



## Protecting theatre buildings through listing

### Summary

This advice note looks at the process for protecting theatre buildings in the UK, through statutory listing, conservation areas and local listing. This is one of a series of advice notes – others can be found on our website at [theatrust.org.uk/how-we-help/advice/advice-notes](http://theatrust.org.uk/how-we-help/advice/advice-notes) and we'll be adding more over the coming months.

### Who is this note for?

This advice note is aimed at community / volunteer groups, theatre operators / owners and local authorities.

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## Statutory Listing Designation

The process of protecting the built historic environment (i.e. getting a heritage asset legally protected) is called 'designation'.

### Check first

Most historic theatres are likely to be already statutorily protected through listing. A building is listed when it is of special architectural or historic interest and considered to be of **national** importance and worth protecting for future generations. In the first instance it is always advisable to check if your theatre is already included on the relevant list below.

- In England, the special register is called the National Heritage List for England (NHLE). You can check by searching through Historic England's website here: [www.historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/](http://www.historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/)
- In Wales, check the Historic Environment Records on Cadw's website here: [www.cadw.gov.wales/historicenvironment/recordsv1/historicenvironmentrecords/?lang=en](http://www.cadw.gov.wales/historicenvironment/recordsv1/historicenvironmentrecords/?lang=en)
- In Scotland, check Historic Environment Scotland, here: [www.historicenvironment.scot/advice-and-support/listing-scheduling-and-designations/listed-buildings/search-for-a-listed-building/](http://www.historicenvironment.scot/advice-and-support/listing-scheduling-and-designations/listed-buildings/search-for-a-listed-building/)
- In Northern Ireland, check the Department for Communities Buildings Database, here: [www.communities-ni.gov.uk/services/buildings-database](http://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/services/buildings-database)

### Making the application

Any theatre with a special historic and architectural interest can be listed if it is over 30 years old. It then becomes legally protected and it cannot be altered, extended or demolished without the express consent of the local planning authority. However, this does not mean that alterations cannot be made to the building – we will be publishing a further advice note on owning / managing a listed building in the near future – in the meantime please contact us for advice.

In **England**, Buildings are listed by the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport after a favourable recommendation by Historic England.

Historic England only considers applications where the building:

- Is under serious threat of demolition or major alteration
- Is one of its strategic listing priorities ; or
- Has very strong potential for inclusion on the National Heritage List for England

In **Wales**, Welsh Ministers draw up the list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest. Assessment of structures for listing falls to Cadw's inspectors of historic buildings. You send a request for listing to [cadw@gov.wales](mailto:cadw@gov.wales) explaining why the building should be added to the list. Reasons and justification are required as set out below at 'Gathering an evidence base'. Further information and a download document [Understanding Listing in Wales] can be found at [www.cadw.gov.wales/historicenvironment](http://www.cadw.gov.wales/historicenvironment)

For theatres in **Scotland**, there is a downloadable application form at [www.historicenvironment.scot/advice-and-support/listing-scheduling-and-designations/listed-buildings/propose-a-building-for-listing/](http://www.historicenvironment.scot/advice-and-support/listing-scheduling-and-designations/listed-buildings/propose-a-building-for-listing/) Reasons and justification are required as set out below at 'Gathering an evidence base'.

For theatres in **Northern Ireland**, the Historic Environment Division of the Department for Communities compiles lists of buildings of special architectural or historic interest. Special architectural or historic interest is therefore the 'legislative test' to which all new listing proposals must be compared. The Historic Environment Division will decide to investigate if a building is worthy of putting to the legislative test in response to listing requests from the public. Listing requests are evaluated by 'a forum of Conservation Architects'. You can nominate a building to be listed by emailing: [historicenvironmentenquiries@communities-ni.gov.uk](mailto:historicenvironmentenquiries@communities-ni.gov.uk) Reasons and justification are required as set out below at 'Gathering an evidence base'. Further information can be found at [www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/historic-buildings-and-monuments](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/historic-buildings-and-monuments)

## Categories of listed buildings

The following grades of listing are used to show the level of special interest of a theatre in England and Wales:

- Grade I buildings are of exceptional interest
- Grade II\* buildings are particularly important buildings of more than special interest
- Grade II buildings are of special interest (this is the most likely grade of listing for a theatre that is currently unlisted)

In Scotland, it is slightly different; buildings are put into one of three listing categories according to their relative importance:

- Category A: Buildings of national or international importance, either architectural or historic; or fine, little-altered examples of some particular period, style or building type
- Category B: Buildings of regional or more than local importance; or major examples of some particular period, style or building type, which may have been altered
- Category C: Buildings of local importance; lesser examples of any period, style or building type, as originally constructed or moderately altered; and simple, traditional buildings that group well with other listed buildings

In Northern Ireland, similar to Scotland, buildings are put into one of four listing categories according to their relative importance. Gradings in Northern Ireland (unlike elsewhere in the UK) are not statutory:

- Grade A: Special buildings of national importance including grand buildings and the fine, little altered examples of some important style or date.
- Grade B+: Special buildings that might have merited A status but have minor detracting features such as impurities of design, or lower quality additions or alterations. This grade also applies to buildings that stand out from grade B1 buildings because of exceptional interiors or some other features.
- Grade B1 and B2: Special buildings of more local importance or good examples of some period of style. Some degree of alteration or imperfection may be acceptable.

There is no difference to the level of legal protection across all categories.

## List descriptions

The list includes a description of each building, its historic significance and describes some of its key features, including those that led to the listing. If a specific feature is not mentioned it does not mean it is not covered by the listing.

## Reasons for listing theatre buildings

### Architectural interest

To be of special architectural interest a theatre building must be of importance in its design, decoration or craftsmanship. Special architectural interest may also apply to particularly

significant examples of building types or techniques (e.g. buildings displaying technological innovation or virtuosity) and significant plan forms. Engineering, stage and technological interest can be an important consideration. For example, Alexandra Palace Theatre (Grade II) with its rare survival of Victorian stage machinery: traps, levers, pulleys and lifts that would have allowed impressive special effects.

For more recent buildings in particular, the functioning of the building (to the extent that this reflects on its original design and planned use, where known) will also be a consideration. Artistic distinction can also be a factor relevant to the architectural interest of buildings and objects and structures fixed to them. For example, the listing of the Theatre Royal in Plymouth (Grade II) for its moveable auditorium roof.

### **Historic interest**

To be able to justify special historic interest a building must illustrate important aspects of the nation's history and / or have closely substantiated historical associations with nationally important individuals, groups or events; and the building itself in its current form will afford a strong connection with the valued aspect of history.

Historic England and Cadw have adopted four values as the basis for evaluating the historic significance of a place: evidential value; historical value; aesthetic value and communal value. Additional evidential values can be gained from documentary sources, pictorial records and archaeological archives or museum collections. To assess the significance of this aspect of an asset, all this evidence needs to be gathered in a systematic way and any gaps in the evidence identified.

### **Gathering an evidence base**

If you think your local theatre has national architectural and historic interest you will need to gather enough evidence to register the building for assessment. It is not enough to demonstrate a building's local significance. The more factual evidence that can be gathered to support a case the better chance the application will have of success.

The type of evidence necessary to warrant designation and the main factors that are borne in mind when undertaking assessments is contained within Historic England's Listing Selection Guide on culture and entertainment buildings which was published in December 2017. Download here: <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/dlsg-culture-entertainment/>. Wales and Scotland do not have such a specific guide but the evidence needed within Historic England's document is the same.

You will need to supply details of the history of the building i.e. construction periods. Theatres were often extended and updated internally. You will need to know details of who built and who designed it especially if there are specific artists involved. Talk to everybody who might know the building or have lived or worked there. Find out who it was built for and who owned it. Your local historical society or amenity group will help you in dating and describing it. Theatre bills and opening programmes may have original photographs.

The local library will have street guides, books and directories that include theatre buildings. Sometimes you can trace it back year by year or decade by decade to its construction. Equally, the local library or county record office may have early maps or plans, which will provide a clue to the building's origin. There may be original drainage plans or planning applications with the architect's original drawings. This is particularly likely with theatre buildings.

There are many websites with information on historic theatres including:

- Theatres Trust's Theatre Database <https://database.theatrestrust.org.uk/>
- Arthur Lloyd <http://www.arthurlloyd.co.uk/>
- Cinema Theatre Association <http://cinema-theatre.org.uk/>

- Cinema Treasures. <http://cinematreasures.org/>

Basically the better researched the application, the more historical detail you have, the better chance of success you stand.

Good photographs are likely to make all the difference to your submission. This does not mean expensive professional photography but good colour images both internally and externally. Close-ups of architectural features should also be included as well as technical installations such as stage equipment if considered a rarity.

You will need to include the address and a copy of a map marking the location of the building. You should also include 'who to contact' for access.

It is helpful to get the support of other relevant organisations such as the Theatres Trust, Cinema Theatre Association, Georgian Group, Victorian Society, Twentieth Century Society, Save Britain's Heritage or Ancient Monuments Society. If the theatre has a known architect such as Frank Matcham or something else where there is supporter organisation/group then you should also get its support i.e. Frank Matcham Society [www.frankmatchamsociety.org.uk/](http://www.frankmatchamsociety.org.uk/)

Finally, you will need to make the application through the relevant website.

## Other forms of designation

### Extending conservation areas to protect theatres

Some theatres will already be in conservation areas (in Northern Ireland known as Local Landscape Policy Areas). You will need to check with the individual planning authority. The advantage of conservation area status is that there is protection over its demolition (in that planning permission is required for demolition).

### Requesting conservation area status

Most local planning authorities have periodic reviews of conservation area boundaries as well as welcoming suggestions for new areas. You should contact your local council and see if there is a review of the area around the theatre planned. They may look to undertake a review if the theatre and the area is under threat (assuming it merits designation). Support from your local councillor will also help.

### Character appraisals

Where a theatre is already in a conservation area it is worth seeing if it is recognised as significant in any accompanying character appraisal or conservation area appraisal and management plan. Such documents support the management of change in a way that preserves or enhances the character or appearance of historic areas through conservation area appraisal, designation and management. A good example of this is for the Questors Theatre in Ealing which is described within the Ealing Green Character Appraisal as 'simple yet crisp glazed elevation, a welcome novelty in the streetscape. The theatre is considered one of the finest amateurs' theatres in the country'.

### Local listing (designation)

A 'locally listed building' is a building, structure or feature which, whilst not listed by the Secretary of State for its national importance, is considered by the local planning authority to be of local importance due to its architectural, historical or environmental significance.

Some theatres will already be locally listed and you should check with your local council. In England and Wales, local authorities are responsible for drawing up local lists of buildings that they consider to be of local importance. It is thought that around half of councils have local lists, but there is no obligation on councils to have such lists, or to update them regularly when they have them. Scotland does not have local lists but its Category C listing (see above) includes such buildings and gives much greater protection. Northern Ireland does not have local lists either, but buildings of 'local importance' can be afforded protection within a Local Landscape Policy Area (as conservation areas, see below).

Locally listed buildings do not have the levels of statutory protection afforded to nationally listed buildings. In England they are known as non-designated heritage assets. The interiors are not protected and outside of conservation areas (see below) there is little protection over demolition unless the council has placed an 'Article 4 Direction' on the building preventing demolition. An Article 4 direction is made by a local planning authority in the UK and serves to restrict permitted development rights, which means a building owner is required to seek planning consent whereas without the direction this would not be necessary.

However, local listing means that the interest of the theatre will be considered during the planning process. The effect of an application on a non-designated heritage asset is a material consideration when deciding planning applications, and local listing strengthens the case for retention of a historic building especially if it is also in a conservation area. A good example of this is the former Gaumont Streatham where the original façade was retained and a mixed-use regeneration housing scheme also provided a community theatre, the Streatham Space.

### **What evidence do you need to add a building to a local list?**

The same evidence would need to be gathered as for statutory listing but without the information on the interior of the building.

### **How to apply**

You will need to contact your local planning authority and see what process it has for adding buildings to its list. Most embark upon a borough-wide local listing process of properties within their area. Some may do this as a thematic study of a particular building type. To add a building to a list immediately it would probably have to be under threat of demolition.

### **The role of the Theatres Trust**

Theatres Trust is the national advisory public body for theatres and is a statutory consultee on theatres in the planning system. We provide a free advice service for anyone who wants to make changes to a theatre building or convert a building to theatre use. We can provide expertise in planning, heritage, listings, architecture and design, amongst other topics.

Contact us at [advice@theatrust.org.uk](mailto:advice@theatrust.org.uk) with information about your theatre and how we can help.