

# Protecting theatres for **everyone**



Ref.: TC/2257

20 April 2018

Martin Mansell  
Planning Control  
Bolton Council  
Town Hall  
Bolton BL1 1RU

By e-mail: [planning.control@bolton.gov.uk](mailto:planning.control@bolton.gov.uk)

**Application:** 03215/18

**Site:** Octagon Theatre, Howell Croft South, Bolton, BL1 1SB

**Proposal:** VARIATION OF CONDITION 11 (APPROVED PLANS) ON APPLICATION 01546/17: VARIOUS AMENDMENTS TO ELEVATIONS, EXTERNAL SETTINGS, INTERNAL SETTINGS AND LAYOUT.

## **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.

The Trust actively encourages theatre operators to invest in their buildings to ensure they meet current building standards and the expectations of modern audiences, staff, performers and the local community. We previously wrote to support the previous application (17/00391/FULL) and in 2015 we undertook an Advisory Review with the theatre which informed the original designs. While we continue to welcome efforts to improve and modernise the Octagon we have some comments that we would encourage the applicant to consider in order to ensure optimum design and operation of the theatre for its long-term functionality and viability.

We consider it regrettable that there has been a simplification of the facade detailing through assumed value engineering. For example amendments to the rear facade and changes to the vertical detailing and brickwork to the front. The dilution of the original design intent provides a less coherent design, for example the big reduction of the expressed verticality in the proposed amendments to the brickwork detailing but which has been retained in the proportioning of the

## **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

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glazing. The replacement of the metal screens by solar film applied to the glazing is also regrettable. We have reservations regarding the proposed changes to the front entrance which is now less pronounced and appears visually more constricted and with less transparency. It is recommended that this element (including its signage) be reviewed with the aid of 3D visuals to ensure that it provides the prominent and welcoming entrance and obvious focus of the original design intent.

The addition of poster boxes is positive as they provide good advertising for the theatre. It is assumed that these are to be illuminated. It is noted that the horizontal banding of the poster boxes which sets a datum around the building does provide a slight conflict with the original vertical banding of the building, including the varying levels of glazing transoms.

With regards signposting of the theatre, we would also recommend additional signage to the Corporation Street elevation.

Internally, some of the double-height areas within the foyer have been lost which is unfortunate, particularly as the resultant floor to ceiling height would appear to be minimal. However, we appreciate this is due to site constraints and the need to fit additional facilities such as a sensory room into a limited space. This is also as a result of expanding the box office which has reduced public floorspace in the foyer, which on balance we support.

We welcome the addition of a direct entry to the café from the street and that it appears possible to shut off entry to the wider theatre outside of performance times which means the café can open independently. This can serve as an additional source of income for the theatre which will benefit its viability. We would suggest that options to make this entrance more prominent and introduce external signage should be explored.

The studio theatre appears to have had its capacity reduced compared to the existing proposal through losing its upper-level seating and changes to the internal form. In principle we don't object to this on the assumption it still works with the applicant's business plan. We welcome the addition of a studio control and dimmer room to the upper levels. We query the positioning of the external glazed doors in relation to the stage as these would appear to be off-centre which may sit uncomfortably with the stage layout. It is also noted that the doors have altered from double height metal doors to single height glazed doors which may be restrictive both in terms of staging and acoustics. It is advised that careful consideration be given by the operator as to the practical use of these doors both in terms of scale (particularly height) and material (potential necessity for additional daylight and acoustic measures internally during studio operation). The level of these doors is at the internal level of the building, which is higher than the external ground level. It is assumed that should these doors be opened to allow the external space to be used for performance, staging would be placed externally to level the two areas.

We note there is a limited number of showers and WCs if all dressing rooms positions are in use. More may be beneficial, particularly if the theatre is hosting larger shows. However we do recognise that there is a delicate balance between dressing room and shower rooms / WCs due

to the limitations of space.

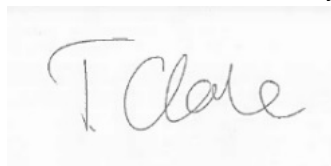
Regarding front of house toilets, whilst the provision is good they are located a long distance from the studio theatre (it will be necessary for the audience to pass around the existing main auditorium and then travel up one level to reach the WCs). Again, we understand that there are space restrictions. Good signposting and strong management policies will need to be in place to ensure that audiences are adequately directed pre-show and at interval times. It is also noted that there are no toilets associated with the rehearsal room and suggest that this is reviewed at the next design stage.

The plans show single doors between the SM support and kitchen area and the auditorium. The applicant must ensure that acoustic separation from this arrangement is sufficient.

More generally, compliance with Part M of Building Regulations should be ensured. For example, the sound and light locks to the auditorium appear very tight for wheelchair users. There currently appears to be no provision for an accessible dressing room. It is always recommended that, where possible, this is located at stage level to avoid the need for lift access between dressing room and stage. These items should be addressed during the next design stage.

Overall, we continue to support this proposal and **recommend the granting planning permission.**

Please contact us if we may be of further assistance.



Tom Clarke  
National Planning Adviser

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