

Our Ref.:322

12 December 2017

Mr John Gunn
Development Manager
Tamworth Borough Council
Tamworth Staffordshire

Dear Mr Gunn,

Assembly Rooms, Corporation Street, Tamworth, Staffordshire, B79 7DN

Application Ref: 0509/2017 and 0524/2017

I write regarding the above planning and listed building applications to amend the approved plans relating to the extensions, remodelling and refurbishment of the Assembly Rooms. While the Theatres Trust generally supports the applications, please see our advice outlined 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 Theatres Trust actively encourages theatre owners and operators to upgrade and invest in their venues to ensure they meet modern building, access and safety standards, as well as the needs and expectations of audiences, performers and staff. We believe the revitalisation of theatres and cultural buildings can act as a catalyst for wider town centre regeneration and support the cultural wellbeing of the local community.

The Trust has met and discussed the scheme with the Assembly Rooms project team on a number of occasions and understand the many obstacles and complications associated with the reorganisation and extensions to this statutory listed heritage asset. While the changes proposed as part of these applications do not address all the potential enhancements, many of our earlier concerns have been resolved, such as the improvements to the dressing rooms and back stage accessibility, and we now believe they have developed a more functional scheme to support to ongoing operation and sustainability of the Assembly Rooms.

Other aspects, such as the extension containing the new multi-function space are now designed so they could be adaptable for a new configuration or use in the future, if desired. It is important that proper services are provided in this space to safeguard it for more intensive uses at a later stage and we urge that these are coordinated within the main works package. Getting services in at a later date will be expensive and more difficult to achieve, and the design at this stage should ensure adequate water/ drainage points, etc. that could service a full café / bar are provided.

Theatres Trust

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Chair Tim Eyles **Director** Jon Morgan

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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

We are disappointed the design is unable to achieve full access through the main entrance and believe that the benefits for wheelchair users of being able to access the building through the main entrance would outweigh any harm to the historic façade that may be caused by the redesign of the proposed ramp. The loss of the original rear wall to the auditorium and consequently the cantilevered balcony have been argued as justifiable through the subsequent enlargement of the foyer thereby enabling audiences to enter the building through the original doors. That this cannot be experienced by wheelchair users / those unable to use steps is a missed opportunity. However, we do acknowledge this could be achieved as a later, standalone project and strongly recommend that this is revisited.

The Trust continues to recommend reviewing the width of the stair in the foyer, the fire lobby for which currently encroaches into one of the 3 central bays of the foyer, impeding circulation. Given the extremely tight space within the foyer, we recommend providing a narrower stair to the balcony and hence smaller enclosed lobby. This would be particularly beneficial for the new opening through to the multi-purpose space to ensure that this circulation route, which will be more heavily used, does not feel too cramped as it also contains a stair lift. It would be sensible to carry out this alteration at the same time as the proposed structural alterations to the rear wall of the auditorium and the cantilevered balcony.

Given the importance placed on retaining the historic entrance route to the auditorium, we are somewhat surprised by the modern design of the foyer, box office and lighting fittings. We feel that these are at odds with the significance of this listed space. We would like to see more consideration given to retaining the integrity of the original foyer and we would recommend that more of the original features, such as the cornice and panelling in the foyer are retained or reused.

With the above issues in mind, we do support the overall objectives of this proposal as we believe the works will significantly improve and enhance the Assembly Rooms as a valuable cultural asset for Tamworth.

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 stylized flourish at the end.

Ross Anthony
Planning Consultant