

# Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC/607

22 February 2023

Emma Coombs  
Development Management  
Planning Services  
Town Hall Annexe,  
St Stephen's Road  
Bournemouth,  
BH2 6EA

By e-mail: [planning.bournemouth@bcpcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:planning.bournemouth@bcpcouncil.gov.uk)

**Application:** 8/23/0003/FUL

**Site:** Regent Centre 51 High Street Christchurch BH23 1AS

**Proposal:** New side entrance to existing community theatre to provide accessible access to the theatre via a new lift. Replacement of existing escape stair from higher levels.

## 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 has come to the attention of the Trust because it is seeking alteration at The Regent to improve accessibility. We note that we are listed as a consultee on the Council's portal but we have no record of having received a notification.

The Regent originally opened in 1931 as a cinema. It is a non-designated heritage asset within the Christchurch Centre Conservation Area. After closing in 1973 it was converted to bingo use like many other cinemas and theatres at that time. This lasted for nine years before the building was purchased by the Council. A need had been identified for an arts centre within Christchurch and with the support of a number of local volunteers the building was restored and reopened for cinema and live performance in 1983. A new studio theatre was added in 2000 and a few years later a major refurbishment project was undertaken, with further works in 2020. The Regent is a valued cultural and social asset for Christchurch and nearby communities, providing a mixed programme of cinema and theatre and is operated by a charitable trust. Paragraph 93 of the NPPF seeks planning decisions to plan positively for venues of this nature.

## 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**



These plans will see a new secondary entrance to the building's southern elevation which is currently a recessed area with bin store and a fire exit. It will see this area infilled to provide an accessible entrance and lift to the main foyer with a reconfigured and enclosed bin store and a new escape stair.

The optimal approach in terms of accessibility is for all users to enter through the same means. However, the age of the Regent and its layout with a number of level changes appear to make this impractical. Although not the primary entrance this new secondary entry will be the first point of access from the car park behind and is on a commonly used passageway. The treatment of the entry would appear to make it welcoming and an integral part of the building. We consider its design to be sensitive to the Regent's character and that of the wider Conservation Area. We welcome the endeavours of the Regent in seeking to enhance accessibility and inclusivity of this important facility as well as their design approach.

Therefore we are supportive of the granting of planning permission.

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

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

Tom Clarke MRTPI  
National Planning Adviser

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