

# Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC/308

02 August 2022

East Lindsey District Council  
Tedder Hall  
Manby Park  
Louth  
Lincolnshire  
LN11 8UP

**Application:** S/153/01087/22

**Site:** THE EMBASSY THEATRE, GRAND PARADE, SKEGNESS, PE25 2UG

**Proposal:** Extension and alterations to existing building to provide a culture house.

## **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 this application for planning permission at the Embassy Theatre which is seeking extension and alterations.

The Embassy originally opened in 1926 as a ballroom and restaurant but was also used for variety shows and concerts. Little of the original building remains or is visible as externally it is covered in a mixture of modern metal cladding and render with a modern glass atrium to Grand Parade. After storm damage in the late 1970s it was refurbished in 1982 and reopened as the Embassy Centre, with further works in 1999. The auditorium which is believed to have been modelled on the University of Warwick's is octagonal with flat floor for flexibility and seating on two levels, the circle occupying five sides of the octagon. The Embassy forms part of a wider complex, to one side of the Grand Parade entrance is a large restaurant and to the other is a pub. Immediately adjacent separated by a passage is a leisure centre. The Embassy's programme predominantly consists of a mixture of theatre, comedy and live music. It is an important cultural facility for the town, providing access to the arts for local people as well as contributing to Skegness' visitor offer. Paragraph 93 of the NPPF (2021) seeks planning decisions to plan positively for facilities of this nature. Strategic Policy 14.1 of the East Lindsey Local Plan Core Strategy (2018) supports the expansion and improvement of leisure and cultural facilities within the district's towns.

## **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

We have met with the Council, the theatre and their design team to discuss these plans and the concept of a 'Culture House' which is unfamiliar in the UK. We welcome and are supportive of efforts to invest in the Embassy and to develop and expand its facilities to broaden its role and value as a facility for local people. There is clear rationale for this project – there is a general need for upgrading of the theatre's front of house facilities with its foyer and public areas being small for its capacity and Skegness and its wider local catchment has fairly low levels of engagement in arts and culture coupled with general socio-economic challenges and deprivation. In recent years a number of developments have come forward across the UK which have sought to develop facilities and front of house offers to make more effective use of theatres throughout the day, increase engagement and to increase and diversify income generation for greater financial sustainability.

Unlike some venues which find opportunities for development challenging the Embassy benefits from having space available to expand its footprint, so these plans propose an extension to the south. This is being utilised to provide additional space needed to open out the foyer at ground and first floor levels to provide additional circulation, expanded café/bar as well as new spaces to deliver the Culture House concept. We are supportive of this approach, alongside this there will be landscaping and public realm improvements outside the Embassy with new planting and external seating. This will improve the environment around the theatre and make it more pleasant and conducive to encouraging use of the café/bar and help to bring more people into the building.

We are also supportive of the principle of bringing additional services into the Embassy which will help enhance its role as an asset for the community and contribute towards the objective of bringing in new people to engage with it. Whilst we had some concerns that too much was being squeezed into too small a space, we have been reassured through our discussions that spaces are being made flexible and open-plan which will enable them to be utilised in different ways depending on requirements. Nonetheless it will be important that the range of spaces and bookings are properly managed to avoid conflict between different uses, and there may be instances where some further consideration of layout may be beneficial for example the rehearsal room to the first floor looks to be very small.

In conclusion we welcome this project and the proposals brought forward and support the granting of planning permission.

Please contact us should you wish to discuss these comments in further detail, and please continue to engage with us should plans be further refined or further opportunities for development arise.



Tom Clarke MRTPI  
National Planning Adviser

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