

Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC

13 November 2019

Ms C Murrar
Development and Housing Services,
Renfrewshire House,
Cotton Street,
Paisley,
PA1 1JD

By e-mail: dc@renfrewshire.gov.uk

Application: 19/0720/LB & 19/0721/PP

Site: Paisley Arts Centre, New Street, Paisley, PA1 1EZ

Proposal: Extension to front of Arts Centre including external alterations.

Remit:

The Theatres Trust is the national advisory public body for theatres. We were established through the Theatres Trust Act 1978 'to promote the better protection of theatres' and provide statutory planning advice on theatre buildings and theatre use in Scotland through The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (Scotland) Regulation 2013, 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 as it involves development at Paisley Arts Centre. The Trust was not formally notified despite this falling within our role as a statutory consultee.

Paisley Arts Centre is a valued cultural facility for the town and its surrounding communities operating within the former Laigh Kirk which is Category B listed. It has a mixed programme including theatre, comedy and live music alongside other compatible functions. We routinely promote the placemaking benefits of theatres and other cultural buildings and the enhancements they can bring to the local economy and the social and cultural well-being of local people. Paragraph 2.17 of the NPF3 recognises Scotland's towns and cities as cultural hubs; the document also references the utilisation of Paisley's historic buildings to create a 21st Century town centre. The Renfrewshire Local Development Plan cites Paisley as the main cultural and civic hub within Renfrewshire.

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

We are supportive of efforts by owners and operators to develop and improve their venues and facilities to ensure they meet the needs of audiences and the communities they serve, and to ensure they are sustainable and viable into the future. We welcome that Paisley Arts Centre has sought to explore options which contribute to those objectives. This application and listed building consent is seeking both internal and external alterations and.

Externally, the focus is on making the Arts Centre more visible through improving its prominence. We would concur with the Arts Centre's view that currently the building does not look open and welcoming, and we consider existing signage to be understated. This has undermined efforts to utilise the venue's café during the day as a means of supporting overall viability. The primary aspect of this is an extension to the foyer/cafe area. This is quite modest in scale and we consider the design and proposed materials to be sympathetic to the overall character and significance of the building as a heritage asset. It would make the building much more welcoming and open, which we believe will help draw people in and enable the Arts Centre to be used to its potential. In particular it will increase the size of the café/bar and give the venue greater flexibility. This will be complemented by more contemporary and engaging signage, as well as more effective use of the garden outside the Arts Centre.

Internally, a number of alterations are proposed to the function and layout of the building. Aside from the expanded café/bar cited above there will also be improvements to the layout and seating within the auditorium achieved by extending the seating upwards to the current first floor. The seating is retractable which will allow for the main auditorium to be utilised in different configurations to suit a variety of purposes. We assume that there will be provision for wheelchair places but this is not shown within the plans or visualisation; best practice encourages spaces in a range of positions so opportunities to enable wheelchair places to the top of the auditorium should be explored. We encourage that this is confirmed so as to ensure the venue is as inclusive as possible; we do note there is level access into the auditorium for both audiences and performers as well as an accessible WC.

On a similar note the existing plans show a lift; on the proposed plans it appears this facility is retained (spaces G03a and F03a) but the plans do not clearly show this and there is no access. This is likely an error but again we would urge this to be confirmed as there are facilities to the first floor (the multipurpose function room, studio, office and AV room) which are otherwise inaccessible to users and staff with wheelchairs or reduced mobility.

There is already an upstairs studio which is to be reconfigured and there will also be the addition of a multipurpose function room. This will further enhance flexibility and enable new hires which will contribute to the Arts Centre's viability and bring more people into the building. There are now two dressing rooms rather than just one previously which is particularly important in terms of safeguarding should the venue be used by young people.

We note there is a slight decrease in audience/visitor WC facilities compared to what is already in place although these will be gender neutral. However because these will have wash basins within them they will be in use longer, therefore there are not quite enough provided to meet standards. We suggest that opportunities are explored to further expand provision. There should also be an accessible WC to the first floor. It appears there is one WC to the first floor

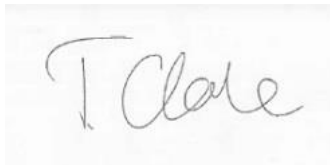
(F06) which is separated from the others at that level by a door therefore some signage may be beneficial to highlight its presence in order to reduce any queueing at busy times.

The other points we would draw the applicant's attention to is that there is a lack of storage for sets, props and other stage equipment. Also the top two rows of seating within the auditorium are quite set back so it should be confirmed these have appropriate sight-lines.

Overall we consider these plans to afford the Arts Centre much greater flexibility and will achieve the objectives set out for this project without harming the historic and architectural significance of this Category B heritage asset. We commented on proposals for the Town Hall in Paisley earlier in 2019 and visited the area. We believe these works will positively contribute to the wider project to invest in arts and culture in Paisley to help revitalise Paisley's town centre and bring more people into the town, and look forward to the project progressing.

Therefore **we recommend the granting of planning permission and listed building consent.**

Please contact us if we may be of further assistance or should you wish to discuss these comments in greater detail.



Tom Clarke MRTPI
National Planning Adviser

Theatres Trust

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