

# Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC/1024

12 February 2018

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**Application:** 06/17/0604/LB

**Site:** St Georges Theatre, King Street, Great Yarmouth, NR30 2PG

**Proposal:** To affix two signs to the exterior of the building, either side of the western main entrance

## **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'.

It should be noted the Trust was not notified on this or the application reference 06/17/0605/A, as per our statutory remit. As such, I would be grateful if you could take the Trust's comments into account.

## **Background:**

St George's Theatre is a conversion of a deconsecrated chapel into a professional theatre with a capacity of 300. Commissioned in 1714, the chapel was modelled on Sir Christopher Wren's St. Clement Danes and is recognised as one of the finest examples of Baroque Church architecture outside of London, built of red brick with ashlar dressings on a stone plinth course, with a clock tower. Despite being listed Grade I, it faced demolition in 1953 but the Chapel eventually discovered a new life and was converted into a theatre and performing arts centre in 1972 and continued operation until 2006 when due to structural defects it was forced to close. It was declared 'at risk' by both English Heritage and The Theatres Trust. Great Yarmouth Borough Council eventually secured funding to sympathetically restore and transform the building into a modern theatre, which reopened in February 2013. A separate single storey pavilion was constructed to the south of the chapel that contains the front of house facilities, including a box office, bar/cafe, toilets and office.

## **Comment:**

As St George's is not a traditional theatre building it is particularly important to draw attention to its theatre function. The Trust does not consider the building to appear to the passer-by as an active theatre. Therefore, the Trust would generally consider that the benefit of new and upgraded signage to promote the theatre and increase its visibility and viability would outweigh any harm caused to the historic building fabric.

In relation to the submitted proposal, we consider the transparent signage enabling continued

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**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

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viewing and appreciation of the ashlar, the minimal fittings to limit impact on the historic building fabric, and the scale which fits the proportion of this Grade 1 listed building to be of appropriate and careful design. However we are concerned that the proposal does not make clear what the current use of the building is, thus does not necessarily serve the purpose for which the signage is intended. We would suggest a revised proposal which affords greater prominence to the theatre use, for example banners alongside the entrance as illustrated in an indicative design which was shared with us below, and believe this can be achieved with minimal harm to the fabric of the building and without unduly compromising visual appreciation and setting.



Existing examples of Grade 1 listed theatres displaying modern external banners and signage include the Bristol Old Vic, Theatre Royal Haymarket, Theatre Royal Drury Lane and Theatre Royal Newcastle.

Although already permitted, the Trust considers the signage of the box office and café to be in keeping with the building's use and believe it does not unduly detract from the setting of the Grade 1 listed building or of the surrounding area.

Please contact us if we may be of further assistance.

Tom Clarke  
National Planning Adviser