

Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC/2134

05 January 2023

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By e-mail: planning@tunbridgewells.gov.uk

Application: 22/03621/LBC

Site: Assembly Hall Theatre Crescent Road Royal Tunbridge Wells Kent TN1 2LU

Proposal: Listed Building Consent - Construction of new means of escape within existing servery area involving the enlargement of existing door openings, removal of existing walls, addition of new fire resisting walls/doors and access ramp

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:

This application has come to the attention of the Trust because it is proposing alteration to the Assembly Hall Theatre for provision of a new means of escape with associated works.

The rationale and justification for this project has been clearly set out within the Heritage Statement; presently the theatre's capacity is constrained when handling shows with larger sets and/or casts because existing escape routes running through back of house are utilised for storage which reduces space to pass through. In turn this will negatively impact the theatre's income potential and its financial sustainability. Moreover, improved means of egress will ensure the theatre meets relevant fire safety standards. This is not just for audiences but for staff, as the theatre's fire risk assessment has found deficiencies with exit from its offices.

The new door will be to the rear of the theatre (north-east elevation), within an area last used as a food servery. Two options have been put forward, one of which would maintain the potential for the servery to be brought back to use should it be required. The works would not cause harm to

Theatres Trust

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sensitive features, with the servery being of modern fit-out. Externally there will be enlargement of an existing door going from single to double-width. Again, we consider harm to be limited and would constitute less than substantial in heritage terms. Nonetheless the need for these works and the benefits they will bring to the theatre and its users constitute clear public benefits in mitigation. This would apply to both options put forward.

We are therefore supportive of the granting of listed building consent.

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

Tom Clarke MRTPI
National Planning Adviser

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