

Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC/3561

09 October 2020

Fiona Runacre
Development Management
Coventry City Council
Council House
Earl Street
Coventry
CV1 5RR

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

Application: FUL/2020/1892

Site: The Albany Theatre Albany Road Coventry CV5 6JQ COVENTRY

Proposal: Erection of a single storey, glazed entrance lobby and terrace to Albany Road elevation together with access ramps and landscaping, and single storey infill extension to yard area at rear of building to create studios, dressing rooms and extended bar area together with associated external alterations creating key internal link to the existing theatre.

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 been brought to the Trust's attention by the applicant. It seeks to create a front extension and rear infill to extend the Albany Theatre and provide additional facilities and improved accessibility. We were not formally notified by the Council despite it falling within our remit as a statutory consultee referenced above.

Albany Theatre is an important and valued and cultural asset for Coventry. It is also on the Council's Local List as a non-designated heritage asset. It has an Art Deco interior with a main auditorium of 620 seats and a smaller studio/rehearsal space. The theatre sits within the site of the city's former Technical Institute in a wing which was opened in 1935. Originally it was used as a teaching and lecture hall but from the Second World War it held public concerts and events, becoming known as College Theatre and Butts Theatre. Despite being a popular venue used by a number of local groups it closed in 2009 following the site being purchased for development.

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, 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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The Council intervened and helped set up a charitable trust to run the theatre and it re-opened in 2013. It continues to play a major part in Coventry's arts and cultural offer.

We are supportive of efforts by theatre owners and operators to invest in and enhance their buildings. The proposed development of the Albany would help it meet its potential through expanding its facilities and address some of its challenges utilising vacant and under-used property within its control. In turn this would boost its value as a cultural and social asset and increase its sustainability and viability, maximising the legacy and benefit of Coventry's City of Culture status for 2021.

Presently the theatre's main entrance is accessed from Albany Road but this lacks prominence. This would be addressed by creating a new entrance lobby with ramps and landscaping. We are supportive of this and consider it will substantially improve visibility whilst remaining sympathetic to the character of the existing façade. However we would suggest consideration of an additional bay to provide symmetry in its design and better respond to the appearance and significance of the building.

It is also proposed to extend the theatre's footprint by infilling a yard which currently sits between the main auditorium and unused internal space which is also within the theatre's control. This would facilitate additional dressing rooms including an accessible changing room, a new studio, WCs and new access to the main auditorium's balcony. As well as improving the theatre's facilities, this would also make most of the building accessible.

For both the front extension and rear infill we would urge careful consideration of fixing details to ensure future reversibility should reinstatement of the building's original appearance be sought and minimise harm to its fabric. Nonetheless we are supportive of the form and use of these extensions; the infill will enable existing windows to the theatre to remain exposed.

As part of these works there will be internal alterations to bring a currently vacant area of the building back to use, providing a substantial number of new WCs, a further two studios and an enhanced foyer/café/bar area. Again this is something we welcome and support, as it will provide the theatre with additional flexibility and increase its value and use outside of performance times. As internal works this element of the proposal sits outside of the application for planning permission, however we would urge the applicant to ensure the acoustics between these spaces are managed. There are a number of other minor comments for consideration which we have articulated to the applicant's design team.

Overall we are supportive of this scheme and of the benefits it will bring to the Albany as a cultural asset and to the city as a whole. Paragraph 92 of the NPPF seeks planning decisions to plan positively for facilities such as the Albany. We also consider the proposal to respond positively to the building's significance as a non-designated heritage asset. Therefore we recommend the granting of planning permission.

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Please contact us should you wish to discuss these comments in further 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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