

# Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC

19 January 2022

Eirini Dimerouki  
Planning, Building Control & Licensing  
Colchester Borough Council  
Town Hall,  
Colchester,  
Essex,  
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By e-mail: [planning.services@colchester.gov.uk](mailto:planning.services@colchester.gov.uk)

**Application:** 213488 & 213489

**Site:** Colchester Arts Centre, Church Street, Colchester CO1 1NF

**Proposals:** PV panel installation on roof of South aisle

## **Remit:**

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:**

These applications for planning permission and listed building consent have come to the attention of the Trust because they are seeking installation of PV panels at Colchester Arts Centre. They are part of a set of applications to which we have also provided comment under separate cover.

The Arts Centre is a Grade II listed heritage asset within the former St. Mary at the Walls church. After church use ceased the building was converted for performance use with the Arts Centre opening in 1980. It is a valued arts and cultural asset for the town and its wider catchment, offering a varied programme of live music, comedy and theatre along with other events such as beer festivals. It is run on a not-for-profit basis. Paragraph 93 of the NPPF (2022) seeks planning decisions to plan positively for facilities of this nature.

We are highly supportive of theatres and other cultural and performance venues, including those within historic buildings, investing in environmental sustainability initiatives. For community and charitably-operated venues such as Colchester Arts Centre the cost savings are particularly beneficial to their longer-term viability. Nonetheless we acknowledge such interventions within

## **Theatres Trust**

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**Interim Chair** Katie Town      **Director** Jon Morgan

**Trustees** Paul Cartwright, Annie Hampson, Richard Johnston, Gary Kemp, Jane Spiers, Truda Spruyt

The National Advisory Public Body for Theatres  
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## Protecting theatres for **everyone**



the historic environment can lead to conflict between environmental sustainability and harm to architectural and historic significance. We therefore take such assessments on a case by case basis taking into account varying factors to weigh the environmental benefits against the level of heritage harm.

In this instance the impact of the proposed addition of solar PV panels to the southern side of the building is mitigated by them being shielded to a large extent behind the existing parapet and also by trees which obscure the view to the building from Church Walk and the pathway through the churchyard. It must also be considered that PV panels are a removable and reversible intervention which generate public benefit by improving sustainability and reducing the operating costs of the Arts Centre as a social and cultural asset.

In our view the harm is less than substantial but with reference to paragraph 202 of the NPPF (2021) we consider the environmental and public benefits of this proposal outweigh this harm. We also note that consent has twice previously been granted for similar works.

As such we support installation of PV panels on the auditorium's southern elevation and would in turn support the granting of planning permission and listed building consent.

Please contact us if we may be of further assistance or should you wish to discuss this representation in greater detail.

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

Tom Clarke MRTPI  
National Planning Adviser

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