

Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC/911

27 November 2019

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By e-mail: planning@monmouthshire.gov.uk

Application: DM/2019/01578

Site: Abergavenny Town Hall Abergavenny Town And Market Hall Cross Street Abergavenny Monmouthshire

Proposal: Internal remodelling and refurbishment of existing theatre and toilet space on the second and third floor.

Remit:

The Theatres Trust is the National Advisory Body for Theatres and was established by The Theatres Trust Act 1976 'to promote the better protection of theatres'. The Trust is a statutory consultee in the planning system and local planning authorities in Wales are required to consult the Trust on planning applications for '*development involving any land on which there is a theatre*', '*residential development within 50 metres of a theatre*' as well as for proposed theatres. The definition of theatres within the Act defines a theatre as 'any building or part of a building constructed wholly or mainly for the public performance of plays', and therefore applies to theatres, playhouses, arts centres, ciné-varieties or buildings converted for theatre use, old and new, in other uses or disused.

Comment:

This application has come to the attention of the Trust as it relates to alterations within Borough Theatre. There has been some engagement between the project team and the Trust during 2017 in development of a feasibility study for this project, but we have not previously had the opportunity to comment on these final proposals. There is an existing permission more associated with the wider Town Hall function which creates alterations within parts of the theatre which we were not consulted on.

We are supportive of efforts by theatre owners and operators to upgrade their facilities and

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

buildings, and particularly welcome improved accessibility which is a primary objective of this project. We understand works to the Borough Theatre form part of a wider programme of improvements to the Town Hall. The theatre is a valued cultural asset for Abergavenny and its surrounding communities.

While as shown on the floorplans this proposal appears to result on a significant decrease in seats, we understand there will actually now be greater flexibility. Average attendances shown within documentation shared with us during the project viability stage show average attendances to be below the proposed seating capacity, however there were a number of individual shows and types of show which were higher. Retractable seating will allow for larger attendances for comedy and gigs for example. Although in fully-seated mode capacity will be lower, there will be much better levels of audience comfort. Nonetheless the theatre must ensure its business plan is sound taking into account circumstances where income will be lost through lower capacity to ensure it remains sustainable into the future.

There is to be a rearrangement of the WC facilities which will increase provision from three to six at second floor level, and these will be unisex/gender neutral. In isolation this will still not provide the theatre with sufficient numbers although we are aware from floorplans associated with the previous application and from engaging with the theatre that further facilities are available to the first floor and that appropriate signage and audience management will be in place to avoid congestion and queues on the second floor.

To meet minimum provision set out in Part M of Building Regulations there should be two permanent wheelchair positions in the auditorium and a further four removable positions. The plans show only one permanent position on the balcony level with two (we assume) removable positions at the front of the stalls (second floor). However we are reassured following discussion with the theatre that other positions will be available due to the nature of the retractable seating. Nonetheless we suggest floorplans are submitted which show this potential and possible other seating configurations more clearly.

More fundamentally, to the third floor there appears to be insufficient space to turn around a wheelchair after exiting the lift followed by insufficient clear door width into the balcony (area marked DT-01 on the third floor plan). This appears outside the scope of this application having been a part of the other Town Hall proposal, nonetheless it will need to be resolved particularly as there is a wheelchair position to the balcony and a refuge.

We are supportive of the rationalisation of bar space, it would work much better operationally to run one larger bar instead of two smaller ones and we consider this space will also provide a better environment for audiences.

In conclusion we are supportive of the principle of improvement works which will upgrade the theatre and the experience it provides to audiences, and particularly that it significantly enhances accessibility into and around the theatre. We do suggest though that clearer floorplans are submitted which help demonstrate how the stalls can be configured and where wheelchair positions can be made available. Subject to such clarification, we would recommend the granting of listed building consent for these works.

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for **everyone**



Please contact us should you wish to discuss this representation in further detail.

Tom Clarke MRTPI
National Planning Adviser

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