

Ref.: RA/9004260

29 August 2017

Mr Peter Munnelly
Planning and Development
Islington Council
222 Upper Street
London N1 1YA

Dear Mr Munnelly,

King's Head and Former North London Mail Centre, Upper Street, London N1 1AE

Application Ref.: P2017/0800/FUL

I write regarding the above planning application for the creation of a 360 seat theatre on the basement levels of Block B of the Islington Square development, including partial demolition, alterations and the change of use of the existing theatre space at the rear of the King's Head public house. 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 use through The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015, that requires 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 welcomes and supports the establishment of a new replacement theatre space for the King's Head Theatre, given the limitations of the existing theatre space and the many opportunities the new space creates for the theatre into the future, both artistically and operationally. We recognise the complexities of retro fitting an existing basement area and the constraints this has placed on the design of the new theatre auditoria and support spaces, and understand the new theatre has been secured with a 20 year peppercorn rent lease.

To help the King's Head Theatre refine the scheme, the Trust facilitated an independent peer-based Advisory Review of the proposal with a panel of theatre design and operation experts in July 2017. The purpose of the Advisory Review was to consider the functionality of the theatre space as well as operational issues associated with a larger space and its basement location. The feedback provided by our Advisory Review Panel was mostly positive, however, to ensure the viability of the theatre there are a number of issues that do need clarification and resolution before planning permission is granted. These issues are visibility and street presence; circulation and the get in; and fire safety.

Theatres Trust

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Chair Tim Eyles **Director** Jon Morgan

Trustees Richard Baldwin, David Blyth, Pam Bone, Paul Cartwright, Paddy Dillon, Ruth Eastwood, David Ian, Richard Johnston, Gary Kemp, Dara Ó Briain, Simon Ricketts, Peter Roberts, Ann Skippers, Anna Stapleton

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

Visibility and street presence

The existing theatre benefits from its prominent location and street frontage on Upper Street and its ability to promote the theatre and shows to passing pedestrians and traffic. With the relocation of the theatre, there is concern regarding both the visibility and space restrictions of the main entrance and its ability to attract the uplift in audience numbers needed to support the viability of a new, larger theatre.

The proposed footprint of the new entrance provides little scope for a theatre 'shop front' at street level and with very little room to provide a box office desk and audience interface. Given the main entry door is not directly visible from the new arcade, being down the small courtyard being created by the demolition of the existing theatre, we strongly recommend that this area be included in the theatre's demise so that it can be activated to encourage people to enter and use the facilities throughout the day.

Signage will also be a crucial factor in assuring visibility within the new development, and while we support the proposed wall sign in the former window cavity on the east elevation and the sign above the courtyard gates, these must be specifically secured for the theatre's use. The wider finishes and decoration of the courtyard should also be considered as a means of drawing the people to the theatre. The Trust also strongly urges the provision of a signage location on Upper Street to maintain the theatre's street presence.

Circulation and get in

The limitations of the basement space and the small ground level entry mean that there is only one main stair and lift to service the theatre and audience flow and waiting may therefore become problematic, particularly at cross-over times when one show's audience is leaving and another's arriving. Access to the balcony is also limited. We therefore recommend that consideration be given to including one of the ground floor retail spaces next to the main entry as part of the theatre's demise to provide additional circulation and holding space, and the theatre are able to use core stair SW1 for operational purposes, both to access the balcony from the main floor, and to act as a secondary means of exit for the audience leaving a show to minimise congestion on core stair SE1.

We also note that the route between the delivery bays in the adjacent car park on level B2 and the goods lift will make manoeuvring of props and sets challenging. The route involves rotating potentially large items through a bending corridor. This may cause issues on the get in and place additional limitations on the size of scenery and equipment that can be transported, we encourage the theatre to ensure this access is suitable.

Fire safety

The ability to safely evacuate the theatre is paramount and we are concerned that the proposed scheme relies on the use of Evac chairs to help less mobile people escape from a basement of 4-storeys, which requires trained and able staff to be available at all times to use the chairs. The Association of British Theatre Technicians Technical Standards advises '*Where lifts are provided for access for mobility-impaired people they should be designed as evacuation lifts and should comply with the recommendations of BS 9999 and of BS EN 81-3*'. It is strongly

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recommended that the lift provided is designed as an evacuation lift and that emergency evacuation proposals be discussed at this planning stage with the Building Control team and the London Fire Brigade to ensure the scheme satisfactorily addresses this issue.

Advice: While the Trust is fully supportive of the need for a new theatre space to allow the King's Head to expand and develop its work, it is important that the scheme maximise the opportunities available to ensure the venue is a viable and sustainable theatre into the future. Once the above issues are addressed, we are happy to recommend granting planning permission, and suggest planning conditions or a s106 agreement that will restrict the use of the rear part of the King's Head Public House until the new theatre space is operational to guarantee and safeguard the theatre, and a requirement to submit details for theatre signage on Upper Street to maintain the theatre's street presence.

Please contact us if we may be of further assistance.

Regards,

Ross Anthony
Planning Adviser

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