

# Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC/1979

06 March 2018

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**Application:** 18/01160/FULL

**Site:** 5 Great Newport Street, London, WC2H 7JB

**Proposal:** Variation of conditions 1 and 36 of planning permission dated 29 April 2016 (RN: 12/03930/FULL) for Demolition of Nos. 6-9 Great Newport Street behind retained front facades and demolition of rear addition to No. 5 Great Newport Street. Excavation and redevelopment to provide a building comprised of lower basement, basement, lower ground, ground and six upper floors, terraces, roof plant and alterations to front facade, providing a new auditorium and ancillary services in the form of a new flexible theatre space and arts club venue along with rehearsal studio and ancillary facilities including bars at basement level 1 and ground floor level (sui generis), restaurant (Class A3) on the ground floor and part lower ground floors and a 66 bedroom hotel at part ground and first to sixth floor levels (across 5-9 Great Newport Street), associated hotel bar and sculpture gallery at first floor level and outdoor swimming pool, terrace and bar at fifth floor level. Namely, to allow amendments to the consented scheme including increase the theatre capacity to over 400 seats, the intensification of the hotel use to 155 beds, provide 24 cycle parking spaces, fenestration changes to rear elevation including new windows, increase in overall height of building by 600mm, alterations to ground floor level shopfronts, creation of lightwell enclosed by railings outside 6 - 7 Great Newport Street, rearrangement of rooftop mechanical plant and screen, and internal alterations.

## 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:

Thank you for consulting the Theatres Trust on the above application which includes the variation of condition 36 of permission 12/03930/FULL resulting in alterations to the re-provided theatre. The Trust has some outstanding concerns that we consider must be resolved before the proposal is determined. **Subject to those concerns being addressed, the Trust cautiously supports the theatre aspect of this application.**

## 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

Please see our detailed advice below.

The revised proposal appears to result in the following key changes to the re-provided Arts Theatre compared to the consented scheme:

- Increase in audience capacity from 360 to 400 seats
- Rearrangement of the theatre space further to discussions with the proposed operator (PW Productions)
- A rearrangement of the front of house space due to required changes for the applicant in relation to commercial areas

The Trust has had extensive discussions with the applicants and potential theatre operator PW Productions regarding the proposed amendments to the scheme. This came about primarily as a result of proposed amendments since the original application which amended the hotel above ground to meet changing demands. While the overall GIA of the theatre space remained unchanged, an altered layout and increase in seating to address condition 36 resulted in a reduction in available space for other features essential to the operation and viability of the theatre. There is also a subsequent reduction in the volume given to the theatre and there is no longer an ability to flat-floor the auditorium. Whilst this would limit the flexibility of the space it is not necessarily seen as critical and the operator who is currently in negotiations with the applicant does not consider it necessary.

The Trust had major concerns as to the impact of these amendments to the viability of the theatre. A detailed response was provided to the applicant in July 2017 setting out our concerns along with suggestions as to how these could be overcome was shared with the Council.

The Trust welcomes that a number of our concerns and suggestions have been addressed within this revised proposal. However, there are also elements of the scheme that should be further considered.

#### Fire safety and evacuation

We suggest there is a need for two fire evacuation lifts within front of house areas to cater to the six wheelchair places that would be required under part M of Building Regulations. The applicants should set out what the procedure will be for the escape of these places as the stairs is not an acceptable means of escape. We also note that the three fire evacuation stairs change to two at basement -1 level which causes us major concern. We recommend submission of a fire evacuation strategy with approval for this proposal not given unless it has been signed off by the Council's Building Control department and/or the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority.

#### Managing performance cross-over

It is becoming increasingly important for theatres to programme more than one performance in an evening and as such consideration should be given to the cross-over of audiences. Despite some amendments to the layout of the theatre, we still consider there to be insufficient space for a cross-over of performances. The lower-ground level plan shows a 'plant' space behind the office. Our concerns would be alleviated if this space were to be given to the theatre and the lower-ground layout rearranged.

# Protecting theatres for everyone



## Ceiling heights

While we appreciate the increase in ceiling heights compared to those shown to us previously, the height of the stalls floor appears to be 2.2m which remains tight. It would not allow for any servicing to protrude from the ceiling, so it must be ensured that lighting and fire sprinklers are adequately provided.

## Fit-out and ongoing costs

We understand that there is still no agreement for the share of the fit-out costs of the theatre to be paid for by the developer. The underground location of the theatre relies on expensive screening and fire protection. This could be prohibitively expensive for a theatre operator to implement and maintain and may impact the viability of the making this space suitable for theatre use. We would not be able to support this application until Heads of Terms including the developer's contribution towards fit-out is agreed.

## Get-in

While PW Productions have indicated a get-in for scenery alongside a narrow public entry from the street is acceptable, operationally this does not represent best practice. This is because it would not be possible to have public access to the building during a get-in which restricts the operating hours of rehearsals and we have reservations as to whether it would be acceptable to other operators. Best practice would be to separate the get-in from public access for safety and operation viability.

## Public entry

The public entrance is enlarged to improve prominence and visibility. We note from the Design & Access Statement that prominent projecting signage for the Arts Theatre appears to be proposed. The visibility and therefore viability of the theatre, given its future location at basement levels and minimal street-level presence, was a major concern for the Trust. We would strongly encourage that this signage, along with additional signage on the building's frontage, is secured for the theatre by condition. However the proposed split of the existing frontage between the proposed theatre entrance and the restaurant is confused with the existing architecture and it would be preferable to see the whole of the glazed arched central doorway given to the theatre rather than split between the get-in and the restaurant. We would recommend the main front entrance to the theatre is glazed to ensure visibility.

## Part M compliance

It should be ensured that access, seating, lobbies and toilets are compliant with Part M of the Building Regulations.

## Theatre operator

We also welcome that PW Productions as a recognised provider have indicated their support for the scheme. The support of PW Productions falls short of a secured operator agreement. PW Productions have also suggested a commercial rent for the space. Theatres Trust believes a peppercorn rent would be more appropriate and if an alternative operator is required they may not find these terms viable. In order to ensure that an operator is in place we recommend that a firmer commitment is received, either from PW Productions or another recognised operator.

In conclusion, **subject to our concerns being addressed** we are generally supportive of these amendments and **recommend approval** of this proposal.

### **Theatres Trust**

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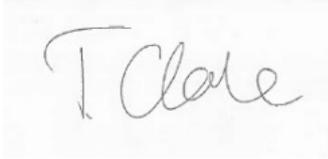
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Please contact us if we may be of further assistance.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "T Clarke". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped 'T' and a clear 'Clarke'.

Tom Clarke  
National Planning Adviser