

Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC/3082

28 April 2021

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Planning, Investment and Regeneration Service
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By e-mail: DC.Admin@kirklees.gov.uk

Application: 2021/65/91254/W

Site: Lawrence Batley Theatre, Queen Street, Huddersfield, HD1 2SP

Proposal: Listed Building Consent for refurbishment of theatre building (within a Conservation Area)

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 for listed building consent at Lawrence Batley Theatre came to the attention of the Trust through a story in the press. It is seeking to convert a store room to an accessible dressing room, shower and WC and to carry out refurbishments throughout the building both front and back of house.

Lawrence Batley Theatre is a valued cultural facility for Huddersfield and its surrounding catchment. It is within an early nineteenth century former Wesleyan chapel which is Grade II* listed. It served as an arts centre for a short time in the 1970s and was then a nightclub for a decade or so before plans for its conversion to theatre started in the late 1980s. It opened as the Lawrence Batley in 1994. The Trust's database entry describes the conversion as "extremely effective" with many features of the original building having been retained and the auditorium offering flexibility in its format with a light and attractive foyer. Efforts to improve and upgrade the theatre's facilities and widen accessibility are to be welcomed; paragraph 92 of the NPPF (2019)

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, Paul Cartwright, Paddy Dillon, Annie Hampson, Richard Johnston, Gary Kemp, 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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seeks planning decisions to plan positively for cultural facilities. Support for the development of theatres is particularly critical as they recover from the Covid-19 pandemic.

At basement and first floor levels it appears there is upgrading and refurbishment only; if there are any reconfigurations at this level these are not obviously shown.

At ground floor the layout of the male WCs is to be altered, currently there are two toilets and potentially a urinal but this is not shown. This will be altered to one toilet and six urinals and is likely to be a significant uplift in provision. This will enable quicker throughput, potentially reducing queues and therefore improving audience experience. The female WCs seem equal in provision so it is to be assumed this area will see an upgrading only, likewise for the adjacent accessible WC. It is at this level that a print room and corridor adjacent to the stage door will be converted to an accessible dressing room, shower and WC. We encourage theatre owners and operators to seek to make their buildings accessible to all, whether for audiences, performers or staff. Therefore the principle of this alteration is supported. However, as currently drawn they do not appear to conform with Part M in terms of size and layout for the WC and shower. It will be important that having invested into the theatre its new facilities are functional for those using them so we would recommend engaging an access consultant to advise on usability of the space. In addition, the wash basin within the dressing room would hinder access so this too would need further review.

In terms of heritage impacts, none of the proposed works would impact on historic fabric or features. Reconfiguration and upgrading of WCs and redecoration will help improve the audience experience more generally, which is important in retaining custom to support the ongoing sustainability and viability of the theatre as an asset for Huddersfield. Likewise, enhanced facilities for performers and staff are also welcomed. Although as currently proposed the new accessible dressing room and facilities do not appear to meet requirements this is a design matter which can be resolved, and fundamentally has no impact on the building's historic significance.

Therefore we are supportive of the granting of listed building consent.

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

A handwritten signature in blue 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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