

Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC

21 April 2022

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By e-mail: developmentmanagement@wiltshire.gov.uk

Applications: PL/2022/02060

Site: Angel Leisure, The Market Place, Devizes, SN10 1JQ

Proposal: Proposed second story to rear of the Palace Cinema Devizes

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:

This application has come to the attention of the Trust because it is proposing development at the Palace Cinema, specifically an extension at second floor level to the rear of the building along with associated alterations around the fly tower. Please note that we should have been notified as a statutory consultee as this building falls within our remit outlined above.

The Palace opened in 1912 as the Picture Palace. Originally it had a capacity of 417 seats which was expanded to 900 in the late 1920s. It was intended and equipped for live performance, including a stage and tall fly tower. It was badly damaged by a fire in 1932 but re-opened around three months later. In the early 1970s bingo nights were introduced into the programme, and in 1975 it was subdivided with bingo in the stalls and a smaller 253 seat cinema in the circle. This type of alteration was quite common at that time, with cinema attendances having encountered decline which continued into the 1980s. Bingo ceased in late 2018 and the building was taken on by the current operator who has been undertaking a programme of refurbishment and restoration, restoring its original cinema and theatre function.

Theatres Trust

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL
T 020 7836 8591 E info@theatrestrust.org.uk W theatrestrust.org.uk

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

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The Palace is a non-designated heritage asset and an important cultural and social facility for Devizes and its surrounding communities. Paragraph 93 of the NPPF seeks planning decisions to plan positively for venues of this nature.

We welcome these efforts by the Palace's operator to invest in the building and to re-establish its original function and scale for cinema and live performance. This will enhance provision and access to the arts for local people, complement the offer of the nearby Corn Exchange and maximise the function of the Palace as a facility for local people. The additional versatility provided by this extension will support the venue's financial sustainability and help conserve it as a cultural and local heritage asset for Devizes.

This proposal seeks to alter and extend the block to the rear of the Palace adjoined to the fly tower. This appears to be a later addition of low architectural merit. It would be made into a two-storey structure with roof terrace above and would accommodate dressing rooms, a rehearsal studio which can also be used for meeting/function space, back of house WCs and a shower. The location of this development in a less sensitive part of the site means it would not impact on the building's character and significance particularly its decorative front façade and internal features. We support the design approach in particular its green roof which will help mitigate the environmental impact of development and encourage biodiversity. However, we have some concerns with internal layouts which we would encourage the applicant to address in order to maximise the value and usability of the facility for the wider community.

Our primary comment is that the upper levels are not accessible to wheelchair users or those with reduced mobility. The plans suggest there could be scope for a lift to be inserted within part of the store room space on the ground floor rising into the area occupied by the kitchen above. Ideally it should also reach the roof terrace if this is to be a public area. Unless there are constraints which prevent this we would strongly encourage such an approach to be taken forward. Also, although there is an accessible WC provided to the ground floor there appears to be no means of accessing the stage or the rest of the building internally. We would encourage opportunities for the steps or area around it to the back of the fly tower to be ramped if this is practical.

With regards to dressing room provision, currently one single large space is shown although we assume that for larger productions or events the rehearsal/conference room could also be made available. We would strongly encourage that the dressing room has the capability to be subdivided particularly where children and young people are performing. This is so as to ensure safeguarding standards are met.

If taken forward a lift would likely require some degree of overrun which would result in the need for submission of revised plans for this application, or for a subsequent application for variation of conditions/minor material amendment. Otherwise our comments relate to internal matters which can be managed without need for formal application.

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We have no concerns regarding the relocation of the stage door on the assumption it is easily accessible from the car park area to the rear and there is sufficient width between the extension and the fencing to move the sets and equipment anticipated. The plans do not show this layout and it is not possible to ascertain what space is available utilising images online.

To conclude, we welcome this scheme and the investment being made into the Palace. The scheme enhances Devizes' cultural offer and we do not consider it to cause harm to the significance of the building as a non-designated heritage asset. We are therefore supportive of the granting of planning permission.

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

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

Tom Clarke MRTPI
National Planning Adviser

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