

Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC/2030

30 June 2021

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Application: DC/21/122058 & DC/21/122059

Site: THE BROADWAY THEATRE, CATFORD ROAD, LONDON, SE6 4RU

Proposal: Listed Building Consent and Planning Permission for internal and external alterations and adaptations at at The Broadway Theatre, Catford Road SE6.

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 on the above applications for planning permission and listed building consent at the Broadway Theatre. A number of alterations and repairs are proposed across the building, both front and back of house as well as externally.

The Broadway is a Grade II listed cultural and heritage asset with two performance spaces – an 800-seat main auditorium and smaller 80-seat studio theatre. It is a distinctive curved stone building with Art Deco and gothic influence, the latter to reflect an adjacent vestry hall which was demolished in the 1960s. It is a landmark building with the Catford Major Town Centre and retains much of its original fabric and appearance. The main auditorium has gothic style oak panelling with the proscenium flanked by panels surmounted in shields, heraldic beasts and metal scrollwork grilles. Historically there have been few theatres within Lewisham so the Broadway has been an important arts and cultural facility not just for Catford but the wider borough, particularly following demolition of the Lewisham Hippodrome in 1960. The Broadway has always been intended as a multi-purpose space for the community and it contains a number

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

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of offices and other spaces. It has a mixed programme with the studio hosting emerging directors and works. However, the minimal alteration that has occurred within the building means that it suffers to some degree in meeting the needs of modern audiences.

There are a lack of toilet facilities, as is common with older theatre buildings across the UK, and accessibility requires improvement. Operationally the complicated get-in and back of house arrangements compromise the range of shows the Broadway is able to host. Externally the building is in clear need of repair; even next to the main entrance there is accumulation of moss and algae with other vegetation growth around the entrance canopy and front façade. Plans and options for development at the theatre, both short and long term, have been discussed with the Trust over the last few years.

We welcome that investment is being made into the building and we are supportive of efforts to improve and update the theatre's facilities to coincide with Lewisham's year as Borough of Culture in 2022. The Broadway is an asset for Catford and can play a huge part in ensuring the town centre's future success, just as Councils elsewhere around the UK including in London have placed theatre projects as central to town centre and economic development projects in their areas. Strategic Objective 4B of the Core Strategy (2011) articulated through Policy 19 includes the enhancement of leisure, arts, cultural and entertainment facilities. DM Policy 23 of the Development Management Local Plan (2014) also promotes arts, cultural and entertainment facilities in the borough. Paragraph 92 of the NPPF (2019) seeks planning decisions to plan positively for facilities such as this.

There are a number of works proposed and our comments in relation to these are set out below:

Toilet provision

There will be alterations to toilet blocks at various locations throughout the building. Largely this involves rearrangement of layouts which will allow for additional cubicles through more efficient layout, along with some expansion of footprint or conversion of other spaces. In some cases, such as within the basement, there will be a significant uplift in provision. This is welcomed and supported. At basement level a baby changing facility will be installed in place of a store/electrical cupboard and to the ground floor the snack kiosk is given over to WC provision including an accessible WC and gender neutral WCs. A shower will also be refurbished which raises no issues.

Bars

The basement and ground floor bars will be refurbished and given a more contemporary finish which reflects the building's historic character including copper finishes to the bars and bulkheads, with additional facilities to the ground floor circular bar which will help this become more of an all-day destination. Again these changes are welcomed, and will help generate activity and allow people to engage with the theatre at different times of day.

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Box office

Minor alterations will be carried out to enable equal access, which is supported.

Accessibility improvements

At the basement level ramps will be installed within the lobby and gallery. These changes would meet the purpose for which they are intended, would be reversible and would not prevent a more holistic scheme in the future. Due to the tight nature of the basement level it will need to be ensured that the ramps do not hinder access to and from other areas, such as prevent doors from fully opening. It is proposed that a stairlift be installed to provide access to the seating at Circle level. Whilst best practice and modern standards dictate that wheelchair spaces should be provided at a variety of locations across the auditorium, and certainly we encourage that this is achieved, it is not always the optimal outcome where constraints make this challenging. We would question whether the lift leaves enough width on the staircase for escape, and whether there is safe refuge and evacuation for wheelchair users at that level. It may be beneficial to instead provide wider provision to the stalls/ground floor. We recommend that an accessibility consultant is engaged to advise on these matters. Similarly, further advice may be required in respect of the portable wheelchair lift. We would again question whether this is the best solution, and whether there is a plan to quickly and safely evacuate in emergency. The stage stairs will be altered to comply with Building Regulations. Although stated this will result in the loss of historic fabric, it is not clear these are original and in any case we do not consider their loss to compromise the building's historic character and significance.

Upgrade of circle seating

A raised platform will be installed to allow for adjustment to seating positions; currently there is limited space between seats and rows so this will enhance audience comfort. This will be a reversible alteration so raises no challenges from a heritage perspective. We assume given the appointment of a recognised theatre consultant that there has been appropriate study to ensure new positions offer good sight-lines to the stage.

Get-in

The current get-in arrangements are clearly problematic for both the theatre and touring productions, requiring a set of stairs which operationally is inefficient and limits the shows that can come in. The proposal for a demountable get-in ramp will go some way to addressing this and is relatively low cost, as indicated within the Charcoalblue report. We would suggest that even with the ramp some constraints will remain and this is an aspect where the availability of additional land for a permanent optimum solution would be beneficial. We recognise however that the report cites this is a short-medium term option, and it is a reversible intervention.

Technical upgrades

These include replacement or installation of rigging, lighting and other infrastructure which is to be welcomed. The safety curtain would also be replaced, although we do not believe this is original or of any particular significance.

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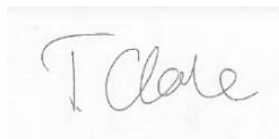
External repairs

As noted above, there is clear need for repair to the building and this is documented within the submission. We support these proposals, but in relation to cleaning of the stonework there should be a condition put in place which requires testing and approval of the method and finish. A patch of stonework should be worked on with approval coming from the Council's Conservation Officer for works to continue. A recognised specialist contractor should be appointed to undertake the works.

To conclude, it is pleasing that the Broadway is being given the attention and investment it deserves. The works proposed, with the exception of individual elements which require further clarification, testing and refinement (as the theatre consultant's Stage 3 report itself acknowledges), will meet the main project objectives. It is regretful, whether for reasons of budget constraints and/or no prospect of neighbouring land being available, a more comprehensive project to fully address all limitations cannot be undertaken in the near future. These proposals will improve the building in the immediate term but aren't necessarily the optimum or most efficient solution for it longer-term. Nonetheless for the purposes of the applications submitted there is nothing that should prevent planning permission and listed building consent being granted. The proposals overwhelmingly do not impact on historic fabric or features and/or are reversible. Where there is any minor degree of harm we consider this is offset by the public benefits of improving function and accessibility which will help safeguard the Broadway's ongoing conservation. External repairs to the building are clearly much needed.

Therefore we recommend the granting of planning permission and listed building consent, with the suggested condition on stonework repair/cleaning as we have set out.

If you wish to discuss these comments further please do not hesitate to get in contact, and please continue to engage with us should plans be further refined.



Tom Clarke MRTPI
National Planning Adviser

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