

Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC/456

05 July 2021

Development Team
Rugby Borough Council
Town Hall
Evreux Way
Rugby
CV21 2RR

By e-mail: rbc.planning@rugby.gov.uk

Application: R21/0487

Site: 2, HENRY STREET, RUGBY, CV21 2QA

Proposal: Alterations to external openings, internal remodelling of theatre and associated works.

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 the above application for planning permission. We have been notified because the proposal seeks external and internal alterations to Rugby Theatre's site at 2 Henry Street and the former Central Hall.

Rugby Theatre is a valued cultural facility for the town. It is split across two sites adjacent to each other on Henry Street. The main auditorium is on one side with this site containing a smaller studio theatre, a bar, toilets and props and scenery stores on the other. It is run by its members and hosts local amateur theatre as well as cinema and other events. Venues such as this are particularly important for the social cultural well-being of local people because they bring people together, reduce isolation and provide opportunities to participate in the arts, volunteer and learn new skills. Paragraph 92 of the NPPF (2019) seeks planning decisions to plan positively for these types of facilities. Spatial Objective 2 of the Rugby Local Plan 2011-2031 (2019) seeks the enhancement of cultural facilities within the borough.

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

The site subject to this application includes two neighbouring but currently separate buildings which are both within the ownership of the theatre – 2 Henry Street which was taken on just over ten years ago and the former Central Hall. There is a contrast between the two buildings architecturally but both are undesignated heritage assets which make positive contributions to the Rugby Town Centre Conservation Area. Number 2 currently houses props and general storage and Central Hall has a studio space, bar and lounge, toilets and scenery store. It is proposed that these two buildings are amalgamated through new internal opening, the layout of the two buildings is rearranged and a new external opening is provided.

Forming openings between the two buildings will benefit the theatre operationally and offers the flexibility needed to undertake the internal alterations to enhance their facilities. It is the front of house facilities which will particularly benefit. The bar area will be opened up; currently the servery is boxed into a narrow room separate from the lounge area. This is likely to be a tight and congested area and isn't an optimum approach from the perspective of either the theatre or its audiences and customers. The structure will be removed so the bar and lounge is all within one area. This will give visibility affording oversight of the lounge and it will improve the environment for users and working environment for staff and make it much more inviting. There will also be substantially more space through expansion into the current toilet area the other side. In turn this will better facilitate the potential for the bar/café to be operated as more of an all-day venue. It will also make it more attractive for any events or private hires which will help support the theatre's income.

In turn the WCs will move into the former 2 Henry Street unit in place of the prop store which is to be downsized. This will give a substantial uplift in toilet provision as well as adding an accessible WC which is particularly welcomed. There will be a new structural opening into the prop store which will improve movement of items operationally and removes any need to travel through public areas.

There will be a back of house WC lost which we assume is acceptable for the theatre as there appears no reason to remove it for the purposes of building works, other than to mitigate the loss of space for prop storage.

There will also be an opening created from the bar into the studio space to create a new servery. This could allow the studio to be utilised independently of the bar for functions and private hires so again would support the theatre's income potential and function as a facility for the community. The plans state the shutter will be acoustically protected and this will be critical to prevent bleed of sound into the studio which could impact performances, rehearsals and other events. There will also need to be sufficient protection to guard against disturbance from the circulation space to the WCs.

Externally the main entrance doors and screen above are to be replaced with glazed examples. We would concur with the applicant's supporting statement that the current solid doors are unwelcoming and do not give a sense of the building being open. This would undermine efforts

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to better utilise and bring people into the building. We consider the proposed design would enhance the character of the building and contribute to its setting within the conservation area. We have no objection to the approach to glazing at 2 Henry Street.

In conclusion we welcome the theatre's efforts to invest in their facilities and enhance the experience for audiences and other users. We do not consider the proposed external alterations would have a negative impact on the character of the site as a non-designated heritage asset or would undermine the conservation area. There do in any case facilitate the public benefit of improving the theatre's facilities. We are therefore supportive of the granting of planning permission.

Please do not hesitate to contact us should you wish to discuss these comments in further detail.

Tom Clarke MRTPI
National Planning Adviser

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