

Ref.: TC

13 March 2025

Elizabeth Warden
Ipswich Borough Council
Development Management
Grafton House
15-17 Russell Road
Ipswich
IP1 2DE

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

Application: 25/00141/LBC

Site: The Gallery Studio Theatre, St Georges Street, Ipswich, Suffolk, IP1 3LH

Proposal: Alterations to existing first-floor theatre seating, including seating replacement, reconfiguration of auditorium, alteration to balcony railing, construction of new technical control room, and exposure of hidden historic features.

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 Joshua McTaggart

Trustees Vicky Browning OBE, Anna Collins, James Dacre, Suba Das, Liam Evans-Ford, Stephanie Hall, Annie Hampson OBE, 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 Gallery Studio Theatre. It seeks to carry out internal alterations within the theatre's auditorium.

The Gallery Studio Theatre is within a former Salem Chapel which is a Grade II listed heritage asset. It was previously a studio theatre operated by the New Wolsey until they vacated in 2019 following expansion of their main site. It was taken on by The Gallery Players, a local amateur theatre group which is a charitable organisation run by its members and volunteers. The Players utilise the theatre for their rehearsals and productions, as well as making it available for general community hire.

Paragraph 98 of the NPPF (2024) seeks planning decisions to plan positively for community, cultural and social facilities such as this.

The current seating block is said to have been installed in 2009 but is in any case clearly a later intervention with no particular historic merit. It is not optimal in terms of accessibility, audience comfort or audience safety. We therefore have no objections to the principle of replacement on heritage grounds, and support and welcome efforts to enhance the theatre's function and adhere to current standards and best practice. Currently there are five rows of bench seating accessed by a central gangway which has no handrail. This is not ideal for those with reduced mobility. The new block will have altered tiering levels with six rows of seats. This will give a slight increase of five seats. These will be accessed by a gangway on either side. Whilst not shown on the proposed plan, we welcome that wheelchair positions have been considered and will be located to the ends of the front row. It is assumed therefore that the seats shown in those positions are removable, and the seats next to them will be held for companion seating. There will also be a technical control room to the rear of the seating block which is an operational improvement.

Alteration/replacement of the seating bank itself is considered neutral in terms of heritage impact. To facilitate this there is a need for removal of remaining fixed sections of the historic balcony. Whilst this generates a degree of less than substantial harm, with reference to paragraph 215 of the NPPF there is public benefit in mitigation from improving the audience experience and ultimately a heritage benefit by keeping this asset in active use. Furthermore the sections will be securely stored and can be reversible, and the applicant has set out a reasonable strategy for storage and documentation.

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The exposing of further historic features by removing an area of later suspended ceiling and enhancing visibility of timber roof beams and structure with lighting is also considered a heritage benefit.

We therefore support the granting of listed building consent.

Please contact us if we may be of further assistance or should you wish to discuss these comments in further detail.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "T Clarke".

Tom Clarke MRTPI

National Planning Adviser

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