

# Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC/2485

07 September 2022

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**Application:** 22/3463/FUL & 22/3464/LBC

**Site:** The Hippodrome North End Road London NW11 7RP

**Proposal:** External alterations associated with the refurbishment of the Hippodrome, including reinstatement of external canopy, alterations to levels, alterations to loading bay, creation of new stage access door, refurbishment of facades, installation of plant and plant screen, provision of cycle parking, repair and refurbishment of windows, doors and roofs, and other associated works; &

Internal and external refurbishment of the Hippodrome, including reinstatement of external canopy, alterations to levels, alterations to loading bay, installation of retractable screen to foyer, installation of plant and plant screen, reinstatement of the stage, creation of new stage access door, installation of balustrading, redecoration and refurbishment of seating, flooring, doors, redecoration of auditorium and other associated works

## **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 regarding these applications for planning permission and listed building consent at Golders Green Hippodrome which seek various internal and external alterations and refurbishments. The Trust has met with the applicant and their team and undertook a site visit on 6<sup>th</sup> September 2022.

## **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

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Background and significance

The Hippodrome is a Grade II listed heritage asset which opened in 1913 and is a rare example of a surviving large-scale suburban theatre. It is of great architectural and historic interest having been designed by renowned theatre architect Bertie Crewe. Its original capacity was around 2,340. Being located immediately adjacent to the Golders Green underground station made it attractive to Londoners from further afield across the city and it became an established London venue for touring shows and was renowned for its annual pantomime. The final live performance as a theatre in February 1968 featured major stars of the time and was broadcast live.

Externally the Hippodrome has a symmetrical façade towards the station in stucco or reconstructed stone with three storey centre in seven bays divided by piers with Ionic capitals and entablature with urns above the cornice. Either side are pavilions which rise as short pedimented towers. A pitched roof with central cupola sits above. The main entrance is within a curved corner bay. The elevation to North End Road is plainer although it has decorative windows and further piers to the rear corner.

Internally the auditorium was intended to represent Roman splendour. It has a square proscenium opening with its lintel supported on console brackets and above this shelters flanking pavilions which contain two levels of boxes and an extra box facing directly towards the audience at the upper level. The boxes are framed by Roman Doric columns supporting a full entablature which continues over the proscenium. Over the boxes are lion-drawn chariots reminiscent of Frank Matcham's London Coliseum.

After closure the BBC converted the Hippodrome to a live studio and concert hall with a reduced capacity of 700. Alterations were carried out which obscured but did not irreparably damage the Crewe interior. The upper part of the fly tower and stage wings were given over to a large rehearsal room, offices, band room and servicing. Much of the stalls floor was levelled for an orchestra stage although the raked floor survives beneath. A large sound control room and storage space was inserted to the rear. Several notable bands and artists played during this time including AC/DC, Blur, John Denver, INXS, The Kinks, Queen, Scott Walker and The Who, some of whom commercially released recordings of their Hippodrome performances. A number of radio and television shows were filmed in the Hippodrome including the first series of Monty Python's Flying Circus, and it was also used for comedy, theatre, musical concerts and boxing. Therefore it also has immense cultural significance which contributes towards its overall heritage significance and the high regard to which the Hippodrome is held by local people and those with connection to it.

The BBC vacated the Hippodrome in 2003 and it fell vacant until purchase by a church group in 2007. The Trust did not raise any objection to the resultant change of use on the basis that safeguards were in place to maintain potential for a full return to theatre use and to ensure that theatrical activity in the area was sustained. Condition 3 of permission C00222/W/07 sought to ensure "an appropriate level of public performance for the benefit of the community" and details of activities to be undertaken were outlined in a submitted public performance management scheme. However those activities were not undertaken as mandated and enforcement action

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was initiated. A different group subsequently took on the Hippodrome in 2017 and a further application followed in 2020 for which the Trust initially objected but our advice altered following discussion with the applicant which yielded revisions. The current applicant purchased the Hippodrome in late 2021.

The Trust considers that given the Hippodrome's size, accessibility and reasonable overall condition there is realistic prospect that it could be returned to viable use as a full-time performance venue in future. Therefore use of the building must not undermine its character, function or reversibility. This position is consistent with local, regional and national policy, such as paragraph 93 of the NPPF (2021), Policy HC5 of the London Plan (2021), Policy CS10 of Barnet's Local Plan Core Strategy (2012) and Policy DM13 of Barnet's Local Plan Development Management Policies (2012).

## Current plans

### *Landuse*

The stated intention of the applicant is to maintain/revert to the existing 2007 permission (C00222/W/07) which would uphold the spirit and obligations of condition 3 and utilise the Hippodrome for live performance and other public events alongside the applicant's core functions as a place of worship. These applications relate to internal and external works which will remove later alterations and insertions to help repair and restore the Hippodrome and to a great extent return it to its original form. This will ensure the Hippodrome is sustained as a significant heritage asset and that the full range of functions within the extant permission can be better facilitated thus enhancing its role as an asset and facility for the wider community. We welcome and support the applicant's aspirations.

### *Auditorium*

Much of the decorative significance and important features within the auditorium were retained despite the wider alterations of the BBC-era and subsequent owners. The primary change within the stalls was its levelling for the BBC orchestra although the original rake and stage edge remain underneath. This format will be retained as this offers flexibility for different configurations, for example seated, standing or cabaret layout for large functions/parties. Within the Dress Circle historic seating will be repaired and the balcony fronts will be altered with them heightened and rails removed to meet modern safety standards. There will be general repairs and redecoration, reverting to the original lighter colour scheme which has been ascertained through sampling and historic images. Large ventilation units which are obtrusive and which obstruct some of the decorative features will be removed with a new system installed which will also be more efficient. We support this approach.

To the rear of the stalls a non-original corridor will be removed and a new lobby and bar area will be installed with dividing wall to the rest of the stalls. An additional entrance will be opened into the foyer. It is acknowledged within historic summaries of the Hippodrome that it had completely inadequate front of house provision for a venue of its size. Sufficient foyer and bar space will be vital to support re-introduction of larger-scale performances and events as well as the church's

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general activities. Creating this space will also give flexibility to host smaller events without opening up the full capacity and volume of the auditorium, or allow use of both spaces concurrently (for example as a waiting area or a break-out space for conferences and such events). It could also potentially facilitate private hires and smaller functions. For some high-capacity events further movable bars in this area might be beneficial to minimise queuing and congestion, this would also apply within the foyer/break-out spaces at upper levels to serve audiences in the circle and upper circle. There does not appear to be direct access from the bar to stores so it should be considered how the bar will be stocked and serviced. There will also need to be consideration of acoustic properties of this area to ensure services, performances and other activities are not disturbed by activities in the foyer/bar area.

We had noted from the proposed plans that provision of wheelchair places was below the levels expected, however we have been assured that with the seating being removable adequate places can be achieved. There is no lift access to the upper levels but having discussed this with the applicant it is not feasible due to constraints within the building such as multiple changes in level and lack of means of escape. We acknowledge this can be a challenge within historic theatre buildings.

### *Stage and back of house*

A full height stage will be reinstated; the original was lost to flat-flooring and currently there is a temporary structure in place. Again this is welcomed as it will closer return the auditorium to its original form. It should be ensured there is sufficient loading to accommodate modern requirements, further to sets and equipment which may be needed for services and live events in conjunction with the insertion of a new stage door and direct access there is potential for this route to be utilised for cherry pickers and other such equipment which might undertake fibrous plaster inspections and other such maintenance. As the stalls is flat-floored it should be ensured sightlines are adequate. Thought should also be given as to the intended programme to ensure technical capabilities are sufficient, keeping in mind there will be constraints on the type of shows that can be handled due to lack of wing space.

This area saw much intervention during the BBC years, dividing up the fly tower to create a number of different rooms and studios on different levels. Many of these will be retained as they have been re-purposed as flexible spaces for church and wider community use and contribute to the Hippodrome's role and potential as a community asset. A drawback is the existing lack of accessibility to these spaces which this scheme is not addressing, however if future opportunity could be found to provide lift access perhaps directly from the service yard this would be encouraged.

There are some alterations within this area, for example the rooms either side of the stage at the lower level are being merged which will better enable access to the stage from back of house areas.

### *Foyer/front of house*

A new opening will be made into the lobby and bar to the rear of the stalls. This will help improve

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audience flow and alleviate congestion for large events and is particularly beneficial given the small size of the entrance foyer relative to the Hippodrome's size and capacity. Aside from this and general redecoration and repair this area is otherwise unchanged.

Elsewhere across the building there will be refurbishment and addition of WCs, which will not impact upon heritage but will enhance facilities for users and audiences.

### *External*

There will be some alteration to the building. To the service area (south-east elevation) a new stage door will be inserted. This can be considered a less architecturally sensitive elevation and this intervention would bring positive operational benefits by providing a direct route onto the stage. This would enable quicker delivery and loading of sets and equipment which could be applicable both to church services and any concerts and live events which might be held. This would also be of use should the Hippodrome ever revert to full-time theatre/live performance use. Currently, possibly as a result of past alterations, access to the stage area is convoluted and requires changes in levels and manoeuvring around corners which would impact efficiency and limit events which could be accepted. Improving efficiency in this way constitutes a heritage benefit.

To the roof a new parapet will be constructed in order to help shield new plant, we consider this to be a sensitive approach. Around the first floor level a canopy will be installed utilising existing fixings, reinstating what was previously in place. The building's signage will be removed and replaced.

Particularly to the south and west elevations there will be landscaping works to help address issues related to level change and improve the environment around the Hippodrome, which will improve its setting and attractiveness. This could also encourage and facilitate use of external areas to enhance the venue's offer and give additional flexibility.

There will be general repairs and redecoration undertaken including to original windows and doors. A number of windows feature decorative glass so care must be taken in undertaking the works and where replacement is necessary this should be on a like-for-like basis. Whilst overall the building appears to be in reasonable condition there are visibly some areas of deterioration and we welcome investment into its upkeep.

### Concluding comments

We are supportive of the interventions and alterations included within these applications, and welcome the applicant's stated intentions with regards to use of the Hippodrome for public events and performances once again. From a heritage perspective these will help sustain and enhance the asset in accordance with paragraph 197 of the NPPF and better facilitate viable use consistent with its ongoing conservation. They will also maintain the potential for full-time return to performance use. The Hippodrome is a very important building for the Trust and we pleased to see it being occupied and open to the community.

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

We would encourage the applicant to continue to engage with us they progress with their plans and to consult us at an early stage should they seek revisions.

Please contact us should you wish to discuss these comments further.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "T Clarke". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Tom Clarke MRTPI  
National Planning Adviser

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