

Ref.: TC/287

4 December 2024

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Civic Centre  
Port Talbot  
SA13 1PJ

By e-mail: [planning@npt.gov.uk](mailto:planning@npt.gov.uk)

**Application:** P2024/0685

**Site:** Princess Royal Theatre Port Talbot Civic Centre Access To Port Talbot Civic Centre Port Talbot Neath Port Talbot SA13 1PJ

**Proposal:** The refurbishment of the Princess Royal theatre and civic square, including extension of the theatre.

## Remit:

The Theatres Trust is the National Advisory Body for Theatres and was established by The Theatres Trust Act 1976 'to promote the better protection of theatres'. The Trust is a statutory consultee in the planning system and local planning authorities in Wales are required to consult the Trust on planning applications for '*development involving any land on which there is a theatre*', '*residential development within 50 metres of a theatre*' as well as for proposed theatres. The definition of theatres within the Act defines a theatre as 'any building or part of a building constructed wholly or mainly for the public performance of plays', and therefore applies to theatres, playhouses, arts centres, ciné-varieties or buildings converted for theatre use, old and new, in other uses or disused.

## Theatres Trust

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL

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## **Comment:**

This application for planning permission has come to the attention of Theatres Trust through reports of the development in the press, as it is seeking the refurbishment and extension of Princess Royal Theatre. We note that we were consulted on 25<sup>th</sup> October, but no notification is recorded as having been received.

Princess Royal Theatre forms part of the Port Talbot Civic Centre, occupying the eastern wing with its own entrance into the theatre foyer. Its auditorium has a capacity of around 800 across stalls and balcony. Whilst balcony seating is fixed its stalls was built to accommodate different functions and formats. It hosts a range of different shows and is an important cultural facility for the town and its wider catchment. We therefore welcome efforts to invest in this theatre and its facilities.

Nonetheless, the theatre does have some challenges. We concur with the implied view of the applicant as expressed within the Design & Access Statement that the theatre's frontage lacks activation and is not instantly recognisable as a theatre, having more the character of an office building. There are also broader internal limitations which are not unique to this theatre. This project seeks to address those matters.

A significant element of these proposals is the construction of extensions to the front and part of the side. To the front this will provide a double-height atrium to enlarge the foyer. The benefit of this design approach is that it will improve the theatre's prominence and make the front elevation more open, making the venue more visible and inviting. An all-day café/bar offer will be provided, which will help improve engagement with the theatre and its offer and provide greater diversification and opportunities for revenue generation. Importantly, along with the side extension, it also allows for internal reorganisation which will provide much-needed additional WCs significantly increasing provision including an accessible WC. There will be a new lift which will make the upper levels accessible, therefore making the theatre more inclusive. This is welcomed. Further comment on WCs and accessibility is provided later in this document.

Alongside these works will be further internal reorganisation. The large kitchen which sits alongside the auditorium will be converted to a multi-purpose room, which will support the theatre's events and conferencing offer as well as facilitating classes, rehearsals and potentially smaller-scale performances. This will further enhance the theatre's role and cultural value. It is recommended that consideration to wider

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doorways is given during the next design stage to enhance accessible provision.

To the rear of the theatre will be a further extension which will improve the theatre's get-in/servicing access, supported by an external lift to manage the change in levels. This will make the theatre's handling of shows more efficient, making it more attractive to producers. It will also provide an additional acoustic baffle between the stage house and the outside.

To the back of house area stage left will be reorganisation which will provide a new star/premier dressing room and a green room with an en-suite shower and toilet (it is assumed that all will be designed to be accessible). Having dressing room facilities and a green room at ground floor level will also have a positive impact on accessibility and inclusivity for artists.

To the first floor, what is currently council space for offices will be given over to an additional upper foyer, bar and further new WCs. This will also improve the experience of audiences, as well as offer a break-out area also to improve the conferencing offer. While this level does have lift access there is no note of wheelchair accessible positions at this level. Further consideration should be given as to whether adjustments could be made to the front row of the circle to allow for this.

The general layout of the second floor will be similar, but it will become accessible front of house through the new lift and it is stated there will be improved acoustic treatment to the meeting rooms. These will benefit from an outlook to roof of the front extension which will be a green roof. Four wheelchair seating positions are indicated at this level. Companion seating should also be included. There is no bar facility or public toilet provision at this level and it is recommended that consideration is given as to whether it may be possible to decrease the size of the second committee room to allow for WC facilities above the toilet locations on other floor levels and for this room to become a pop-up bar facility to serve the upper circle level when the theatre is open.

Regarding WC provision, the increase in the number of toilets is welcomed however it is noted that the overall provision is lower than regulatory standards. The works provide good opportunity to further address this shortfall in provision. Consideration should also be given to universal / gender neutral toilets to provide choice to audience members. It is unclear from the proposals whether there is a Changing Places Toilet provision within the overall complex – if not, this would be a further

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point for consideration.

It is unclear whether the new front of house lift will also be used for evacuation purposes / of the evacuation for those unable to use stairs.

The Design and Access document notes some positive improvements for the internal fit-out of the theatre in terms of retractable seating, improvements to the orchestra pit to aid flexibility of the space / speed of turn around, review of stage equipment and potential replacement etc. We appreciate that these are internal items and do not fall within the planning documentation, however, are all worthwhile considerations to continue to support the operation of the theatre and hope that the scheme can support the development and implementation of these ideas.

Signage is a further area touched on in the Design and Access statement and will, no doubt be the subject of a future application both for the main signage advertising the theatre and also digital posters etc to advertise the programme.

We support the design approach to the extensions. The challenges associated with opening the theatre's front south-facing aspect have been mitigated through sensitively designed solar shading. The rear will be clad incorporating large branding which will improve prominence and increase awareness to passing traffic.

A further element of these plans is a revised landscaping plan to the front of the theatre. We consider this will improve the outlook from the theatre and further help attract people to the building and the wider area.

The Design and Access statement suggests that the scheme is hoping to achieve BREEAM Very Good and that the replacement of plant will ensure compliance with energy efficiency standards. We would advocate to ensure that these standards are maintained throughout the project.

Whilst we have raised a number of points for further thought and clarification, these can be considered and addressed at the next stage of design as the project moves forward. Overall, we welcome this project and are pleased to see investment into this important theatre and its facilities.

We are supportive of the granting of planning permission.

Please contact us if we may be of further assistance or should you wish to discuss this representation in greater detail.

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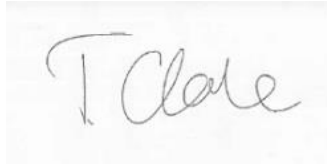
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# Theatres fit for the **future**



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National Planning Adviser

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