

Protecting theatres
for **everyone**



Ref.: TC/3834

14 August 2023

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Application: 23/00283/FUL

Site: Units 1, 2a and 2b, Queens Yard, White Post Lane, LONDON, E9 5EN

Proposal: Full planning application for partial demolition of buildings and the extension of existing Theatre (Use Class Sui Generis) for new two storey theatre auditorium, young artist (community spaces) and with associated access and servicing arrangements.

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 for consulting Theatres Trust on this application for planning permission, which seeks to develop the Yard Theatre through partial demolition and extension of its existing building. We have been engaged by the theatre and their design team over the last few years as their future plans have been developed.

The Yard is a 110 seat producing theatre located within a former industrial warehouse. Originally intended as a temporary venture, it has now been open for twelve years during which time it has become an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation, debuted shows and supported artists which have found national and international success, and developed a strong community and educational outreach offer partly delivered through satellite sites and local schools. It has a particular focus on supporting under-represented groups, and alongside theatre it also hosts live music and DJs at weekends. The Yard is well-regarded by audiences and is an important social and cultural facility for local people. Paragraph 93 of the NPPF seeks planning decisions to plan positively for facilities such as this.

Currently the theatre occupies part of a building with independently operated units either side. Access is from Queen's Yard. At first floor level are two studios and an office but these are in effect an independent unit as they can only be accessed through a door and stairway from the south-west corner of the building to White Post Lane. This is not an optimum arrangement operationally, furthermore they are not accessible to wheelchair users or those with reduced mobility. The lower part of the building including the auditorium is accessible. Due to its compact size the theatre is lacking in back of house facilities, in particular there are no dedicated dressing rooms. Whilst The Yard has unique character there is demonstrable need and value in it developing further to optimise its cultural and community value and resilience particularly with regards to access and inclusivity. We welcome that these plans have come forward and that the growth and development of the theatre appears to be realistic and sustainable.

These plans will see the theatre extend eastwards into what is currently a bar (Unit 1) as well as take on the section of ground floor currently outside its demise underneath the first floor studio (Unit 2B). The external seating area to the rear of Unit 1 will be infilled to create an extension. This will give a new street entrance into the ground floor level from White Post Lane in addition to the Queen's Yard entrance, extend the café/bar, enable lift access to the upper level and relocate the main theatre space providing two dressing rooms and an accessible back of house WC and shower. There will be much-needed additional front of house WCs and a net gain of one

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studio. The first floor studios will be served by an upper-level accessible WC. A second lift will provide wheelchair access and wheelchair places to the upper tier of the auditorium.

We support the design approach, particularly welcoming the re-use of materials. As well as being a nod to the industrial heritage of the area, the chimney feature helps aid prominence and visibility of the theatre. Whilst the lift location to the upper studios isn't optimal due to the risk that waiting persons may obstruct those seeking to use the stairs, and that best practice would see the upper tier of the auditorium served by an accessible WC, we recognise the constraints of space and building layout and that upper level accessibility currently does not exist. This is similarly the case for dressing rooms where ideally a minimum of three should be sought (particularly if there may be children or young people performing).

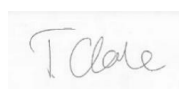
We would also highlight that under proposals under consultation by the Government the WC block as currently designed may not be permissible and may require a re-design, dependent upon the outcome and implementation of any new rules. This is because universal WCs would need to open onto a corridor or circulation space and not into a private or enclosed space.

Nonetheless, any opportunities to optimise internal layout and function can occur at the next stage of design and does not affect our overall support for this scheme. We consider that these plans will enable The Yard to further develop its important offer and provision whilst maintaining its distinctiveness.

The Vision for the Legacy Corporation area outlined in the London Legacy Development Corporation Local Plan 2020 to 2036 (2020) includes recognition of it as a global centre for cultural and sporting excellence. Strategic Policy SP.1.1 seeks to promote opportunities for cultural expansion. Policy HC6.B.6 of the London Plan (2021) seeks planning decisions to support evening and night time cultural venues including theatres. This proposal contributes to those policy objectives.

Therefore we recommend 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.



Tom Clarke MRTPI

National Planning Adviser

Theatres Trust

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