

Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC/382

13 May 2021

Planning
Reading Borough Council
Civic Offices
Bridge Street
Reading
RG1 2LU

By e-mail: plgcomments@reading.gov.uk

Application: 210623

Site: Progress Theatre The Mount Reading RG1 5HL

Proposal: Single storey extension

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 come to the attention of the Trust because it is seeking to provide an extension to the Progress Theatre to facilitate an upgrade to the theatre's toilet provision. We have not been notified despite this falling within our remit as a statutory consultee. We ask that the Council ensures we are notified of future applications relating to theatres in Reading.

The Progress Theatre is a small community theatre and charitable organisation run by its members. It has a mixed programme of new and classic works and has youth groups which help develop skills in the arts for young people. Venues such as this are important cultural and social assets for their communities, contributing to the well-being of local people and enabling access and participation. Paragraph 92 of the NPPF seeks planning decisions to plan positively for facilities of this nature.

Inadequate toilet provision is a challenge faced by many theatres, particularly those in older or converted buildings. The theatre falls into this category, having been built post-war as a community hall with the theatre taking over in the early 1960s. Of particular note are current

Theatres Trust

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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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arrangements which require audience members and visitors using the accessible WC to pass through backstage areas. There are just two female WCs; this is likely to lead to queuing which detracts from a positive theatre experience for audiences and compromises pre-show and interval sales which are so important for theatre's income and viability. The current layout with the WCs immediately adjacent to the bar is likely to give rise to congestion. Therefore seeking to rectify these challenges through investing in the building and identifying opportunities to extend its footprint are to be welcomed and supported.

By extending the theatre to its southern boundary the theatre is able to rationalise the layout of its WCs and provide a small buffer between the WCs and the bar which should alleviate congestion. Provision of five unisex WCs meets the standards set out in the Technical Standards for Places of Entertainment. Furthermore an accessible WC will also be provided within the same location. These will enhance the audience experience considerably.

In conclusion we welcome this proposal and support the granting of planning permission.

Please contact us should you wish to discuss these comments in more detail.

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

Tom Clarke MRTPI
National Planning Adviser

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