

# Protecting theatres for **everyone**



Ref.: TC

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**Application:** 124382/FO/2019 & 124383/LO/2019

**Site:** Arch 18 And Arch 19 Watson Street Manchester M3 4LP

**Proposal:** Creation of new theatre use and associated back of house facilities, external and internal alterations, including provision of new bar and WC area;

Listed Building Consent for external and internal alterations, in association with the proposed theatre use.

## **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 has come to the attention of the Trust because it is proposing a new theatre within two grade 2\* listed railway arches which form part of the Manchester Central complex.

We are supportive of this proposal, which will bring two vacant railway arches back into positive use as a base for the 53two Theatre who lost their previous premises due to redevelopment. The site is in an accessible location with close proximity to public transport but currently its surrounding context generally lacks activity with a number of neighbouring units also being vacant. Returning these units to use will have positive placemaking benefits as it will help

## **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, 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

improve the surrounding environment through providing further active frontage thus increasing natural surveillance.

Alongside its role as a theatre and arts venue 53two is also a registered charity supporting young and emerging artists and producers. It is therefore an important part of Manchester's overall cultural provision. Paragraph 92 of the NPPF (2019) seeks planning decisions to plan positively for cultural facilities and to guard against unnecessary loss. Policy CC1 of the Core Strategy Development Plan Document (2012) encourages a range of entertainment and cultural facilities within the City Centre, reiterated by Policy CC4.


Plans show that one unit will be used as a bar and toilets with the other housing the theatre space and backstage facilities. They will be inter-connected through the removal of non-original brickwork infills. Similarly, non-original brickwork will also be removed to the side to re-open access onto Great Bridgewater Street as a service entrance for the bar and the non-original facades will also be removed. We do not consider this alterations to harm the character and significance of these arches as heritage assets, and in fact help enhance their appearance.

There is direct access into the bar and the theatre can be separated off when not in use. This means the bar can be operated and opened independently regardless of whether performances are scheduled so will afford the operators greater flexibility and support the venue's overall sustainability and viability as a cultural asset. Similarly there is an option to enter directly to the theatre from Great Bridgewater Street should the bar ever be closed off for another event or private function. The Design and Access Statement references the doors to the auditorium providing sufficient acoustic protection which will be important so as to avoid noise from the bar disturbing performances. An acoustic wall is referenced only between the auditorium and backstage, but it would be advisable to ensure the existing wall separating the two arches has sufficient acoustic insulation to block noise from the toilets being operated as these sit alongside the theatre space.

We welcome that the venue provides level access and includes an accessible washroom and WC for performers/staff. The plans also indicate a good number of wheelchair spaces including companion seats when in full seating mode. Visuals show the stage to be raised and while we assume there will be a ramp or lift to enable wheelchair access this isn't confirmed.

In conclusion we welcome this application which will reinstate 53two as a valued element of Manchester's cultural provision and bring two arches as heritage assets back to positive active use. We therefore **recommend the granting of planning permission and listed building consent.**

Please contact us should you wish to discuss these comments in more detail.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "T Clarke". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Tom Clarke MRTPI  
National Planning Adviser