

# Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC/2010

22 November 2021

Jennie Humphrey  
Pending Applications  
Development Planning  
City of Westminster  
PO Box 732  
Redhill  
RH1 9FL

By e-mail: [southplanningteam@westminster.gov.uk](mailto:southplanningteam@westminster.gov.uk)

**Application:** 21/07110/FULL & 21/07111/LBC

**Site:** London Coliseum 32 - 35 St Martin's Lane London WC2N 4ES

**Proposal:** Installation of automatic glazed internal entrance enclosure and doors to the main foyer entrance of the London Coliseum.

## **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 this application for listed building consent at the Coliseum. This proposal seeks to insert a glazed draught lobby within the foyer area beyond the set of doors to the centre of the primary St Martin's Lane elevation.

The Coliseum is Grade II\* listed reflecting its outstanding architectural and theatrical significance. It was designed by renowned theatre architect Frank Matcham.

We have been engaged by the applicant and their previous consultants on this matter, having met them, undertaken a site visit and provided advice going back to 2018 when works were also being planned for the box office. It now appears that original plans for a draught lobby have altered, these applications having been submitted by a different architectural practice. A further meeting and site visit took place on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2021 immediately prior to submitting these comments.

## **Theatres Trust**

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL  
T 020 7836 8591 E [info@theatrestrust.org.uk](mailto:info@theatrestrust.org.uk) W [theatrestrust.org.uk](http://theatrestrust.org.uk)

Interim Chair Paddy Dillon Director Jon Morgan

Trustees Richard Baldwin, Paul Cartwright, 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 rationale for these works is understood. The nature and design of the Coliseum's entry doors with solid wood and minimal glazing means that without them being propped open the theatre does not obviously appear to passers-by as somewhere that is open to visit or to buy and collect tickets. In turn this means that climate control is a problem both in terms of undermining efficiency and being sub-optimal for working conditions within the foyer. A more comfortable environment is important for the theatre to develop its ancillary activities which will help support its function and viability. The challenge, which we have discussed with the applicant, is finding a solution and design which addresses the brief whilst avoiding harm to sensitive historic fabric and preserving the theatre's special character.

Given the significance and sensitivity of this building as a heritage asset there is a lack of detail submitted, both within the plans and the supporting documentation. The Heritage Statement is just a three-paragraph document which provides a brief description of the theatre and the proposal without providing any appraisal of the proposal's harm to the asset or justification for the works. Notwithstanding our advice on the works specifically, an appropriate statement should be submitted. As set out in paragraph 194 of the NPPF (2021) and paragraph 9 of the guidance on the Historic environment (2019) the statement must be more proportionate to the significance of the Coliseum and allow an understanding of the impact of the proposal guided by a heritage expert.

The submitted plans do not show details of fixings, for example how the enclosure would be built into or attached to the intricate joinery and detailing of the existing doorway, plasterwork or into the decorative mosaic floor. As these constitute sensitive fabric and features any harm would need to be fully identified and justified which is currently not the case. It is likely that examination would also need to be carried out into the flooring and what is beneath it before the works could be progressed.

Notwithstanding the above, we have serious concerns over the proposed approach. We suggest there may be alternative options which would be more appropriate and we encourage these to be explored further. One option is for the same location to be maintained but with a much smaller enclosure which broadly fits the footprint of the current entry mat; again this would require investigation of the floor below but there would seem less potential for harm to fabric given insertions already exist in this location. In our view, a better location may be the ramped set of doors, as there would seem to be a more straightforward opportunity for fixings and insertions which minimise harm to fabric whilst also being an entrance that all visitors are able to use. We acknowledge this isn't the optimum location in terms of visibility into the foyer, but this would be offset by the factors cited.

Therefore in conclusion we object to this proposal and urge the applicant to withdraw the application in order for there to be re-consideration of location and submission of supporting documentation. We would be willing to work positively with the applicant and their team to find a suitable way forward.

Please contact us if we may be of further assistance or should you wish to discuss these

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comments further.

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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