

Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC

02 October 2019

Leigh Thompson
Carlisle City Council
Civic Centre
Carlisle
Cumbria
CA3 8QG

By e-mail: EDAdmin@carlisle.gov.uk

Applications: 19/0364

Site: West Walls Theatre, 12-22 West Walls, Carlisle, CA3 8UB

Proposal: Installation Of Expanding Grill Gate To Front Of Fire Exit Door

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:

This application for planning permission and listed building consent has come to the attention of the Trust as it involves development at a theatre, the West Walls Theatre.

The West Walls Theatre is Grade I listed due to the city's historic boundary wall being beneath the building. It is a valued community theatre operated by the Green Room Club and run by its volunteers and members. Facilities such as this help improve the cultural and social wellbeing of local people, bringing people together and providing opportunities for participation and engagement in the arts. Paragraph 92 of the NPPF (2019) seeks planning decisions to plan positively for cultural facilities. Paragraph 4.42 of the Carlisle District Local Plan 2015-2030 promotes and supports the district's arts and cultural sectors.

This proposal seeks to install a grill gate in front of a fire exit door along the theatre's front elevation. We understand the grill gates have been deemed as required because the space in

Theatres Trust

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL

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

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, Ann Skippers, Anna Stapleton

The National Advisory Public Body for Theatres

The Theatres Trust Charitable Fund co-operates with the Theatres Trust, has the same Trustees and is registered as a charity under number 274697

front of the fire escape sits within a small recess which gives rise to anti-social activity. In turn this poses a safety and security risk; that part of West Walls generally lacks natural surveillance as it is enclosed by vacant and inactive frontages and the rear of service yards.

We would however generally caution against installing measures which block access to fire doors unless absolutely necessary. The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 states that "Where necessary in order to safeguard the safety of relevant persons, the responsible person must ensure that routes to emergency exits from premises and the exits themselves are kept clear at all times." Should the grill gate be installed it is absolutely essential it is opened as a first priority upon the opening of the building and whenever anyone is inside. This will require a robust management plan and careful oversight by the person(s) responsible for the building. Aside from the obvious risk to people inside the building from a blocked exit, failure to keep the exit clear could lead to prosecution and fines which could undermine the theatre's sustainability.

In conclusion, while we cannot be expressly supportive of this application the location of the fire exit a few metres from and within site of the theatre's main entrance (which has its own similar grill gate) mitigates the risk of this grill gate being inadvertently left closed and there are sound reasons as to why it is required. Therefore we do not wish to raise an objection although we would reiterate to the theatre operators that the opening of the gate must be ensured and carefully managed.

Please contact us if we may should you wish to discuss these comments further.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "T Clarke". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the printed name.

Tom Clarke MRTPI
National Planning Adviser