

Protecting theatres for **everyone**



Our Ref.: RA/3862

21 April 2017

Mr Richard Byrne
Development Management
Metropolitan Borough of Oldham
PO Box 30
Oldham. OL1 1UQ

Dear Mr Byrne,

Proposed Theatre, Union Street, Oldham, OL1 1DN

Application Ref: PA/339957/17 and LB/339956/17

I write regarding the above planning and listed building applications for the construction of a new replacement theatre building (sui generis) with ancillary bar and office uses, and public realm works adjacent to the Grade II Listed former Oldham Library Building. The Trust supports the applications. 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'. The Act defines a theatre as any building or part of a building that was constructed or used for the public performance of plays, and therefore applies to theatres, playhouses, arts centres, super cinemas, ciné-varieties or buildings converted for theatre use, including those now in other uses or disused.

Comment: The Trust welcomes and supports this proposal for the provision of a modern purpose built theatre to replace the existing Coliseum Theatre, which will complement and enhance the Cultural Quarter being developed in Oldham around the former Library building. We are aware of the functional issues facing the existing Coliseum and understand the new theatre will be both a producing and receiving house and will include a 550 seat main house, a 175 seat studio theatre, and ancillary office, function and café/ bar spaces. The Trust actively encourages local authorities and developers to place culture at the heart of place making and to develop cultural facilities as a catalyst for wider regeneration.

Overall, the Trust is pleased the proposal has developed and been refined since the initial scheme was granted permission. Most of the Trust previous concerns, particularly those related to, circulation, access and operational issues have now largely been addressed. The new facilities will enable the Coliseum to expand its programme of work and engagement with the

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The National Advisory Public Body for Theatres

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local community, and enable the Coliseum Theatre to attract a greater range of modern touring productions that the existing theatre cannot stage.

In terms of specific design comments, we recommend the applicants give further consideration to:

- Providing a security desk/ office at the stage door on the -02 floor to manage access into the back of house areas;
- The need for the short stub aisle in the centre of the stalls area. This appears unnecessary and, given they are centrally located, would be better used for seating with some of the best sightlines in the house; and
- While the WC provision meets the appropriate guidelines, we are concerned about how they are distributed on the different levels, and therefore the distance an audience member may have to walk to find facilities. With appropriate signage and staff management, this may not be an issue for the applicant, but should be reviewed.

We note the documentation indicates that plans for the existing theatre are being developed. We would seek an undertaking from the applicant that the new theatre will be completed and fully operational before the existing theatre closes. The Trust would recommend the existing building is first offered to other cultural organisations before other uses are considered.

The Trust's advice reflects guidance in 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'.

This scheme will secure the continued operation of the Coliseum Theatre and ensure it remains a viable and sustainable in to the future, providing a valuable cultural asset for Oldham. The Trust would therefore recommend granting planning and listed building consent.

Please contact us if we may be of further assistance.

Yours sincerely,



Ross Anthony
Planning Adviser