which should help mitigate the risk of disturbance from shows and events.

This will provide a much better get-in arrangement, and its enclosure should help reduce disturbance to existing surrounding properties.

With regards to the dressing rooms, the Design and Access Statement notes they are being consolidated with improved accommodation and better connectivity to the stage and cross-over. Whilst the current location may not be optimal, being some distance from the stage door, the dressing rooms are all located together which has some benefits. However within this scheme they are being re-located largely to the eastern side of the building within various areas stage right at different levels. It appears these may have been slotted in within available spaces rather than being a coherent block as we had seen in pre-application plans (although provision of an accessible dressing room is clearly welcomed). There is a net loss of dressing rooms, although this may be acceptable if it is deemed to meet the venue's needs and they are of better standard compared to existing. The development we saw at pre-application was of greater height. We suggest that consideration could be given to taking suites 9-14 out of short stay use and given to the main venue to provide a more coherent dressing room block. Alternatively the addition of one extra storey

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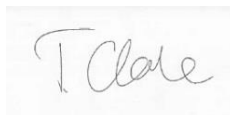
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could enable further improvements to back of house facilities including a larger and more accessible green room (this currently appears to be in an inaccessible location for wheelchair users so we urge re-consideration). We consider the additional harm that would be generated would be mitigated by the public benefits of delivering better facilities and back of house accessibility for the Troxy.

Whilst we have raised points for further consideration which we believe would further enhance the scheme, these can be addressed at the next stage of design.

We are supportive of the granting of planning permission.

Please contact us should you wish to discuss these comments further.



Tom Clarke MRTPI

National Planning Adviser

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