

Our Ref.: RA/2198

10 August 2017

Mr Andrew Tyrrell  
Planning Service  
Colchester Borough Council  
Colchester Essex CO3 3WG

Dear Mr Tyrrell,

**Mercury Theatre, Balkerne Gate, Colchester CO1 1PT**

Application Ref: 17/1964

I write regarding the above planning application for the refurbishment and extension of the Mercury Theatre. The Trust supports the application. 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'.

**Comment:** The Theatres Trust actively encourages theatres owners to invest in their venues to ensure they meet modern building standards, and the needs and expectations of audiences, staff, and performers in order to remain viable and sustainable into the future. The Trust therefore welcomes and supports this application for the refurbishment and extension of the Mercury Theatre which will upgrade and renew the front and back of house facilities to improve the customer experience, encourage wider community use, and provide additional facilities to support productions and generate additional income.

In terms of the proposed front of house layout, reorganisation of the entry, café, box office and the infill of the port-cochere creates significantly more useable ground floor space within the existing building footprint, and opens up these spaces to improve the appearance, accessibility and audience circulation on this level. It also allows for the relocation of the main entry point so that it is more clearly visible and facing the main pedestrian and vehicle access routes from the town centre to the east. The additional lift WCs on both levels and the learning suite are also supported and enhance the facilities offered by the theatre.

Likewise, the back of house alterations and the construction of a new production block provide much needed additional storage, dressing room and rehearsal space, and have been designed to allow the new spaces to be used separately from the main house and public areas. We also welcome the opening up the stage dock and creation of a new get in door, which will provide a

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**Chair** Tim Eyles **Director** Jon Morgan

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The National Advisory Public Body for Theatres

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direct, clear and wide route for the delivery and movement of sets and props. We do, however, recommend the installation of an additional acoustic door and sound lock between the stage and the workshop and/ or between the get in area and the new production block next to dressing room 4 to minimise noise and light transfer during performances.

We also appreciate the consideration given to the materials and appearance of this new extension to minimise its impact on the surrounding area, and the proposed archaeology investigations to be carried out to determine the appropriate design for the buildings foundations and substructure.

Overall the Theatres Trust agrees with the clear rationale for this project and agree the proposed works will improve the theatre's facilities and the way it operates and functions to meet these aims. We therefore recommend granting planning permission, attaching conditions as appropriate.

The Trust's advice reflects guidance in paragraph 70 of the NPPF to promote and safeguard cultural facilities, which 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ross Anthony', with a horizontal line drawn through the middle of the signature.

Ross Anthony  
Planning Adviser