

Protecting theatres
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Ref.: TC/3561

15 May 2023

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Development Management
Coventry City Council
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Earl Street
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By e-mail: planning@coventry.gov.uk

Application: PL/2023/0000719/FULM

Site: The Albany Theatre Albany Road, Coventry, CV5 6JQ

Proposal: Demolition of the existing single storey rear building with the replacement of a new four storey extension for the provision of a workshop, technical stores, office accommodation, green room, dressing rooms and associated works.

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 Theatres Trust through press reports because it is seeking development at the Albany Theatre. We do not appear to have

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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been notified despite this falling within our statutory remit outlined above. These plans represent Phase 2 of the theatre's development and improvement scheme; Phase 1 was consented in 2020 and that scheme was supported by the Trust in its comments of 9th October 2020.

Albany Theatre is a valued cultural asset for Coventry. It is also on the Council's Local List as a non-designated heritage asset. It has an Art Deco interior with a main auditorium of 620 seats and a smaller studio/rehearsal space. The theatre sits within the site of the city's former Technical Institute in a wing which was opened in 1935. Originally it was used as a teaching and lecture hall but from the Second World War it held public concerts and events, becoming known as College Theatre and Butts Theatre. Despite being a popular venue used by a number of local groups it closed in 2009 following the site being purchased for development. The Council intervened and helped set up a charitable trust to run the theatre and it re-opened in 2013. It continues to play a major part in Coventry's arts and cultural offer and is seeking to further develop. The Phase 1 project is infilling a yard between the auditorium and unused internal space to provide a new studio, WCs and dressing rooms and adding a new front entry lobby. Paragraph 93 of the NPPF (2021) seeks planning decisions to plan positively for facilities such as the Albany.

This proposal will see the demolition of the single storey back of house area to the rear of the stage which currently houses dressing rooms and the greenroom. In its place, also incorporating a larger footprint by utilising existing car parking, will be a four storey building with a scene dock, studios, replacement and additional dressing rooms and office space. This would appear to significantly expand back of house provision and function, for which we are supportive.

We have a few specific comments related to how these spaces will function which the applicant may wish to consider further. As these are related to internal layouts these do not affect our overall recommendations.

The ground floor studio labelled 'Studio 1' appears not to be wheelchair accessible through the front of house route from the main entrance and foyer due to the steps indicated within the side corridor. This is based on information shown within the proposed plans for Phase 1 as these show the whole layout of the theatre. There is a doorway directly into Studio 1 from the rear car park but this would require users exiting the building via the corridor from the foyer via the WCs, or to proceed straight to Studio 1 from the rear car park. We suggest that options should be explored to make the main internal route accessible.

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It is important that some ground floor dressing rooms have been retained and these are referred to in the Design Statement as 'quick change'. There is an accessible WC and shower alongside these dressing rooms, it should be ensured at least one of the two dressing rooms is also accessible.

All floors within the extension are accessible due to provision of a lift. The third floor is currently without a WC, it would be desirable for at least an accessible WC at that level to avoid users need to go to the levels below. If the green room is in use the next available WCs are on level one.

Overall however we welcome this continued investment in the Albany and its facilities. We are therefore 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 black ink that reads "T Clarke".

Tom Clarke MRTPI

National Planning Adviser

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