

Protecting theatres
for **everyone**



Ref.: TC/2073

15 May 2023

Grant Heal
Planning Team
Riverside
4 Canning Road
Lowestoft
NR33 0EQ

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

Application: DC/23/1409/FUL

Site: Riverside Theatre And Restaurant Quay Side Woodbridge Suffolk IP12 1BH

Proposal: Replacement of restaurant marquee with new bar and restaurant structure

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 planning permission has come to the attention of the Trust because it is seeking development at the Riverside Theatre, specifically to replace its existing marquee utilised as a seating area for its bar and restaurant with a more permanent metal structure with glazing. We have not been notified despite this falling

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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within our remit outlined above. Please ensure Theatres Trust is notified of relevant future applications within East Suffolk.

The Riverside opened in 1915 as the Woodbridge Electric Theatre. From the 1930s it was called the Woodbridge Theatre and in the 1950s a stage was added which reduced audience capacity but added the ability to host live performances. It had a substantial refurbishment in the mid-1980s and was again renamed to the Riverside Theatre. The current capacity is for 288 seats and the theatre also has a popular bar and restaurant with external pavilion selling drinks and ice creams. Much of the Riverside's programme is cinema, but it also hosts annual shows by local amateur theatre groups as well as occasional touring shows and live music. There have recently been plans to expand provision by adding a second dedicated cinema screen, with planning applications supported by us, but to date this has not come to fruition. The Riverside is an arts and cultural facility which is valued by local people. Paragraph 93 of the NPPF (2021) seeks planning decisions to plan positively for facilities of this nature. It is also a non-designated heritage asset within the Woodbridge Conservation Area.

In recent years a number of proposals have come forward from theatres seeking to expand and optimise their front of house offers, recognising that additional footfall and income generated can help sustain their core social and cultural offers. Partly by virtue of the Riverside's position just away from the quayside and next to the railway station, and being on a main pedestrian route towards the town centre, it has a well-developed ancillary food and drink offer. This is provided partly from a lightweight glazed extension as well as external seating on a large front terrace. There is also a small pavilion kiosk. As a result of restrictions during the pandemic a canvas marquee was added within the external space allowing the bar/restaurant to continue to operate and generate an income.

These plans will see the marquee replaced with a permanent structure with metal frame and glazed side panels with rooflights. Beyond its original purpose of immediately responding to Covid-19 issues, the marquee has provided additional flexibility through provision of greater indoor space which can also be opened up in good weather. This proposal will carry that principle forward, offering greater certainty and reliability compared to the marquee as well as the potential for more congruous design which better responds to the host building and its wider setting.

We consider the overall design approach and materials to be appropriate, and the flat roof and height continue to allow views of the original theatre building, in particular its gabled roof. There appears to be some overhang of the flat roof; this

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may serve a practical purpose in providing some shading or weather-proofing when the sliding doors are open but it is not explained within the supporting documents. It otherwise appears from the elevation diagrams that it may interrupt views towards the theatre and extend the existing building line which may cause some harm to setting, meriting justification. It might alternatively be reviewed whether the overhang could be reduced or removed.

Subject to the above clarification we would be 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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