

# Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC/411

28 October 2020

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**Application:** 2020/1966/FUL & 2020/1967/LBC

**Site:** The Palace Theatre High Street City Centre Swansea

**Proposal:** Refurbishment and conversion of the existing Grade II listed theatre building to Classes A2/B1 commercial office space, including the removal of some internal fabric, the insertion of three areas of new floor to the stage house, auditorium and roof void, the insertion of mechanical plant louvres at high level to the Bethesda Street Elevation and roof along with the reinstatement of the conical roof at the apex of the building, reinstatement of the two entrance canopies and introduction of glazed roof lights to the roof. Highway alterations to Bethesda Street to become a one way street with a servicing / delivery bay to the rear the theatre and widening of pavement along the High Street facade to facilitate a new main entrance to the building.

## Remit:

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:

Thank you for consulting the Trust regarding this application for planning permission and listed building consent associated with the restoration project and change of use at the Palace Theatre. We were engaged with this project at pre-application stage, taking part in a meeting of stakeholders and submitting formal written comments.

### Theatres Trust

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL

T 020 7836 8591 E [info@theatrestrust.org.uk](mailto:info@theatrestrust.org.uk) W [theatrestrust.org.uk](http://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

The Palace is a Grade II listed heritage asset which opened in 1888 as a music hall. It occupies a triangular site between High Street, Bethesda Street and Prince of Wales Road and is distinctive as a theatre building owing to its wedge shape which draws comparisons with the Flat Iron Building in New York. It is the oldest surviving theatre building in Wales and is architecturally significant both externally and internally; its auditorium can be described as intimate with two steeply-raked balconies curving round to the proscenium. It is also notable for showing the first silent picture in Wales. Originally called the Pavilion it was renamed as the Palace in 1900.

The Palace hosted a number of significant performers and entertainers including Charlie Chaplin, Dan Leno, Morecambe and Wise and Ken Dodd. It was converted to a nightclub in the 1970s, and subsequently saw use as a bingo hall. Lower areas were used as a bar/nightclub in later years until closure in 2006. It has been vacant since that time during which its condition has deteriorated considerably, suffering water ingress, plant growth and intentional damage by trespassers. Although repairs carried out in 2016 left the building weathertight and were supposed to have prevented unauthorised access it also restricted ventilation which compounded damage to fabric. The building's owner continued to neglect it and further trespass occurred culminating in a suspected arson attack towards the end of 2019. The Council subsequently purchased the building. Despite its condition and the damage that has occurred structurally it is sound and almost all its fabric remains and is repairable.

Given the architectural and cultural significance of the Palace it is a priority building for the Trust and is also on our Theatres at Risk register. As articulated at pre-application stage we are keen to see it restored and returned to active use and continue to welcome the Council's proposals which have been only slightly amended compared to the plans on which we previously commented.

Internally there are a few alterations in layout, primarily that some rooms have been swapped. Within the basement there has been a shifting of the IT/communications room, LV switch room, one meeting room and some breakout space. This will require a slight reduction in newly inserted partitions. To the first floor there is to be a ramp in place of steps and a platform lift. To the fourth floor the location of a WC and plant room has been swapped. Neither of these alterations to plans on which we have already commented cause us concern.

Externally there are some amendments in design and appearance. The conical roof to the rotunda has been altered with increased parapet and additional cowl set in front to match the original design which we welcome. A further roof cowl is now pitched rather than flat-topped, louvres to the north elevation have been extended and there has been a re-design of roof lights. Again we have no objections to these changes.

In terms of the change of use, we would echo our pre-application comments in that we can support commercial/employment use as we have previously accepted following a feasibility study in 2015 that reinstatement of significant theatre use is unlikely to be viable at this time. A

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previous study for performance use in the late 1990s similarly showed the venue would likely operate at a significant loss. Fundamentally despite the move away from social and cultural use the Palace's historic character and features of significance will be maintained, the scheme is reversible and potential for performance use in future remains.

In conclusion we consider this proposal to be sensitive to the Palace's history and significance and we welcome the Council's investment into the building. Therefore we are supportive of the granting of planning permission and listed building consent.

Please do not hesitate to contact us should you wish to discuss these comments further and continue to engage with us should plans be further amended.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "T Clarke".

Tom Clarke MRTPI  
National Planning Adviser

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