

Protecting theatres
for **everyone**



Ref.: TC/2010

16 June 2023

Holly Sharpley
Pending Applications
Development Planning
City of Westminster
PO Box 732
Redhill
RH1 9FL

By e-mail: southplanningteam@westminster.gov.uk

Application: 23/03153/LBC

Site: London Coliseum 32 - 35 St Martin's Lane London WC2N 4ES

Proposal: Proposed stage floor strengthening; removal of existing Expamet ceiling to the basement canteen area, installation of additional proposed 200x75mm PFCs (mid-span to the existing timber beams, to the outer circle of the disused revolving stage structure); new lightweight 1 hour fire rated MF plasterboard ceiling system; Installation of additional proposed 200x75mm PFCs and a new lightweight MF plasterboard ceiling system below the existing basement ceiling to the toilet/lockers/changing areas (existing ceiling to remain); removal of existing plaster cornice and mouldings are and re-instated with new to match existing.

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 **Website** theatrestrust.org.uk **Twitter** @TheatresTrust

Facebook @theatres.trust **Instagram** @TheatresTrust

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:

Thank you consulting Theatres Trust on this application for listed building consent at the Coliseum. It seeks internal alterations within the building's basement level in order to strengthen its stage along with associated works.

The Coliseum is a Grade II* listed heritage asset reflecting its outstanding architectural and theatrical significance. It was designed by renowned theatre architect Frank Matcham and is considered to be the finest example of his work, with an elaborately decorated auditorium and splendidly appointed public rooms designed to attract new audiences into the West End. Originally it had the UK's only permanent Royal box. A tower to the southern end of its St Martin's Lane elevation contains sejant lions and an illuminated rotating globe bearing a 'Coliseum' sign which is visible from Trafalgar Square. It is the biggest theatre in the West End by capacity, seating 2,359 people and similarly has a very large stage. Originally the stage had a pioneering triple revolve but this was partially removed in 1976. For some time it has been owned and operated by English National Opera, and has also held runs of external West End productions and English National Ballet shows.

The applicant's primary reason for bringing these works forward is to reflect the changing nature and requirements of its programme arising from reduced 'National Portfolio' funding from the Arts Council, receiving a transition arrangement as English National Opera moves its base outside of London. This means that the Coliseum will need to become more of a touring venue in order to sustain itself longer-term. However, modern producers and shows require sufficient loading capacity and facilities to meet the needs of shows. This has been reflected through stage improvement applications at other venues in the West End (and elsewhere) in recent times, for example strengthening and/or removal of rakes.

As set out above, the pioneering triple revolve was removed almost fifty years ago but the timber stage surface and remnants of the revolve are buried below a new top. These are highly significant. This is not adequately reflected within the Heritage Statement, which states, "The old rotating circular stage, which has been rarely used, is in need of an upgrade due to health and safety issues."

The applicant has set out different options for how strengthening can be achieved. The preferred option is to strengthen from below because this would allow the theatre to remain operational and works could be phased. As with our advice on similar schemes elsewhere, it is important for the ongoing viability and sustainability of theatres (and for London's wider reputation for the strength of its cultural offer) that

Theatres Trust

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL

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

Facebook @theatres.trust **Instagram** @TheatresTrust

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

Protecting theatres for **everyone**



they are able to receive to biggest and best touring shows. This constitutes a public benefit which to some degree mitigates the impact of further alteration as it contributes towards the future conservation of the building as a heritage asset of great significance.

On that basis we are supportive of these plans in principle, but with reference to paragraph 194 of the NPPF (2021) the application needs to be accompanied by an adequate Heritage Statement which properly describes the significance of the stage and revolve and how they may be affected by these works. There is otherwise a risk original fabric and the revolve may be damaged or removed if their significance is not appropriately recognised.

Similarly the plans do not clearly show which ceilings are being removed or replaced and there is limited description within the Heritage Statement.

We would therefore conditionally support the granting of listed building consent subject to submission of an appropriately detailed Heritage Statement and original stage fabric and revolve being retained.

Please contact us if we may be of further assistance or should you wish to discuss these comments in further detail.

Tom Clarke MRTPI

National Planning Adviser

Theatres Trust

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL

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

Facebook @theatres.trust **Instagram** @TheatresTrust

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