

Protecting theatres  
for **everyone**



Ref.: TC/44

18 April 2023

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**Application:** BH2023/00733

**Site:** Theatre Royal 35 Bond Street Brighton BN1 1SD

**Proposal:** Refurbishment of floor and wall finishes on Stalls and Royal Circle Level, refurbishment of bar furniture, reconfiguring of WCs at first floor and creation of opening between bar and foyer and upgrading of both water supply and internal Wi-Fi infrastructure.

### **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 to carry out a range of internal refurbishments and alterations

#### **Theatres Trust**

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL

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**Chair** Dave Moutrey OBE

**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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at Theatre Royal Brighton. We were aware from the applicant that this scheme was coming forward.

Theatre Royal is a Grade II\* listed heritage asset. It was established in 1764 making it one of the UK's oldest theatres. It originally opened at the current site in 1807 with significant redevelopment and enlargement occurring nearly fifty years later by noted mid-nineteenth century theatre architect C. J. Phipps. As a venue it is notable for having had one of the first female theatre managers, during the late 1800s, for whom there is a statue in the Royal Circle bar. In 1894 the front façade was replaced with a new design with a colonnade of columns with bulbous bases in red brick with stone dressings. The continuing success of the theatre enabled it to purchase adjoining properties, including the pub which is covered by this proposal, facilitating further expansion and redevelopment in 1927. This was carried out by W.G.R Sprague and Barton, the former being a further theatre architect of great renown who worked with the latter on Streatham Hill Theatre in London (similarly Grade II\* listed). At that time the auditorium's plasterwork was replaced in a French neo-classical style leaving just a deep frieze of Jacobean strapwork above the proscenium from Phipps' scheme. It is believed the scene door to Bond Street belonged to the original early nineteenth century theatre, and the original structural walls and colonnade were also retained in the original redevelopment scheme around 150 years ago. It is this amalgamation of development over different periods which helps contribute to the theatre's significance and historic interest.

The theatre is undertaking a wider project for repairs to its external colonnade as well as ventilation and electrical upgrades; these were commented on and supported by us through a previous recent application for planning permission and listed building consent. These plans represent a set of further internal works to be undertaken whilst the theatre has a period of closure later this summer.

Much of this work refers to refurbishments. This includes the replacement of seating and carpets within the auditorium, replacement of carpets and wallpaper within the foyers and other public areas, refurbishment and renewal of the WCs including accessible WC within the stalls and refurbishment of the stalls and Royal circle bars. These are all supported; carpets and seating are worn and some of the seating is damaged. Seating will be replaced on a like-for-like basis and will enable current standards to be met. Carpet will be replaced on a close likeness and similarly the wallpaper will also be close in style. Works to the bars are limited to cleaning and sanding frontages and tops with refits of serving and sales equipment. The WCs to the stalls level are of more modern fit but require renewal. These works will not

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impact on the theatre's character and significance but will improve appearance and comfort for audiences. Investment in general maintenance and upkeep of the building is to be welcomed.

There will be reconfiguration of the WCs to the Royal Circle achieved by swapping the female and male blocks. Again these are of more modern fit so there are no issues from a heritage perspective, but they are inefficient in their use of space. The new layout would provide an additional cubicle in each which will help reduce queueing, thus again improving the audience experience.

Where there will be greater change and impact is in relation to the adjoining pub. This became part of the theatre through the 1920s works and acquisitions, but in recent years has been independently operated and accessed. The pub is coming back within the theatre operator's control to form part of its front of house offer. This will see a new opening between the pub and the foyer. Although this will impact historic fabric, currently the pub lacks accessibility due to a 200mm front step. The new link will provide accessibility which represents a public benefit. The overall plan form of the building would remain readable, and this could in future be reversed. Therefore we raise no objection to this intervention.

There will also be a number of refurbishments within the pub, including the reinstatement of its bar front and removal of lowered ceiling to reveal more of its decorative ceiling. These are heritage benefits.

We welcome this investment into the theatre and its facilities, which will help further enhance the experience for audiences. Therefore we are supportive of the granting of listed building consent.

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

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

Tom Clarke MRTPI

National Planning Adviser

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