

# Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC/775

25 November 2020

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**Application:** 20/P/01902 & 20/P/01903

**Site:** Yvonne Arnaud Theatre, Millbrook, Guildford, GU1 3TZ

**Proposal:** Proposed changes to the entrance of the theatre including new entrance screen, signage, new cladding at ground floor level only. Demolition of an existing external lift, construction of a new internal access lift, layout changes to the front of house, layout changes to back of house areas, refurbishment of public areas, replacement of roof finishes and provision of insulation, and replacement of obsolete services systems; &

Listed Building Application for proposed changes to the entrance of the theatre including new entrance screen, signage, new cladding at ground floor level only. Demolition of an existing external lift, construction of a new internal access lift, layout changes to the front of house, layout changes to back of house areas, refurbishment of public areas, replacement of roof finishes and provision of insulation, and replacement of obsolete services systems.

## **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 planning permission and listed building consent at Yvonne Arnaud Theatre.

Yvonne Arnaud is a statutorily Grade II listed heritage asset. It was one of the first provincial theatres built as part of a post-War cultural boom, designed as a theatre with restaurant, bars,

### **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

## Protecting theatres for everyone



club and club room within a riverside setting. It was also considered one of the most successful in design due to the intimacy of its auditorium and close relationship between performers and the audience. Its exterior is reflective of the circular geometry of its auditorium with concrete columns part-wrapped in brise soleil. It has a varied theatrical programme and continues to make a tremendous contribution towards Guildford's cultural provision and to the social and cultural well-being of local people.

Nevertheless, the theatre has some challenges which this proposal is seeking to address. The value and benefit of its riverside position has been compromised by tree growth which has severed these views. Neither is it well integrated to the town centre; it lacks signage and prominence and is not obviously a theatre. There is level access into the foyer and ground floor but lift access which is via a later external circular addition only serves the top floor. Back of house areas are not accessible. Some facilities are in need of updating and the foyer layout gives rise to congestion. The building suffers from poor temperature control making it energy inefficient.

Therefore we are supportive of the project proposed as it seeks to rectify the challenges cited and would reinforce the theatre's role as a cultural asset into the future, in particular that the building would be fully accessible for audiences, performers and staff and that's it would be made more efficient.

Interventions include modification of the theatre's entrance with new illuminated signage (also subject to a separate Advertisement Consent to which we have responded under separate cover) which will help improve the theatres prominence along with the addition of a cladding screen at ground floor level below the canopy to help conceal fire doors. The external lift tower will be demolished with a new replacement internal lift which will instead serve all levels. In design terms we have no objections to these proposals in principle and largely consider they would not detract from the theatre's character and significance as a heritage asset. The lift tower was a later addition which reduced riverside access and thus compromised the value of the theatre's riverside setting and original design intention so providing enhanced riverside access is welcomed and we support removal. However we would suggest submission of further design details with regards to the coloured cladding around the main entrance and its appropriateness as current drawings lack clarity. This element could be conditioned.

Refurbishment and alteration to layout within the foyer and other public areas again would have no impact on the theatre's heritage significance, but would make the building more accessible to all users and would enhance the experience of its users. This will be important in ensuring the theatre's ongoing sustainability and viability, therefore providing substantial public benefit. The original theatre plan included a 'club' and usage of the third floor space for events such as functions and exhibitions will be reflective of that original function; its riverside views will be an asset which should ensure this space is attractive and will help diversify the theatre's social and cultural function.

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We are fully supportive of works backstage which will provide accessibility for staff and performers, in particular a new accessible dressing room and crew room, WC and a platform lift to link front and back of house.

We also support replacement and renewal of the theatre's electrics and services, and roof replacement to provide sufficient insulation which will bring the building's energy efficiency up to more modern standards.

In conclusion we are supportive of these proposals, and concur with the applicant's assessment that with minimal loss of original fabric there will be significant public benefits and improved sustainability. Paragraph 92 of the NPPF seeks planning decisions to plan positively for facilities such as this. Policy E6.1 of the Guildford Borough Local Plan (2019) supports enhancement of arts and cultural facilities. Theatres and cultural facilities more generally are also increasingly important in supporting the role and function of their town and city centres by bringing people into the area and supporting other businesses. The improvement of Yvonne Arnaud to better meet the needs of its users is to be welcomed.

Therefore we support the granting of planning permission and listed building consent.

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

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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