

# Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC/2305

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Alex Ferguson  
Strategic Place Planning  
Aberdeen City Council  
Business Hub 4  
Marischal College  
Broad Street  
Aberdeen  
AB10 1AB

By e-mail: [pi@aberdeencity.gov.uk](mailto:pi@aberdeencity.gov.uk)

**Application:** 221519/DPP & 221518/LBC

**Site:** Aberdeen Arts Centre & Children's Theatre 31-33 King Street Aberdeen AB24 5AA

**Proposal:** Installation of 2no accessible platform lifts and associated works; and

Installation of 2no accessible platform lifts, removal of raised stage and surround and associated works

## **Remit:**

Theatres Trust is the national advisory public body for theatres. We were established through the Theatres Trust Act 1978 'to promote the better protection of theatres' and provide statutory planning advice on theatre buildings and theatre use in Scotland through The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (Scotland) Regulation 2013, 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 Aberdeen Arts Centre & Children's Theatre, which seek alterations within both parts of the building to facilitate enhanced accessibility following the award of grant funding. We provided comments on a related project in 2022. The proposals would see an internal platform lift installed within the Arts Centre's north-east stairwell and an external platform lift to its entrance, and the Children's Theatre's raised floor and stage surround will be removed to provide better flexibility in layout configurations.

The Arts Centre operates within the former North Parish Church, a Category A heritage and cultural asset of great architectural significance. It has a varied artistic programme including comedy, live music and theatre which serves the city and its wider catchment. It is physically

## **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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linked to an adjacent building at 31 King Street which houses the Children's Theatre, also Category A listed.

We welcome the applicant's efforts to improve accessibility which will help further enhance inclusivity of these valued arts and cultural assets. We are supportive of these proposals in principle but would note a lack of detail on some elements.

We are supportive of the works within the Children's Theatre and have no objections, as the floor deck and stage surrounds were later additions. Further to better functionality and flexibility within this space there is some heritage benefit as original timber flooring will be revealed and decorative plaster cornices will be repaired.

With regards to the interior platform lift it is stated the proposed location is best placed but there is no indication as to what other options may have been explored, whether these may have been less sensitive from a heritage perspective why they could not be taken forward; the proposed location is visually obtrusive although we acknowledge that in mitigation it appears that a currently boarded window will be revealed and there are merits in being located immediately beyond the main entrance for ease of movement. Providing access to the first floor from the foyer rather than the current arrangement of users coming through back of house/service areas also constitutes a substantial public benefit. The scheme is stated to be reversible. However, there is a lack of detail on materials, colour and the bridge link and railings from the lift to the first floor. Ideally there should be better alignment between the window and top of the door to the top of the lift shaft so again we suggest further justification for the design and approach given that this is a Category A listed heritage asset.

We are in agreement with the position of the external platform lift although we would suggest further detail on whether other options for design and installation have been considered and why this one is considered optimum. Again there is a lack of detail of finish and colour and how the lift would be fixed, particularly as a 'shrouded enclosure' is referenced.

In conclusion we are supportive of the granting of planning permission and listed building consent in principle, but recommend submission of further information as set out to help justify harm and demonstrate these are the optimum solutions given the heritage significance of the Arts Centre. We are fully supportive of proposals within the Children's Theatre.

Please contact us if we may be of further assistance or should you wish to discuss this representation in greater detail.



Tom Clarke MRTPI  
National Planning Adviser

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