

Protecting theatres
for **everyone**



Ref.: TC/2495

18 April 2023

Hannah Nutch
South Kesteven District Council

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

Application: S23/0160

Site: The Corn Exchange And 39 Broad Street Stamford Lincolnshire PE9 1PX

Proposal: Change of use to floor of building to form extended bar area for adjacent property

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 through press reports because it is seeking alteration at Stamford Corn Exchange Theatre. We have not been directly notified despite this application falling within our statutory remit outlined above. Please ensure Theatres Trust is notified of relevant future applications within South Kesteven. We note there has been a corresponding listed building consent already permitted.

The theatre occupies Stamford's Corn Exchange which was built in 1859 to host public meetings, shows and other entertainment alongside its commercial function.

Theatres Trust

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL

Telephone 020 7836 8591 **Email** info@theatrestrust.org.uk **Website** theatrestrust.org.uk **Twitter** @TheatresTrust

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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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Much of it was destroyed through fire in 1925 leaving just the front and side walls and the cellar. It was rebuilt using the remaining structure functioning as a theatre, cinema, dance hall, skating rink and auction room although performance function dwindled after the 1950s. For many years it was a general hall with two annual productions by local amateur groups. In 2001 the Corn Exchange was purchased by a local charitable trust who carried out refurbishment, restoration and development works ahead of reinstatement of full-time theatre by 2008. This included construction of a fly tower and lighting grid, with removal of the balcony to facilitate raked seating. An orchestra pit was added by raising the stage. The Corn Exchange has a strong programme of predominantly theatre, live music and comedy. It is a valued cultural and social asset for Stamford and surrounding communities. Paragraph 93 of the NPPF (2021) seeks planning decisions to plan positively for facilities such as this.

This proposal seeks to utilise part of the neighbouring building, also within the Corn Exchange's ownership, to extend its bar area and museum/archive room. The additional area for the theatre is currently in residential use and this would be reduced from a two storey unit to one storey at first floor level. At the second floor of 39 Broad Street a new opening would be created to extend the upper bar area within the Corn Exchange. At the level above a further new opening will extend the theatre's museum and archive room.

The applicant has set out the rationale for seeking to extend this bar space, which is because it is the location that works best for most audiences as it is most visible and easily accessible. The existing space is too small and this has an impact on the experience of audiences. These plans would see the extended lounge utilised for the bar servery with storage behind.

We note from the previous listing building consent and comments within the Heritage Statement that there has been revision of plans to minimise impact on fabric and significance, and this has resulted in the removal of objection by consultees such as Georgian Group. The impact of this operationally is that audiences will have to filter to and from the servery at the end of the extended lounge through the relatively narrow doorway. The bar will lack visibility. There is also limited space within the new lounge itself, and the working area behind the counter appears to be very tight. We suggest this may give rise to queueing and congestion into and out of this area and inefficient working for staff. We suggest that an alternative may be to relocate the bar counter along the rear wall of the existing bar area so that it offers more space and will have greater visibility. The extended lounge could be used as a new seating

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area, and could also potentially offer a meeting/function space which could be available for external hire.

The intervention to extend the museum/archive is similar, but we have no comments to make on this.

It is important that the theatre continues to meet the needs of audiences and there is benefit in improving the theatre's function and flexibility. Additional income generated can help sustain the building and support its cultural offer. These are public benefits which help justify harm, nonetheless listed building consent has already been granted. In terms of landuse, there is no Local Plan policy on loss or reduction of residential use. Similar to consideration of heritage, likewise these public benefits along with supporting the enhancement of a key town centre use also help justify change of use. Although Policy SP6 of the Local Plan also has no explicit policy on enhancement of community facilities (under which theatres would be included), the position on new facilities implies that enhanced or expanded facilities would also be supported. Part d. of NPPF paragraph 93 also seeks planning decisions to ensure that established facilities are able to develop.

There may be an opportunity to provide or improve acoustic insulation to ensure appropriate living conditions for the occupant of the residential flat, although we would note a similarly functioning use could lawfully be introduced into the commercial unit to the ground floor and the existing residential accommodation already adjoins the theatre and existing lounge. Further advice should be sought from the Council's environmental health officer, and if necessary acoustic matters can be conditioned.

Although we have raised some matters for the applicant to further consider, this does not affect our overall advice or the principle of change of use for this space. We are supportive of the granting of planning permission.

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

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

Tom Clarke MRTPI

National Planning Adviser

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