

Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: RA/1849

10 April 2017

Clare Johnson
Development Management
Blackpool Council
Corporation Street
Blackpool FY1 1LZ

Dear Ms Johnson,

Pavilion Theatre and Horseshoe, Winter Gardens, Church Street, Blackpool

Application Ref.: 17/0164 and 17/0165

I write regarding the above planning and listed building applications for part demolition and alterations to the Olympia link building, Pavilion Theatre and Horseshoe at the Blackpool Winter Gardens to create a museum with a new public entrance to Adelaide Street. Please see our advice below.

Remit: The 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'.

Background: Blackpool Winter Gardens is the earliest, largest, and most complete surviving Winter Gardens complex in the United Kingdom. It has been central to tourism, leisure and entertainment in Blackpool for over 130 years, helping make the town one of England's premier seaside resorts. Its outstanding architectural and historic significance is reflected in its Grade II* statutory listing and the Pavilion Theatre and Horseshoe are two of the oldest and most significant spaces at the heart of the complex.

The physical form and use of the Pavilion has changed as the nature of public entertainment has evolved over the last 140 years. It opened in 1878 as a largely glazed winter garden and music hall that was open, through a series of shutters, to the Horseshoe promenade that wrapped around it. The Pavilion was converted into a theatre in 1885 and much of the existing auditorium and decoration was installed in 1896 to designs by renowned theatre architects Wylson and Long. The Pavilion was adapted for cinema and then later fully enclosed and separated from the Horseshoe in the 1930s. The stalls were levelled and the proscenium arch was bricked up in 1986 when it was converted into multi-purpose events space, for which it is still used.

Theatres Trust

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL

T 020 7836 8591

F 020 7836 3302

E info@theatrestrust.org.uk

W theatrestrust.org.uk

Chair Tim Eyles **Director** Jon Morgan

Trustees Nick Allott OBE, Richard Baldwin, Dara Ó Briain, Paddy Dillon, Ruth Eastwood, Oliver Goodwin, Prof Gavin Henderson CBE, Jerry Katzman, Dame Penelope Keith DL, Judith Mellor OBE, Peter Roberts, Simon Ruddick, Ann Skippers, Anna Stapleton

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In terms of historical significance, the Pavilion is a unique example of a transitional variety theatre showing the evolution from music hall to theatre. While the Wylson and Long scheme created much of the existing decoration scheme and layout, with its balconies, boxes and proscenium arch stage, which are all features of a typical late Victorian theatre building, it retained the shutters linking the space to the surrounding Horseshoe and thus the links to its previous music hall use. In addition, the Pavilion is one of only two known remaining examples of an intact auditorium by Wylson and Long, the other being the Tottenham Palace Theatre of Varieties. All other 19 theatres they are known to have designed have been demolished or substantially altered, despite ranking with Matcham, Sprague and Crewe as the leading Victorian/ Edwardian theatre designers.

The Pavilion has been listed on our Theatre Buildings at Risk register for a number of years due to the dilapidated state of the roof and ceiling. The Trust has been supportive of Blackpool Council's efforts to refurbish the wider Winter Gardens complex and we are keen to find a permanent and sustainable use for the Pavilion that will see it repaired and restored for the wider public to enjoy.

Advice: The Theatres Trust supports the overall aim of this proposal and this fantastic opportunity this presents to repair and restore the building structure and create a new state-of-the-art museum and exhibition spaces within the Pavilion Theatre, Horseshoe and associated basement areas. Given the range of other large theatre venues in Blackpool, the Trust has previously advised it would be unlikely the Pavilion could be successfully returned to permanent theatre use. We therefore agree that a museum of Blackpool and popular culture could be an appropriate and viable alternative cultural use for the space that can celebrate its theatrical past, and support and complement the existing cultural offer at the Winter Gardens. Attracting a broader range of users will help make the overall complex more economically sustainable in the long term.

The Trust has been involved in a number of pre-application meetings with the design team, however, there remain some matters that we feel need further consideration before proceeding, particularly the proposed vertical access through the auditorium. While we accept the change of use and that alterations will have to be made, we feel that significant interventions are proposed to key features of the theatre to suit the museum and its access needs, rather than allowing the significance and conservation of the building dictate the where these interventions would be acceptable.

The Statements of Significance, prepared by Professor Vanessa Toulmin and Mark Price, together with the Conservation Plan and Heritage Statement, note the internal decoration scheme, the interconnectivity between the Pavilion and the Horseshoe, the rear internal auditorium stairs, and the sense of scale and layering of the balconies as the key architectural features of historical importance. In our opinion, the application does not fully consider the significance of these features and therefore doesn't provide the justification needed to support certain works that harm this Grade II* building, such as the major interventions proposed to the balcony.

Our main concern is with the alterations planned within the auditorium. The proposal involves

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reopening the original stair positions that originally linked the basement entrance directly into the rear of the auditorium, though not reinstating the stairs themselves, and closing the two current stair positions that link the basement to the Horseshoe. A lift core pierces through the auditorium to connect the basement with the stalls and horseshoe level, and then to the proposed temporary exhibition space being created on the lower circle balcony. The lift core, together with the proposed stair that wraps around it from stalls to balcony level, are significant installations and dominate the apse end of the auditorium, blocking the views to the rear of the theatre, and requiring significant alterations to the balcony structure. In our opinion, the lift core causes significant harm to the theatre, to the building fabric and its historical significance. In addition, this proposal requires the removal of the existing historic stairs that link the upper and lower balconies and the (now removed) bridge that Wylson and Long installed over the Horseshoe. The Statement of Significance notes the loss of this unique design would be regrettable and opportunities to reinstate the use of stairs in this location should be further explored.

Overall, the Trust is not convinced that all possible options for vertical circulation around the building have been fully explored and that a less intrusive and damaging option for the lift core and stair cannot be provided in this, or another part of the building.

The lower circle balcony itself will also be partly levelled to create two tiers of exhibition space. The smaller front tier will be created by raising the floor to the height of the existing balcony and installing new glass balustrade, while the rear space, known as the temporary exhibition space, will be permanently separated from the auditorium by the installation of a full height glass wall. An earlier scheme proposed a solid wall, and while a glazing is less intrusive, the wall, together with the lift core, do continue to interrupt the sense of depth of the balcony. We note the use of this level as a temporary exhibition space is subject to a structural assessment of the balcony structure (to be undertaken once works commence and the structure can be accessed) to ensure it can support the expected loading i.e. the suggested maximum capacity of 513 people for events, plus the new level floor structure, and/ or the displays/ exhibitions/ related storage equipment. It was originally designed to hold 402 seats.

While the interconnectivity between the Pavilion and the Horseshoe is significant, this is a feature that has been altered in the past, having being fully blocked off in the 1930s and reopened in the 80s. We recognise the proposed re-blocking up of these openings is needed to provide sound proofing for different exhibitions within the museum, and as they don't appear to harm sensitive historic fabric and have been carefully designed to allow the dividing poles to remain visible, this is considered acceptable.

We also support the overall repairs proposed for the building, particularly the repairs to the slate roof and external brick work. Making the roof weather, water, and animal proof will allow for the stabilisation and repair of the ceiling and decorative plaster work, which is in a deteriorated state which needs to be supported by an internal scaffold structure. With regards the ceiling, we note only a Preliminary Condition Assessment has been carried out and a fully compliant ceiling inspection and remediation plan, outlining a clear methodology for the repairs proposed, is required in line with HSE and ABTT regulations. We therefore recommend a full baseline survey and preparation of a methodology statement is required as a condition of any consent before works commence. Details of the guidance on ceilings can be found here:

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<http://www.abtt.org.uk/abtt-publish-new-guidance-for-the-inspection-of-suspended-fibrous-plaster-ceilings/>

With the interconnectivity of the various spaces within the complex, it is impossible to look at this application in isolation, and it is important to consider how this proposal will impact and allow the rest of the complex to continue to function simultaneously. We remain concerned about the long term storage requirements for tables, chairs and event equipment used for functions in the Ballroom. They are currently stored behind the Arena and Pavilion in the Olympia link building along Adelaide Street. It remains unclear where the alternate storage space will be, and it is noted that adequate, accessible storage space for the ballroom was not included within the recent application for the conference centre. Given the importance of this to the operation of the Ballroom, this needs to be clarified before the building is demolished to enable this development.

In terms of policy, section 16(2) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 places a statutory duty on Council to have a special regard to the desirability of preserving listed buildings or any features of special architectural or historic interest which they process. Paragraph 131 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) also notes the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation, and that great weight should be placed on its conservation (paragraph 123).

Due to the impact of the proposed lift core, stair and associated alterations to the balcony, the proposal in its current form doesn't meet the above legislative and NPPF requirements, nor do the benefits outweigh the harm caused to this important Grade II* heritage asset at this stage.

Despite this, the Trust is keen to see the museum project come to fruition and are keen to continue working with the design team to resolve these matters so the project can move forward. We therefore recommend that the application is withdrawn to allow for further discussions, and that the team carry out a thorough options analysis that re-examine the visitor circulation needs around the building and explore alternative proposals for the lift core which are in line with the Statement of Significance and the need to sustain and enhance the features of special architectural or historic interest.

Please contact us if we may be of further assistance.

Yours sincerely,



Ross Anthony
Planning Adviser

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