

Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC/2079

20 March 2023

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By e-mail: planning.services@thanet.gov.uk

Application: F/TH/23/0182

Site: Granville Theatre Victoria Parade RAMSGATE Kent CT11 8DG

Proposal: Erection of a glazed entrance foyer to replace existing and erection of a ground floor side extension including internal alterations, together with three first floor extensions and a glazed part single, part two storey extension to rear, replacement of roof membrane and alterations to the surrounding landscaping including addition of steps, seating, planters and cycle storage

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:

Thank you consulting Theatres Trust on this application for planning permission at the Granville Theatre, which seeks to refurbish, internally alter and extend the building. This will include replacement of its foyer block and a rear extension.

The Granville Theatre opened in 1947 replacing the Granville Pavilion which was badly damaged during World War 2 and subsequently demolished. Due to the scarcity of materials everything that could be salvaged from the original building was used to construct the replacement. It had a capacity of 900 spread across the stalls and a narrow three-sided balcony. From 1986 it also screened films, and in 1998 the auditorium was divided resulting in a reduced-size auditorium still capable of handling live performances with a smaller dedicated cinema screen behind. Architecturally the Granville has a degree of interest as a seaside purpose-built theatre within the

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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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Ramsgate Conservation Area, but has been altered over time including the addition of the current foyer extension. Some areas are in a deteriorated condition.

The Granville closed due to the pandemic in March 2020 but did not re-open, being put up for sale in May 2022 by its owner Thanet District Council. It was nonetheless a facility valued by local people, reflected in its designation as an Asset of Community Value and active campaigns for the theatre to be re-opened. Community groups were invited to bid under the Community Right to Bid scheme, but after none were successful it went to the open market and was acquired by a local organisation.

We have been keen to see the Granville returned to use so that it can once again function as an important cultural and social asset for Ramsgate and its surrounding communities. We therefore welcome and support the stated ambitions of its new owners which includes a refurbished and modernised single auditorium with a capacity of around 600, a workshop/studio space and enhanced front of house facilities to promote all-day use and to facilitate conferences, functions and other private events. These plans also seek to introduce better wheelchair access and expand provision of WCs, something which is a common challenge of older theatre buildings.

The existing foyer block which is in poor condition will be removed and replaced. The replacement foyer will feature curved glazing which can be opened to the promenade. The design of this foyer will help give the theatre greater prominence and enhance the sense of arrival, also making it a more inviting atmosphere to encourage greater custom for its bar/cafe facilities as per the applicant's vision. The location of the Granville offers great potential in this regard so the emphasis on front of house provision is understood, something that is also a key offer of other seaside theatres, as the potential income generated can help cross-subsidise the core performance and cultural offer. Using the building more effectively throughout the day will also help bring more people into the building, maximising its social function and helping to better raise awareness of upcoming events.

To the rear of the theatre will be an extension which will provide additional facilities including expanded community, education and exhibition space. There will also be a rooftop terrace/bar area. This is supported because it will further broaden the theatre's function. We would however note that there is a general need for further back of house improvements particularly in terms of accessibility; there is no accessible dressing room, there is no step-free access between the stage and back of house areas, no accessible WC to serve the community space, and potentially sub-optimal arrangements for get-ins. We appreciate however these are existing limitations which it may not be possible to address at the present time due to budget limitations and that the scheme being brought forward would not preclude future works. Nonetheless, these constraints may reduce the range of shows that could be accepted or that would be willing to come. Better accessibility in particular should be prioritised, for example as a partial new-build the rooftop bar should have lift access from the outset and we acknowledge the applicant's recognition of this. Given the proximity of the rooftop terrace to nearby residential properties, we suggest there would be merit in implementing mitigations to help protect amenity for example a

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screen/shield/planting to the north-west side to prevent overlooking and reduce noise transfer. This might be managed by condition if necessary.

There will also be upwards extensions above either side of the auditorium to provide much needed additional WCs. We have no objection to the design of this, and again it would not prevent future additional development.

Although we have raised points for future consideration and there remains need for further accessibility improvements as more of a priority, the priority must be to re-open the Granville and for it to once again be an active cultural venue serving its community. These proposals are to be welcomed, for example restoration of the auditorium to a single space will better reflect original function and plan form and facilitate accommodation of mid-scale shows. More generally the building can be used more flexibly than is currently the case, and there will be at least some accessibility improvements from the outset. Paragraph 93 of the NPPF (2021) seeks planning decisions to plan positively for facilities such as this. Policy CM01 of the Thanet District Council Local Plan (2020) also permits extensions and improvements to existing community facilities subject to six criteria which we consider are met.

In conclusion we are supportive of the granting of planning permission.

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

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

Tom Clarke MRTPI
National Planning Adviser

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