

# Protecting theatres for **everyone**



Ref.: TC/439

30 May 2023

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By e-mail: [planning@lambeth.gov.uk](mailto:planning@lambeth.gov.uk)

**Application:** 23/00959/LB

**Site:** Brixton Academy 211 Stockwell Road London Lambeth SW9 9SL

**Proposal:** Refurbishment of the main foyer entrance doors and adjacent columns, involving the removal of the existing handrails to the 5 sets of double doors, the installation of internal timber panels and softwood packers into the columns to strengthen the existing double glazed doors to the foyer area, and repair/reposition of door heaters, barriers and light fittings.

## **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'.

## **Theatres Trust**

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL

**Telephone** 020 7836 8591 **Email** [info@theatrestrust.org.uk](mailto:info@theatrestrust.org.uk) **Website** [theatrestrust.org.uk](http://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

The National Advisory Public Body for Theatres. The Theatres Trust Charitable Fund co-operates with the Theatres Trust, has the same Trustees and is registered as a charity under number 274697

**Comment:**

This application for listed building consent has come to the attention of Theatres Trust because it is seeking alterations and refurbishments to the main foyer entrance doors and surrounding areas at Brixton Academy.

The Academy is a Grade II\* listed heritage and cultural asset. It was built in 1929 as an 'atmospheric' super cinema and is considered one of the most impressive of the UK's few theatres of that style, designed in the manner of John Eberson who was the most renowned and originator of the type. The proscenium is framed by octagonal towers linked by an arcade bridge with central broken-pedimented bay. Either side is modelling of a Mediterranean townscape with tiled and domed roofs, balconies, statues, garden walls and vegetation. It was extremely well equipped technically with large stage, extensive counterweight system, easy get-in and generous front and back of house provision including very large foyer. It was also one of the largest offering a capacity of around 3,000 which with stalls seats removed is currently closer to 5,000. After a brief period as a nightclub it was threatened with demolition and then used for storage but was reopened as a concert venue in 1982.

Restoration work was undertaken in 2006. Aside from the Academy's architectural significance it also has great cultural and social significance arising from its use as a music venue over recent decades, hosting a number of iconic performances and events. It forms an important part of London's renowned live music and cultural offer, but has been closed since December 2022 after its licence was suspended.

These works are considered essential to upgrade Brixton Academy's main foyer entrance to give extra stability and strength and to improve safety, in order to try to bring the venue back to use. They consist of removal of five sets of handrails to the front double doors and interior foyer with stabilisation and strengthening of the doors, plus repair works and maintenance.

The handrails to be removed have decorative significance and contribute towards the external character of the Academy as a heritage asset. Their removal will cause harm which we consider to be less than substantial. However, with reference to paragraphs 197 and 202 of the NPPF (2023) the impact of this harm must be considered against the public benefits of improving public safety at the venue and to sustain the significance of the asset within a use consistent with its ongoing conservation by enabling it to meet possible licensing demands which would allow for future return to active use. Further mitigations are that the potential for future reinstatement would be maintained, with the applicant committing to securely storing

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and labelling the removed handrails on site. We recommend that this is made a condition of listed building consent should it be granted.

Similarly, associated internal works and additions to the main doors are also needed on safety grounds. Again, we support the applicant's approach which would see replication of existing colour schemes and relocation where possible.

Therefore, we would support the granting of listed building consent.

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

Tom Clarke MRTPI

National Planning Adviser

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