

Protecting theatres for **everyone**



Our Ref.: RA/2102

29 March 2017

Anne-Marie Piedot
Planning and Building Control
Liverpool City Council
Municipal Buildings
Dale Street
Liverpool L2 2DH

Dear Ms Piedot,

Former Forum/ ABC Cinema, Lime Street, Liverpool L1 1JN

Application Ref: 17F/0599 and 17L/0603

I write regarding the above applications for alterations and the change of use of the former Forum/ ABC Cinema to form a mixed use performance and music venue. The Theatres Trust supports the applications. Please see our comments below.

Remit: The Theatres Trust is the national advisory public body for theatres. We champion the past, present and future of live theatre, by protecting the buildings and what goes on inside. 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: The Trust supports the proposed change of use and associated alterations of this former cinema, as it will retain the building in a cultural use that is compatible with its Grade II heritage listing. The Trust's interest in the building is because it was built as a super cinema with a stage and facilities to support live performance. We understand these works are the first phase of a longer term plan to refurbish and reopen up other parts of the building to complement the proposed performance and music venue use.

The Trust actively encourages local authorities and owners to bring vacant cultural buildings back into sustainable public use as a catalyst for wider regeneration, and we agree the use proposed is appropriate for this building. The use respects its heritage significance by requiring minimal alterations and interventions and utilises the existing form of the heritage asset; maintains public access and the building in a beneficial cultural use; and will support and enhance the variety of cultural facilities within this local cultural quarter.

We therefore support the works proposed as they are necessary to bring the building up to modern building and accessibility standards, including the replacement of the external doors with new acoustic rated doors, the creation of two new fire escapes to the auditorium, the provision

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of an extended stage and alterations to level the stalls, and the new acoustic lining to the stage house, all of which are reversible, if needed. We also welcome the stabilisation and repairs to the decorative plasterwork.

However, we query the provision of WCs in the basement, as it appears to be low (particularly urinals) for an 800 person capacity entertainment venue. We recommend the applicant refer to the ABTT's 'Technical Standards for Places of Entertainment' and clarify if there is appropriate provision, particularly as all the WCs are provided in the one location, not spread through the venue. The disabled WC in the basement is probably not needed here as it is not accessible by lift and the space could be used for additional WCs/ urinals. With regards to the female WCs, we recommend creating an entry door at the stage end of the curved corridor, with exit at the door proposed in the plans, which will help with circulation and flow of users, and avoid a bottleneck at the current proposed entrance which is shared with the disabled and male WCs.

We note the box office and bars will be pop up units and thus their exact location and nature have not been clearly identified. We recommend clarification is sort on where and how beer kegs, etc. will be stored and transferred to the pop up bars when in use, or confirm if alterations are needed to provide plumbing and connections for beer lines, etc. to service the bars, given the basement room under the foyer appears to be the most likely place for a beer/ drinks store.

Finally, we recommend the creation of a sound lobby between the auditorium and the foyer. Given the location of the pop up bars and access to WCs from the foyer, the doors will be in constant use and the sound lobby will greatly assist with noise control and mitigation.

Overall we agree the alterations will create a vibrant and accessible venue and bring this important listed building back into a sustainable cultural use. Once clarification is sought on the above issues, we recommend granting planning permission and listed building consent.

This advice reflects paragraph 70 of the NPPF which provides clear guidance on the importance of safeguarding cultural facilities and states that in 'promoting healthy communities', planning decisions should 'plan positively for cultural buildings' and 'guard against the loss of cultural facilities and services'.

Please contact us if we may be of further assistance.

Yours sincerely,



Ross Anthony
Planning Adviser