

Protecting theatres for **everyone**



Ref.: RA/9006065

6 September 2017

For the attention of Ms Sarah Brit

Planning Policy and Decisions
London Legacy Development Corporation
1 Stratford Place
London E20 1EJ

Dear Ms Brit,

68 Wallis Road, London E9 5LH

Application Ref.: 17/00391/FULL

I write regarding the above planning application for the change of use and alterations to the building at 68 Wallis Road to include an theatre (Class D2), restaurant (class A3), and offices (Class B1). Our comments only relate to the theatre element of this application. The Theatres Trust supports the application. Please see our advice below.

Remit: The Theatres Trust is the national advisory public body for theatres. We champion the past, present and future of live theatre, by protecting the buildings and what goes on inside. 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 supports the application because it provides a new studio theatre with ancillary facilities which will expand the cultural provision within the Hackney Wick area. With a capacity of 110 people, the new theatre is of a suitable size to support fringe and small scale theatre and the Trust hopes the venue will become a highly valued arts centre as Hackney Wick evolves, nurturing professional local talent and promoting new work. As a privately funded venture, it will also need to have a robust business plan/model to ensure the theatre is operationally successful and financially sustainable in the long-term.

We welcome the external repairs to the windows, brickwork and parapet and the rationalisation of the services attached to the building, though consideration should be given to the location of the new theatre signage needed to promote shows at the theatre. While not a listed building, we also appreciate the efforts to restore the internal elements, including removing the false ceiling and restoring the hall's glazed lantern, floor and balcony, the stairs, and other original architectural features. Other than the creation of new toilets and blocking the links between tenancy 1 and 2, few other internal alterations are proposed in the theatre area.

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 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

In terms of design and operation, the Trust makes the following observations that warrant further consideration by the applicant, though we recognise theatre can be staged in many different ways, and these may not be a concern for the type of shows to be presented by the theatre:

- The stage appears to be comparatively narrow but deep compared to the hall itself, and once the false ceiling has been removed, we recommend testing the acoustics in the hall and voice projection from the stage. It may be beneficial to install a forestage to bring the performance closer to the audience.
- Door D14 has stairs immediately off the stage down to the dressing room, and depending on stage lighting, this may be dangerous for actors leaving the stage. We would recommend altering the stairs to create a landing at the top.
- The provision of a separate toilet (and even shower) for the actors would be beneficial, as the only access to the proposed new facilities is via the auditorium.
- The stage also appears to be rather high above the floor of the hall. Height is generally needed when used in flat floor format to ensure adequate sight lines, but we note the proposed installation of tiered bleacher seating and this means a higher stage is not necessarily needed. While there is a store room underneath, it may be useful to reduce the stage height (which will increase floor to ceiling height above the stage for sets/ lights etc.) or to remove it all together down to the hall's floor level, which would illuminate the issue relating to the side stair and create a more flexible performance space.
- There is almost no front of house space for a box office or bar, both of which are essential to support the operation of a theatre, particularly one of this size where bar sales are generally an essential part of the business plan. These could be provided within the hall itself, but this limits their use during shows. We do recommend reviewing the distribution of space to each of the proposed tenancies to ensure the theatre is provided with all the facilities needed to sustain it. For example, the proposed kitchen for tenancy 1 may be better used as a theatre bar, and the kitchen relocated elsewhere in the building.
- Depending on the final uses of each tenancy and the need for windows 18 and 19, the ground level of the light well could be converted for additional storage, actors WC or a dressing room.

Overall, we support the application and as the proposal will introduce new sustainable uses to reactivate this long vacant building and add to the local cultural offer as the wider Hackney Wick area is redeveloped. The Trust would therefore recommend granting planning permission.

Please contact us if we may be of further assistance.

Yours sincerely,



Ross Anthony
Planning Adviser