

# Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC/1667

13 December 2022

Development Management  
City Development  
Sunderland City Council  
PO Box 102  
Civic Centre  
Sunderland  
SR2 7DN

By e-mail: [dc@sunderland.gov.uk](mailto:dc@sunderland.gov.uk)

**Application:** 22/02549/LB4

**Site:** Empire Theatre Box Office Empire Buildings 4 - 5 High Street West Sunderland SR1 3EX

**Proposal:** Internal removal/refurbishment of existing Stalls Bar and fitting out of new bar and provision of DDA compliant washroom

## **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:**

This application for listed building consent has come to the attention of the Trust because it is seeking internal alterations at the Grade II\* listed Sunderland Empire, specifically the area of the stalls bar. We were engaged by the applicant on this scheme prior to submission.

We acknowledge and agree with the identified challenges this project is seeking to address, primarily that as well as the bar being in need of a general refresh its size and location within a relatively constrained space causes congestion for audiences moving between the foyer and auditorium. This is further compounded by the access to WCs along a corridor immediately to the side, with the location of the accessible WC being sub-optimal.

The bar has undergone previous alteration and replacement, as has the part of the building around it. The current fixtures are believed to have been installed in 1995. Whilst the Empire is a significant heritage asset, this bar is of low significance. Therefore the principle of revision to this area is something we would support, particularly as it generates public benefits through better

## **Theatres Trust**

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL  
T 020 7836 8591 E [info@theatrestrust.org.uk](mailto:info@theatrestrust.org.uk) W [theatrestrust.org.uk](http://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

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## Protecting theatres for **everyone**



function and audience experience.

These plans will reduce the size and footprint of the stalls bar but make it function better, and to refurbish it to correspond with the previous 2019 scheme within the foyer. This will give consistency in appearance and branding. Alongside this the flooring will be replaced and the current lattice style ceiling will be removed offering greater height. The bar counter will be DDA-compliant. This also provides an opportunity to relocate the accessible WC giving easier access and further relieving congestion along the existing ramp to the WC block which also generates an important public benefit.

The overall plan form of this area would be maintained but nonetheless the limited harm arising from alterations can be mitigated by the public benefits of better function, accessibility and audience experience. The improved bar which is more attractive to audiences will help improve efficiency and income potential for the theatre, helping to sustain it and support its future conservation.

Therefore we are supportive of the granting of listed building consent.

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

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

Tom Clarke MRTPI  
National Planning Adviser

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