

Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC/2554

31 May 2022

Kate Pickard
Development Control
Watford Borough Council
Town Hall
Watford WD17 3EX

By e-mail: developmentcontrol@watford.gov.uk

Application: 22/00574/FUL

Site: 5-6 Local Board Road Watford Hertfordshire WD17 2JP

Proposal: Demolition of dressing rooms, scenery shop, props store and storage areas, reshaping the theatre roof and construction of dressing rooms, scenery shop, rehearsal spaces and storage areas

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 seeking demolition and development at the Watford Pump House. We have not been formally notified of this application despite it falling within our statutory remit as described above. We were also not notified of a previous application in 2019. Please ensure we are formally consulted on any other applications concerning this or other theatres within the borough and that your system is updated accordingly.

The Pump House is a valued community, cultural and social asset for Watford. It is operated as a charity and is run and staffed by its members and volunteers. It provides opportunities to participate and engage in theatre and the arts and for people to meet and come together. It has programmes for children and young people, helping to develop skills, and provides a space for people with additional needs and specialist groups. Its programme includes small-scale, local and amateur productions along with regular folk and jazz events. It plays an important role in Watford's arts and cultural offer, with a main theatre space, secondary studio and rehearsal facilities which are all available for hire. Paragraph 93 of the NPPF (2021) seeks planning decisions to plan positively for facilities of this nature.

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 theatre is partially a non-designated heritage asset which is included on the Council's register of Locally Listed Buildings as a rare example of surviving Victorian industrial heritage. The section of the building subject to plans for demolition is a later largely single-storey addition which appears to be of low architectural quality consisting of brick with large areas of corrugated sheeting. This would be demolished for a replacement two-storey building providing larger dressing rooms one of which can also be used flexibly as a green room or rehearsal space, new back of house WCs, storage and a platform lift to the stage. This would be integrated into the adjoining roof above the theatre space which will be part re-shaped and entirely re-clad for better insulation. This will facilitate a new balcony level providing additional capacity within the auditorium along with a larger technical gallery and raising of lighting and sound rigs.

This will improve the theatre's flexibility and functionality and is to be welcomed. Whilst the Design & Access Statement says the back of house space can be designed to be fully accessible, currently there is no lift access shown to the upper level. As a new-build we would encourage full access to be provided unless constraints make this impractical. Ideally the balcony and gallery would also be wheelchair accessible but plans suggest this would not be feasible without compromising existing facilities. We would also suggest that the new dressing rooms are made to be flexible so that they can be sub-divided if required to provide segregation for safeguarding purposes should they be used by children and young people. We support the theatre's ambition to add solar panels to help reduce running costs and improve environmental sustainability.

Emerging Policy HC12.3 of the Final Draft Watford Local Plan supports extended and improved cultural and community uses, with Strategic Objective 4 of the Watford Local Plan Part 1 – Core Strategy (2013) also seeking enhancement of Watford's cultural facilities including specifically its theatres. This is further articulated within Policy TLC1. This proposal will achieve that whilst delivering a design which can be considered sensitive to its wider significance as a non-designated heritage asset with reference to paragraph 203 of the NPPF.

Therefore we are supportive of the granting of planning permission.

Please contact us should you wish to discuss these comments in more detail.

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

Tom Clarke MRTPI
National Planning Adviser

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