

Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC/3782

21 March 2022

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Application: W/22/00396/FUL & W/22/00397/LB

Site: Theatrebarn at Bretforton Grange Main Street Bretforton Evesham WR11 7JH

Proposal: Single storey extension. Installation of platform lift to facilitate disabled user access. Alterations to provide a fully accessible main entrance and new external glazed canopy. Refurbishment of existing toilet accommodation.

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:

Thank you for consulting Theatres Trust regarding these applications for planning permission and listed building consent at Theatrebarn. They are seeking internal alterations, refurbishments and construction of an extension to provide additional WC facilities. We provided comments in relation to a similar scheme in 2021 which was subsequently withdrawn. A fresh set of applications have now been submitted following revisions.

Theatrebarn is within a complex of Grade II* listed agricultural barns at Bretforton Grange. Theatre was first introduced in 1979 following the conversion of the Grange's long gallery which was named Theatreroom and equipped with 100 seats. Over ten years later the barns came into the ownership of the theatre with the largest of these converted into a 180-seat proscenium arch auditorium. The adjoining barns are utilised as a foyer, restaurant and back of house facilities including dressing rooms, showers and a green room. The courtyard and grassed area outside of the foyer is also utilised as front of house before shows and during intervals. Theatrebarn was briefly on our national priority Theatres at Risk register for 2013 after its operation and setting

Theatres Trust

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Chair Dave Moutrey **Director** Jon Morgan

Trustees Paul Cartwright, James Dacre, Suba Das, Stephanie Hall, Annie Hampson, Richard Johnston, Gary Kemp, Lucy Osborne, 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

were threatened by a potential neighbouring development. It was removed one year later with immediate threat having receded.

Theatrebarn is a unique and valued arts and cultural asset. Paragraph 93 of the NPPF (2021) seeks planning decisions to plan positively for facilities such as this with paragraph 84.d supporting the development of services and facilities within rural areas. We welcome continued effort by the operator to invest in the theatre and its facilities and broaden its cultural role and function, and particularly support their ambition to improve accessibility which is currently limited. Therefore in principle we continue to be supportive of these proposals.

The extension to the more modern WC block will significantly enhance provision through both uplift in numbers and refurbishment which in turn will improve the audience experience and encourage greater spend which then support's the theatre's financial sustainability. As the applicant has noted in their statement, the new provision will exceed current minimum requirements and will help future-proof the theatre should it develop further in future. Although there is no requirement under current regulations, we would encourage the applicant to consider whether a changing places facility is feasible within this new development. With regards to the accessible WC, the plans suggest there may be scope for and merit in rearrangement because with the new lift in place it appears that it may be tight to manoeuvre into with sharp turns. Potentially it could be accessed from the opposite side and extended with the baby change facility (which we also welcome provision of) accessed from next to the lift if space allows.

The platform lift is supported because it provides a significant public benefit in making the auditorium accessible. The exit from the lift into the auditorium is tight but this is a necessity owing to the constraints of the building and the space available. Nevertheless it appears from the plans that this may be compounded by the rail or barrier to the side of the lift. We suggest that if practical there could be a removable rail or barrier here to assist with easier access. There is only one removable wheelchair place indicated which is below minimum requirements; clearly this itself represents an uplift but if it is possible to make other places available the applicant should do so. Similarly it should be ensured that the new box office is also Part M compliant for both workers and audiences/visitors.

Whilst we raised no objection to the previous entrance canopy proposal this was an area of contention with the previous application. We consider the current option with internal draught lobby is an appropriate compromise solution. We also raise no objection to the internal ramp because again it offers a public benefit of improving accessibility.

In conclusion we welcome the applicant's proposed investment into its facilities and the broadening of access. Although this gives rise to some degree of harm to this important heritage asset this must be assessed against the clear public benefits it generates. Therefore we are supportive of 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 these comments further.

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A handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature reads "T Clarke" in a cursive, slightly slanted script.

Tom Clarke MRTPI
National Planning Adviser

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