

Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC/9005552

17 April 2019

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Civic Centre
Plymouth PL1 2AA

By e-mail: planningconsents@plymouth.gov.uk

Application: 19/00448/FUL

Site: 60A Emma Place Plymouth PL1 3QX

Proposal: Change of use to Community Theatre including ancillary bar (Sui Generis) and associated alterations including the removal of chimneys (part-retrospective)

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:

The Trust wrote in support of the applicant's previous application for change of use at this site in 2016. Similarly, we support and welcome this revised/renewed application. The previous application (16/00206/FUL) was permitted on 29th March 2016. Although the applicant, the Underground Theatre, has resided in the building since that time Condition 2 required soundproofing works to be implemented before the commencement of change of use. As such, permission for theatre use (Sui Generis) can be considered to have lapsed recently.

The acceptability in principle of theatre use (Sui Generis) at this site has been established through the previous permission. Furthermore, chapels and religious buildings such as this are conducive to being repurposed as theatres and performance spaces; indeed there are several examples of similar conversions around the country. Moreover, the proposal provides a means of bringing this vacant undesignated heritage asset back to active use which will provide community and cultural benefits for Plymouth and local people. The nature of this theatre in terms of its size and community focus would help fill a gap in Plymouth's cultural provision.

Internal layouts have been revised since the previous application. This has resulted in an uplift

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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

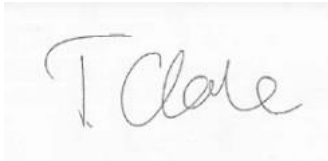
of WC provision which is welcomed. We would however suggest that some thought should be given to providing separate changing rooms as was the case with the first application. Although plans suggest there will be a room divider, it appears that access to the stage can only be made through Changing Room 2. Separate changing rooms will be important for affording the theatre flexibility and ensuring the appropriate safeguarding of young people.

In terms of front of house provision, it appears there is very limited space around the bar (which is within the first floor auditorium) when the theatre is operating at or near full seated capacity. Also, audiences will need to move to the ground floor to use the WC facilities. We would suggest that some thought might be given to making the box office into a more flexible bar/ticketing facility to enhance service particularly during the interval, which would in turn maximise takings which will help with the sustainability and viability of the theatre.

Overall though these matters can be managed independently of this application. In terms of external alterations we are supportive of proposals brought forward, and as noted previously we consider the noise attenuation measures to be beneficial and necessary to help prevent the theatre and its operations being compromised by restriction, and to maintain the amenity of surrounding residential properties.

Paragraph 92 of the NPPF (2019) seeks planning decisions to plan positively for community facilities which includes cultural buildings such as this. In conclusion, we consider the change of use to be appropriate, we remain supportive of plans for this conversion and **recommend the granting of planning permission.**

Please contact us if we may be of further assistance.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "T Clarke". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "T".

Tom Clarke MRTPI
National Planning Adviser