

Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC/2305

03 August 2020

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Planning & Strategy
City Development
The City of Edinburgh Council
Business Centre G2
Waverley Court
4 East Market Street
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By e-mail: planning@edinburgh.gov.uk

Application: 20/02211/FUL

Site: 23 - 24 Greenside Place Edinburgh EH1 3AA

Proposal: Change of use from offices to serviced apartments with associated upgrading and refurbishment works with minor exterior alterations (construct two larger dormers).

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 been brought to the attention of the Trust because it seeks to change the use of offices to serviced apartments on a site adjoining the Edinburgh Playhouse.

The Playhouse is a Category A listed heritage asset reflecting its national importance as what was the largest cinema in Scotland and the fourth largest in the UK, designed by specialist architect John Fairweather. Few theatres either in Scotland or across the United Kingdom as a whole are designated at the highest level. It is the current largest theatre in the UK and therefore also a major cultural asset for Edinburgh, attracting major international touring shows which helps draw people into the city. On that basis it is vital that development which comes forward within proximity to the Playhouse and its setting does not compromise the theatre's operations or significance.

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, Richard Johnston, Gary Kemp, Simon Ricketts, Truda Spruyt

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

The Trust is generally cautious of residential development which adjoins, neighbours or is adjacent to theatres and other noise-generating cultural venues due to the potential for conflict and in particular complaints related to noise, vibrations and general disturbance including from deliveries and servicing. In the case of theatres this includes 'get-ins' and 'get-outs' – the delivery and removal of large sets and equipment – which by necessity often takes place late at night and early in the morning including at weekends due to the scheduling requirements of touring shows. This can affect the amenity and living conditions of residents, whether permanent or short-term. In turn, there is a risk that noise-related complaints can lead to detrimental restrictions on the ability of theatres to operate, compromising their existence as valued cultural facilities. Previous cases of this and the need to avoid future instances and protect Scotland's cultural facilities and infrastructure has resulted in new legislation coming into force; the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 requires planning authorities to take into account whether development includes sufficient measures to mitigate, minimise or manage the level of noise between the development and any existing cultural venues or facilities in the vicinity of the development. The Act is clear that any costs associated with mitigation and management must not fall on the noise source.

The applicant has undertaken an appraisal of the site's surrounding uses and context which identifies a strong mix of entertainment uses around the site. It states, "the building is ideally located for serviced apartment use". While we would consider the area more generally to be conducive for such use, the applicant has failed to acknowledge the site immediately adjoins the Playhouse and overlooks its service yard within either the Design Statement or Planning Statement. The latter does not identify or discuss the Playhouse and any impacts on it as a consideration within the main body of the report or as an 'Other Material Consideration'. The supporting information focuses on the external and general internal design of the proposal, which is itself Category B listed, but does not appear to have undertaken any acoustic assessment to identify any mitigation and protection which may be required to protect occupants from noise and vibrations from the Playhouse.

We do not object to the principle of serviced apartments for short-term tourist use in this area or indeed at this particular site, but at this stage in the absence of an acoustic analysis or detail as to how any impacts will be mitigated we do object to the proposal and urge that further information is sought. This is particularly critical for the rooms closest to the Playhouse. Additionally, if the Council is minded to approve this change of use we recommend that building works are conditioned to avoid them taking place during normal performance times. We also recommend that use of the site is conditioned to ensure they are used only for short-term tourist lets and not for longer-term residential accommodation which would bring materially greater risk of conflict which could undermine the Playhouse.

In conclusion and to summarise, in order for the proposal to comply with requirements of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 further information must be provided by the applicant and if necessary for plans to be revised to ensure the ongoing operations of Edinburgh Playhouse are

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protected. Until such time as the Trust can be satisfied the proposal will not undermine the Playhouse's operations we object to the granting of planning permission for this change of use.

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

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "T Clarke". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Tom Clarke MRTPI
National Planning Adviser

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