

Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC/44

18 July 2022

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Application: BH2022/01904 & BH2022/01905

Site: Theatre Royal 35 Bond Street Brighton BN1 1SD

Proposal: Refurbishment of front elevation terracotta colonnade, new facade lighting and theatre signage. Installation of new mechanical ventilation plant to roof with 3no dormers to provide access, upgrading of internal electrical infrastructure and enlargement of stage door to rear.

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 on these applications for planning permission and listed building consent at Theatre Royal Brighton. They seek repair and refurbishment of the colonnade to the front of the theatre as well as internal and external alterations to upgrade the venue's ventilation, upgrading of the building's electrical services and alterations to its stage door. We have been engaged by the applicant at pre-application stage and have expressed our support for these proposals.

Theatre Royal is a Grade II* listed heritage asset. It was established in 1764 making it one of the UK's oldest theatres and originally opened at the current site in 1807 with significant redevelopment and enlargement occurring just under fifty years later by noted mid-nineteenth century theatre architect C. J. Phipps. As a venue it is notable for having had one of the first female theatre managers, during the late 1800s, for whom there is a statue in the Royal Circle bar. In 1894 the front façade was replaced with a new design with a colonnade of columns with

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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

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bulbous bases in red brick with stone dressings. The continuing success of the theatre enabled it to purchase adjoining properties facilitating further expansion and redevelopment in 1927 which was carried out by Sprague and Barton. At this time the auditorium's plasterwork was replaced in a French neo-classical style leaving just a deep frieze of Jacobean strapwork above the proscenium from Phipps' scheme. It is believed the scene door to Bond Street belonged to the original early nineteenth century theatre, and the original structural walls and colonnade were also retained in the original redevelopment scheme around 150 years ago. It is this amalgamation of development over different periods which helps contribute to the theatre's significance and historic interest.

Theatre Royal was an important venue nationally, hosting new works by several notable playwrights ahead of West End runs as well as having had big name actors perform there early in their careers including Laurence Olivier, John Gielgud, Charlton Heston and Judi Dench. It continues to have a strong theatrical programme including touring West End productions and an alternative pantomime. It is an important heritage and cultural asset for Brighton and its surrounding areas, contributing to the strength and diversity of the city's offer.

The primary rationale for works being brought forward at this time is a critical need to arrest deterioration of the terracotta colonnade, alongside which the opportunity will be taken to upgrade the theatre's infrastructure which has reached the end of its reasonable life.

Colonnade works and associated external alterations

With regards to the colonnade, deterioration constitutes a risk to public safety due to it having failed in a number of locations with netting erected to prevent debris from falling. This is likely to have occurred due to the nature of the materials, the environment and water ingress, exacerbated by historic treatment and decoration of the colonnade which were inappropriate. This has caused corrosion and areas of the colonnade breaking away from the rest of the building; the load bearing capacity of beams has been compromised. Photographic evidence of the colonnade's condition has been included within supporting documents.

The applicant's approach is to replace damaged terracotta on a like-for-like basis with the supporting structure to be replaced. We are supportive of this approach, which is necessary to ensure the ongoing preservation and conservation of Theatre Royal as a heritage asset of great significance. We also raise no objections to minor alterations to soffits arising from a thinner deck than the current one, and overall appearance and significance will be enhanced through removal and rationalisation of cabling with stainless steel tubes enabling temporary installations to be attached. Alongside this will be replacement of the theatre's sign and renewal of external lighting which will help improve visibility and prominence and better activate the building after dark.

Renewal of electrical infrastructure

The theatre's electrical distribution has reached the end of its life, and does not necessarily meet the capacity needs of modern shows or modern safety standards. Therefore cabling and equipment will be replaced. Although some alteration may be required subject to further detail

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and submission, in principle we would support this as harm to fabric and significance would likely be minimal, it would ensure that appropriate safety standards are met and that it can support the needs of producers. In turn this means the theatre can continue to be viable into the future.

Ventilation

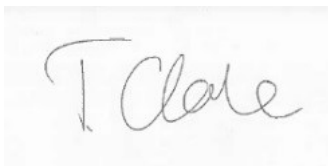
The need and importance of sufficient and appropriate ventilation has become apparent in recent years. The theatre does not have a fully functioning supply into the auditorium and this compromises audience comfort and requires addressing. Whilst this necessitates additional grilles within the auditorium we consider that harm to historic layout and appearance is mitigated by the sensitive design and location and the necessity of the works for reasons of public health. This will also require new rooftop air handling units to be installed, although these are to a less sensitive part of the building.

Alterations to scene door

The theatre currently has an inefficient arrangement for get-ins/get-outs which prolongs changeover of shows and in turn increases costs and reduces attractiveness for producers. This will be addressed through creating a larger clear opening to enable transportation racks to pass through by raising the level of the office floor within. There have been previous alterations in this area and overall the internal area here is of lesser significance. Therefore again we are supportive of these works.

Therefore, in conclusion, we are supportive of this package of works. Whilst some are necessary to maintain public safety and ensure the ongoing protection and conservation of the theatre, others will help ensure the theatre meets modern standards and will work efficiently to ensure it remains viable. We therefore support the granting of planning permission and listed building consent.

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



Tom Clarke MRTPI
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