

Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC/2044

15 January 2020

Frederica Cooney
Pending Applications
Development Planning
City of Westminster
PO Box 732
Redhill, RH1 9FL

By e-mail: northplanningteam@westminster.gov.uk

Application: 19/10113/FULL

Site: Open Air Theatre Inner Circle Regents Park London NW1 4NU

Proposal: Improvements to site infrastructure including erection of buildings at the back of house area and the technical gallery/ control cabin; modifications to external works including new wood store, relocated bin store, and alterations to the entrance gate.

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 as it refers to development at Open Air Theatre in Regents Park. We were not directly consulted despite it falling within our statutory remit outlined above.

Open Air Theatre is the UK's oldest permanent and professional outdoor theatre having been established in 1932. It has a large capacity of 1,256 and helps draw visitors into London, as well as forming a key element of Westminster's cultural offer. Paragraph 92 of the NPPF (2019) seeks planning decisions to plan positively for facilities of this nature. We acknowledge that the nature of any development at the theatre must be sensitive to its setting within Regents Park as a Grade I listed Historic Park and Garden of Special Historic Interest, a conservation area and designated Metropolitan Open Land.

This proposal is seeking to undertake a number of works within the theatre, namely providing a new link building between the admin block and workshops to facilitate meeting rooms and an

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, Truda Spruyt, Anna Stapleton

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improved layout; replacement of temporary storage containers and a shed with a permanent store structure; a new electricians workshop and office; technical and safety improvements to the technical gallery which currently does not meet the requirements of more modern productions; an increase in audience seating capacity through the addition of 80 seats; a replacement control cabin; and various back of house improvements.

Policy S35 of the Westminster City Plan (2016) seeks to protect and enhance Westminster's open space network including its quality, heritage and ecological value. We consider this proposal to be in accordance with that principle because there is only a modest increase in overall built floorspace, primarily arising from the new office link building and storage facility to the north-east of the site. However, the link building is contained within the existing cluster of buildings used by the theatre and the new storage building is replacing existing temporary containers. All are within the theatre's existing boundary. Therefore there is no net loss of open space which is usable and accessible and the proposal will result in enhanced facilities for the theatre which will help reinforce its role as a cultural asset for Westminster and London.

We consider the scale, design and materials of the new facilities to be of sufficient quality and appearance to correspond with the theatre's sensitive setting and the existing theatre structures. We are supportive of efforts by theatre owners and operators to invest in their facilities and the outcome of these works will result in improved facilities and working conditions. An increase in audience capacity will also help improve the viability of the theatre.

Therefore we support this application and **recommend the granting of planning permission.**

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



Tom Clarke MRTPI
National Planning Adviser

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