

Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC

16 December 2020

Kevin Crilly
Development Management
London Borough of Tower Hamlets
Mulberry Place
Clove Crescent
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By e-mail: development.control@towerhamlets.gov.uk

Application: PA/20/01969/S

Site: Two Sites: SITE 1 Land at 3 Millharbour and SITE 2 land at 6, 7 and 8 South Quay Square, South Quay Square, London

Proposal: Original Development: The demolition and redevelopment of sites at 3 Millharbour and 6, 7 and 8 South Quay with four high density residential towers: Buildings G1-G4. The development of the 2.6 hectare site provides new homes in a mix of units and tenures (private, social/affordable and intermediate); a new primary school with nursery facilities; further education uses (Class D1, with a fall-back that part of this floorspace could also be used as D1 or D2 leisure floorspace, if necessary); flexible commercial floorspace (B1/D1/D2/A1/A2/A3 and/or A4); two new public parks including play facilities, a new north south pedestrian link and landscaping including works to conjoin the plots into the existing surrounding urban fabric; car parking spaces (for residential occupiers, blue badge holders and for a car club); cycle parking; management offices; service road and associated highway works; and other associated infrastructure including the diversion of the Marsh Wall sewer Minor Material Amendments to Planning permission Ref: PA/19/00682 dated August 2020 Proposed changes include - changes to internal residential layouts resulting in an amended residential unit mix (including an increase in residential units); redistribution of D1 and D2 floorspace within the podium level of Building G2 (Phase 1); changes to the building footprint and external facades of Building G1 (Phase 2); minor adjustments to the massing, podium heights and overall building heights of Buildings G2, G3 and G4 (Phase 1) and Building G1 (Phase 2); reduction in the area and depth of Phase 1 basement to single-storey and removal of Phase 2 basement (reducing the overall car parking spaces); and changes to play space and landscape design within two new public parks.

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

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

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 minor material amendments at the Millharbour development. We were previously consulted earlier in 2020 with regards to an Environmental Impact Assessment Scoping Opinion. We are a consultee due to the site containing an existing studio theatre and a new theatre being proposed within Building G2.

The new theatre is one of the elements subject to change through this application; previously it was to be located at basement levels but will now sit above ground within its own building fronting what is described as the theatre square. Bringing the theatre out of the basement and affording it prominence within the wider scheme is welcomed. Cultural venues such as theatres contribute tremendously to the vibrancy and value of their surroundings, bringing people into the area which in turn attracts and supports other businesses. There is also limited theatre provision within this fast-growing part of London which would be exacerbated if Lanterns Studio Theatre has to vacate.

To ensure future sustainability and viability of theatres as cultural facilities which benefit their communities they must be appropriately designed with input from specialist theatre consultants, ideally with the needs of an end-user in mind. On that basis we currently have a number of concerns with regards to the theatre's design, function and layout.

If there is an operator committed to the space we would encourage both them and the applicant to engage further with the Trust so we can understand their requirements and ascertain the extent to which these are met by the proposed scheme. As the national advisory public body for theatres we are a source of free and objective advice on theatre design and can also convene a panel of specialists for a full Advisory Review upon request for which there is a modest charge.

As currently indicated the plans for the theatre suggest it would not be operationally sustainable as an independent entity; it could potentially function as a part of the school but there are no links between them in terms of access. Neither would it meet relevant building regulations. For example there is no back of house provision. For a venue of this size and nature it would be expected for there to be dressing rooms, WCs or showers for performers and staff, and storage space for equipment, props and sets. Neither is there any backstage lift for performers which in turn means stage sets and equipment would also have to come up through public lifts; those lifts would need to be of sufficient size. Bringing equipment in and out through public front of house areas would compromise use of those spaces and the income it could generate to support the venue's operations.

Similarly, front of house spaces also require further consideration. Whilst the space afforded these areas appears sufficient and the theatre's independent and prominent frontage is

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welcomed, some thought should be given as to how this operates. There is no bar shown for example, whereas this area could provide an all-day offer which helps bring people into the building and support the theatre's overall viability. The studio space to the ground floor has the potential to be well used by different groups and further enhance the theatre's value as a community asset.

We have a number of concerns with current plans for the auditorium. It is not clear that there is sufficient height to enable tiered seating as shown particularly with the presence of the gallery above which could compromise sight lines from seats below. Whilst the stage has good length it appears to lack depth. If the intention is for the space is to be flexible with different layouts it will require integration with the balcony seating and whether it is technically possible thinking of necessary lighting and grid.

With regards to fire and means of escape, there will need to be a suitable strategy in place and amendments to ensure requirements are met. This includes ensuring safe travel distance to the nearest exit. Currently there is just one set of stairs so there will be no escape if that is blocked. Regulations state there should be a minimum of two stairs leading from any floor above or below ground unless attendance (including staff and performers) is capped at sixty and is lobbied and separated by otherwise imperforate construction from the rest of the premises. The seated capacity from plans appears to be over 450.

Whilst the theatre is an independent unit it should be ensured that there is appropriate acoustic and vibrational separation in place between it and the two neighbouring units. Any plant will also need such consideration.

We would also note that theatre use (Sui Generis) is not a defined or secured landuse within the scheme. We would be keen for this use to be safeguarded given the presence of an existing studio theatre.

In conclusion, whilst we have a number of concerns with regards to the theatre's design these are not insurmountable and we welcome the theatre's inclusion in the scheme. We are therefore supportive of permission being granted for these non-material amendments, notwithstanding matters which fall outside of our remit and interest, although urge subsequent amendment of these plans and engagement with the Trust.

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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