

Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC/2135

08 June 2022

Mr Jason Burgess
Ipswich Borough Council
Development Management
Grafton House
15-17 Russell Road
Ipswich
IP1 2DE

By e-mail: development.management@ipswich.gov.uk

Application: 22/00403/FPI3 & 22/00401/LBC

Site: 3 St Helens Street, Ipswich, Suffolk, IP4 1HE

Proposal: Erection of single-storey modular accommodation to the rear of theatre building with link to the existing manager's cottage.

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 on the above applications for planning permission and listed building consent, which seek to construct a modular extension to the rear of the building to provide additional back of house facilities.

The Regent is a Grade II listed heritage asset designed by notable cinema architect William Edward Trent, which opened in 1929 as a cine-variety theatre. Architecturally its facade is of Georgian style with an interior which is a mix of Art Deco and Neo-Classical. A manager's cottage to the rear was incorporated into the design which is unusual. It had a capacity of 2,000 across stalls and balcony with fourteen boxes along with a café and restaurant. Although built with capability for live performance it was predominantly operated as a cinema except during World War II when it hosted a number of stage shows and civic events. It became the Gaumont in 1955 followed by the Odeon in 1987 and during this time notable live bands and artists played including Buddy Holly, The Beatles, Walker Brothers, Jimi Hendrix, Ian Dury and the Blockheads and Gary Numan. It closed in 1991 at which point it was acquired by the Council and restored

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

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for full live performance use, removing later alterations and refurbishing and re-equipping front and back of house areas.

The Regent is the largest theatre in East Anglia with a busy programme predominantly consisting of theatre, comedy and live music. It is an important cultural asset for the town which contributes to the cultural well-being of local people as well as drawing people in from a much wider catchment which benefits the local businesses and the economy. Paragraph 93 of the NPPF (2021) seeks planning decisions to plan positively for facilities of this nature.

Despite the size and scale of the Regent its history as a cine-variety theatre means its back of house facilities are relatively limited which constrains the Regent's ability to attract and handle the full suite of productions might be available to it. It also has issues with accessibility. These are common challenges with older cinemas and theatres, however the Regent benefits from a large service yard and car park to its side and rear which affords options for extension and development. This is also a less sensitive part of the site in heritage terms being within the setting of the utilitarian side elevation of the theatre and its fly tower; the significance of the manager's cottage comes from its rarity rather than its architectural quality.

Efforts to address these challenges and to enhance the role and function of the Regent and the diversity of its offer are to be welcomed. These plans will see a modular extension at the rear of the yard linked to the manager's cottage where there are currently shipping containers. This will provide three additional dressing rooms equipped with showers and WCs, one of which is accessible, along with a flexible multi-use space. There will be ramped access into the extension. This meets the project brief, and we consider the design to be functional and as such it is appropriate being subservient to the theatre but also helping to reinforce the theatre's identity and visibility. It will also boost the longer-term sustainability of the Regent as a venue helping maintain it within a viable use consistent with its conservation as per paragraph 197.a of the NPPF. With reference to NPPF paragraph 202, we consider this intervention to be at the low end of less than substantial harm but nonetheless improving accessibility and broadening the venue's potential cultural offer clearly constitutes a public benefit. Policy DM28 of the Core Strategy and Policies Development Plan Document Review (2022) supports the enhancement of existing arts, cultural and tourism facilities with supporting paragraph 9.267 further emphasising specific support for improvement of the Regent. It would also help meet the plan's target under Objective 7 to deliver a 10% increase in attendance to the Regent and Corn Exchange by 2036.

Therefore we are supportive of this proposal and recommend the granting of planning permission and listed building consent.

Please contact us if we may be of further assistance.

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

Tom Clarke MRTPI
National Planning Adviser

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