

Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC/1331

08 July 2019

Carolyn Southall
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Silver Street
Enfield
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By e-mail: development.control@enfield.gov.uk

Application: 19/01988/FUL

Site: St Monicas Hall 521 Green Lanes London N13 4DH

Proposal: Redevelopment of site involving demolition of existing building and ancillary structures and erection of part 2, part 3 storey building with basement level to provide new church hall with parish community facilities and 6 x 2 bed self contained flats with associated landscaping.

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 **strongly objects** to this proposal. This is on the basis of the loss of the site as a theatre for which need and demand clearly exists and for which there is no evidence to the contrary or sufficient re-provision, and because it is seeking to demolish a heritage asset. Both of these reasons are supported by Enfield, London and national policy provisions. Furthermore, the applicant's Heritage Statement contains omissions and inaccuracies which means it fails to provide a thorough site analysis.

The Intimate Theatre has unique history and heritage and is highly valued by the local community; this is demonstrated by its successful nomination as an Asset of Community Value which withstood challenge by the applicant. It is on the Trust's 'Theatres at Risk' register on account of imminent risk of loss of theatre use, heritage significance and community and cultural value.

Theatres Trust

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL

T 020 7836 8591 **E** info@theatrestrust.org.uk **W** theatrestrust.org.uk

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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, Ann Skippers, Anna Stapleton

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In addition to its parish community centre function it plays an important role as a small community theatre in an area that is short of provision. Following the applicant ceasing to take bookings or give access to the building for theatre use the local groups which use the facility now require alternative premises. This has an impact on the social and cultural well-being of those associated with those groups; paragraph 92 of the NPPF seeks decisions to guard against the loss of valued facilities and more fundamentally paragraph 8 outlines that sustainable development has a social objective which should support social and cultural well-being. The plans for the replacement space show that the theatre function would be lost; there would no longer be a stage or indeed any dressing rooms and other backstage facilities. In any case, the inclusion of residential units would also give rise to the risk of conflict with theatre use for which there is insufficient mitigation within the proposed building's design.

Furthermore the building has clear architectural interest and historical and social value as a rare survivor that illustrates repertory theatre design in the inter-war period. We believe from our records it was designed by a priest of the church who appears to have good knowledge of theatre. This makes it particularly special, but even if the priest had no hand it is highly unusual for a church to have constructed a theatre to this specification rather than a flat-floored hall as was common. It has some high quality ornate interior features and fittings and these have survived virtually intact. The history of the building and its contribution to repertory theatre in London as well as the artists that played there adds to its special historic interest. It hosted the first complete play to be broadcast live by the BBC and several famous names in the arts have performed there such as David Bowie, Roger Moore and Bill Owen; it is where Richard Attenborough made his stage debut. It has until recently continued to be used by local amateur theatre groups.

Despite this value and importance it is clear that the applicant has made efforts to undermine the role and significance of St Monica's Hall as a theatre (the Intimate Theatre) through their submission documents and has actively sought to argue Theatres Trust is not a statutory consultee. It is to be assumed this is because there is compelling evidence informing our objection which shows this proposal to be in conflict with local, London and national policy and it is only by disregarding the theatre use, the social, community and cultural value and the heritage value of the site by which the proposal could be considered as appropriate for redevelopment of this nature.

The applicant has asserted within the Executive Summary and paragraph 3.36 of the Heritage Statement that while Theatres Trust has interest in the building we are not a statutory consultee. We would challenge this in the strongest possible terms. Fundamentally the site has greater current and historic use as a theatre than is being portrayed.

We would note that the building's current lawful use as established through permission TP/87/2047 includes theatre use (Change of use of premises from theatre to parish community centre incorporating smaller theatre and facilities for arts crafts discussion groups and social centre activities). This is acknowledged within the Design & Access Statement. Elsewhere text suggests the building functions as a 'D1' use, yet the application form lists existing use as D2. It is clear from The Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (as amended) that as a facility for 'assembly and leisure' the building's use is more intrinsically linked to that of a performance space rather than just the "parish community centre" described. The mix of uses

within the 1987 permission would likely in any case to make the site Sui Generis of which the theatre is explicitly a fundamental element.

Regarding our statutory remit, Paragraph (x) under Schedule 4 of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 states, “Development involving any land on which there is a theatre” and thus does not make a distinction as to whether or not the site was constructed as a theatre which seems the basis of the applicant’s argument when judged against ‘theatre’ as described within The Theatres Trust Act 1976 (which itself can be open to interpretation). In any case, taking the applicant’s narrower description it is clear the building was designed so as it could be used as a fully functioning theatre to the extent it was constructed with a formal stage, proscenium arch, dressing rooms and rehearsal spaces. This highly unusual approach documented within *‘The Theatres Trust’s Guide to British Theatres, 1750 – 1950, A Gazetteer, by John Earl and Mike Sell’* (a guide which only included buildings of undoubted theatrical status) has been omitted by the applicant’s Heritage Statement; indeed there are other inaccuracies within the applicant’s submission.

The Council’s own Local Heritage List entry refers to the site as the Intimate Theatre rather than St Monica’s Hall, and Intimate Theatre is prominent as entry signage to the building. It is clear from the submitted existing site plans that the building remains set out as a fully-functioning theatre. Therefore it is without doubt the site contains a theatre, and as such we must be considered as a statutory consultee.

We consider the building to have merit for statutory listing, and are currently challenging a decision by Historic England not to list it on the basis of relevant considerations within our submission not being taken into account. Notwithstanding that outcome, it is clearly a non-designated heritage asset which as referenced above is entry 113 on Enfield’s Local Heritage list on the basis of its rarity, historic association, landmark status, social value and creative association. Core Policy 31 of The Enfield Plan Core Strategy 2010-2025 requires a thorough site analysis and character appraisal which explicitly demonstrates how the proposal will respect and enhance the asset; as we note the information provided contains omissions and inaccuracies and demolition clearly fails to respect and enhance the asset. Policy DMD44.1 of the Development Management Document (2014) goes further by stating applications for development which fail to conserve the special interest, significance and setting of a heritage asset will be refused.

Core Policy 11 of The Enfield Plan Core Strategy 2010-2025 seeks to protect existing assets and provision and promote and encourage the increased use of recreation, leisure, culture and arts facilities by resisting the loss of existing facilities unless it can be demonstrated they are no longer required or will be provided elsewhere. This is generally reiterated by Policy DMD17 of the Development Management Document (2014) although this policy goes further by specifying evidence shows no demand for the existing use and that replacement facilities offer the same

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level of public provision and accessibility. This proposal clearly fails both of those tests, as it can be demonstrated there is a need and demand for St Monica's Hall as a theatre space alongside a community centre function and neither is theatre provision of at least equal standard being re-provided within this redevelopment or elsewhere in the local area. For example, the applicant states there is no theatre programmed within 2019 although this is because access and bookings have been refused rather than no need or demand existing. This has been clearly communicated to us by the theatre groups who have been using the building and in fact enquiries about hiring the theatre have been received by the St Monica's Players group.

Furthermore, Core Policy 11 also seeks to address an identified lack of arts and cultural services and venue provision in the borough which includes studio and rehearsal spaces. Specifically cited as an area of particular pressure is the south west of the borough, within which this site is located. This proposal will further compound that shortage. Policy 3.16.B of the London Plan (2016) states that, "Proposals which would result in a loss of social infrastructure in areas of defined need for that type of social infrastructure without realistic proposals for re-provision should be resisted." Further policy justification for refusing this proposal comes from Policy 4.6.B which seeks planning decisions to address deficiencies in facilities and provide a cultural focus to foster more sustainable local communities. At a strategic level part A of that policy states the Mayor of London will, and boroughs should, support London's diverse range of arts and cultural enterprises and the cultural, social and economic benefits they offer to residents, workers and visitors. Support for culture and the arts has been clearly articulated by the current Mayor of London and this has manifested itself within emerging London Plan policies which have some weight in planning decisions. This includes Policy HC5.A which states plans and decisions should protect existing cultural venues and Policy HC6.B which protects and supports evening and night-time cultural venues including theatres and other arts venues.

Should the appeal regarding the building's statutory listing be unsuccessful and it is robustly demonstrated that refurbishment is not viable, we would only consider providing support for redevelopment of this site if there is appropriate re-provision of its theatre function to at least the same standard as is currently available. We would recommend this is secured by way of condition and Section 106 agreement for which we can provide advice on robust wording these and other such matters. We are in any case keen to work constructively with the Council and the applicant to find a positive outcome for this site and maintain its important and valued role as a theatre alongside being a parish community centre.

In the event this application as currently presented is recommended for approval, we request the insertion of a condition which requires submission of a full photographic and recording report in relation to the site as the Intimate Theatre and for that report to meet the satisfaction of Theatres Trust before the condition is signed off.

In conclusion we reiterate our strong objection to this proposal and **recommend the refusal of planning permission**. On the basis of the application as currently submitted remaining unchanged and the Council being minded to approve it, we would as a statutory consultee request call-in from the Secretary of State.

We would be grateful to be advised of how the Council is minded to determine this application, and to be notified should further documentation be submitted. Please contact us if we may be of

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further assistance or should you wish to discuss these comments.

Tom Clarke MRTPI
National Planning Adviser

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