

Our Ref.: RA/1037

16 June 2017

Panyun Chow
Lambeth Planning
London Borough of Lambeth
10 Wandsworth Road
London SW8 2LL

Dear Miss Chow,

The Old Vic Theatre, The Cut, London

Application ref: 17/02072/LB, 17/02404/ADV and 17/02071/FUL

I write regarding the above advertising, planning and listed building applications for repainting, new entrance doors, and new signage at The Old Vic Theatre. The Theatres Trust supports the applications. Please see our remit and comments 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 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'.

Advice: The Trust agrees the existing signage is ad hoc and there is a real opportunity to rationalise and enhance the signage in a cohesive manner that respects the heritage and architecture of the theatre. Signs are essential to advertise the theatre and are an established traditional feature on theatre buildings having always been used to stand out within the streetscape to attract theatregoers. Theatres have to be more than merely visible if they are to compete and remain viable. The ways in which theatres advertise their presence and their 'offer' are varied and it is acknowledged that no sign can be completely free from architectural impact.

Initially billboards and banners were used on theatre buildings, but signage was optimised in the 1920s and 30s when the use of projecting neon signs became popular, followed by the use of internally illuminated light boxes from 1960s and 70s. Innovations in lighting, electronic signage, and flat panel technology have rendered the bulk of many old-fashioned light boxes unnecessary, and modern signs, using up-to-date technology, and low energy LED lighting and LED screens, are successfully being installed on many listed theatres, whilst not interfering with neighbouring properties or harming the significance of building.

The introduction of the neon signage for the stage door and 'Penny' bar, and changeable neon

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The National Advisory Public Body for Theatres

The Theatres Trust Charitable Fund co-operates with Theatres Trust, has the same Trustees and is registered as a charity under number 274697

signage above the front canopy is therefore considered appropriate and is supported. This type of signage is currently used to good effect at a number of listed theatres, including the Garrick Theatre (1889, Grade II*), the Playhouse Theatre (1882, Grade II), and St Martin's Theatre (1916, Grade II), and at the Royal Court Theatre (1897, Grade II) at Sloane Square. It reflects theatre signage used in the past and allows the building to be seen behind and through the signs, and is a vast improvement to the existing signage identifying the stage door and 'Penny' bar.

We welcome the removal of the various poster boards from each of the elevations and the installation of a single light box on the Waterloo Road elevation and two digital panels on either side of the main entry doors, which will greatly improve the efficiency and time required to manage and change these signs.

The Waterloo Road elevation is largely intact, being little altered since it was built in 1818. However, this elevation also presents a relatively long inactive frontage to Waterloo Road and lends itself to an innovative treatment to identify the theatre. We agree with the proposal to paint the existing render a darker shade to unify the elevation by reducing the contrast between the colour of the brick and colour of the render. We also recognize the need to update the main theatre identification signage to reflect the current branding and welcome the concept of the large block lettering on both the front and Waterloo Road elevations. As the signs are to be painted directly on the render, there will be no damage to the historic fabric of the building, and can be easily reversed at a later date, if need be.

In regards to the replacement of the main entry and 'Penny' bar doors, we note these doors are not original, having been installed when the theatre's main elevation was substantially modified in the early 1980s. The side door to the bar is currently secured by a metal roller shutter when it is not in use. In our opinion, their replacement with the proposed full height glazed doors in metal frames would be appropriate in this context, improving appearance, security and transparency in and out of the theatre, without affecting the special architectural character of the building.

This advice reflects guidance in Paragraph 70 of the NPPF which states that in 'promoting healthy communities', planning decisions should '*plan positively for cultural buildings*' and ensure that such facilities '*are able to develop and modernise in a way that is sustainable, and retained for the benefit of the community*'.

The Trust would therefore recommend granting advertising, planning and listed building consent. Please contact us if we may be of further assistance.

Regards,



Ross Anthony
Planning Adviser