

Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC/2133

28 September 2020

Robert Fowler
Oxford City Council,
St Aldate's Chambers
109 St Aldate's
Oxford, OX1 1DS

By e-mail: planningcomments@oxford.gov.uk

Applications: 20/02145/FUL

Site: 11 - 12 Beaumont Street Oxford Oxfordshire OX1 2LW

Proposals: Temporary change of use from theatre (Sui Generis) to mixed-use as a theatre (Sui Generis) and a non-residential institution (Use Class F.1) for a period of 6 months

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:

Thank you for consulting Theatres Trust regarding this application for temporary change of use at Oxford Playhouse. The proposal seeks to facilitate use of the theatre as additional teaching and lecture space for the University of Oxford for the 2020/21 academic year, initially for the first term but with sufficient flexibility within the permission to cover the period of the second term to March if the theatre is still unable to viably open for performances.

We consider this proposal to be mutually beneficial; like most theatres the Playhouse has been forcibly closed for some time and with continuing restrictions and uncertainty this will continue into the immediate future. Meanwhile, the university is in need of additional space due to social distancing requirements.

Theatres are important cultural and social assets which support the well-being of local people and enhance the function, vibrancy and vitality of town centres. The Playhouse additionally is a statutory Grade II listed heritage asset. Theatres have come under particular challenge as a result of Covid-19 restrictions; already six theatres across the UK have been forced into administration or been vacated by their operators. Therefore proposals such as this which would

Theatres Trust

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Chair Tim Eyles **Director** Jon Morgan

Trustees Richard Baldwin, David Blyth, Pam Bone, Paul Cartwright, Paddy Dillon, Annie Hampson, Richard Johnston, Gary Kemp, Simon Ricketts, Jane Spiers, Truda Spruyt, Katie Town

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

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provide the theatre with an income to help sustain it in the interim while utilising it for a purpose which is compatible with its existing form is to be welcomed. Plans show that no alterations are required; there are other theatres being used by universities in the interim not just within the UK (for example St Andrews University utilising the nearby Byre Theatre) but elsewhere around the world such as Clowes Memorial Hall for Butler University in Indianapolis.

Therefore we are supportive of the granting of temporary planning permission for change of use for a time-limited six month period for the specific purpose set out within the application.

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

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tom Clarke".

Tom Clarke MRTPI
National Planning Adviser

Theatres Trust

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