

Protecting theatres  
for **everyone**



Ref.: TC/271

18 December 2023

Somerset Planning - North Team  
Bridgwater House  
King Square  
Bridgwater  
Somerset  
TA6 3AR

By e-mail: [PlanningNorth@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:PlanningNorth@somerset.gov.uk)

**Application:** 08/23/00333 & 08/23/00334

**Site:** 11-13 Castle Street, Bridgwater, Somerset, TA6 3DD

**Proposal:** Alterations to improve access to both entrances, internal alterations, roof alterations, and the addition of an internal chair and theatre store to the rear.

### **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:**

These applications for planning permission and listed building consent have come to the attention of Theatres Trust because they are seeking alterations and development at Bridgwater Arts Centre. The proposals are mostly internal although there will also be the addition of a small extension at the rear to provide a chair and

### **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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set store, replacing an existing storage shed, and some changes around the two entrances from Castle Street.

Bridgwater Arts Centre is notable for being the first arts centre to have opened with support from the Arts Council, in 1946. It is located within a group of Grade I listed former houses which were put up for sale at the end of World War II, although few internal features remain. It is now owned by Bridgwater Town Council having been taken on from the former Sedgemoor District Council in 2020. It has a mixed programme including theatre, live music, comedy, talks and other events. It also provides classes and a youth theatre company. It is a key part of the local arts and cultural offer. Paragraph 93 of the NPPF (2023) seeks planning decisions to plan positively for facilities such as this.

Like many older buildings the Arts Centre does not currently meet modern standards of accessibility. The main entrance requires intervention by way of a metal ramp upon request and there is only level access through the building on the ground floor. Therefore part of the driver of this refurbishment project is to improve accessibility and inclusivity and this is welcomed. In particular there will be handrails added to the entry steps outside the door to number 11 with an enlarged lobby inside, and a level threshold with internal ramp at the number 13 entrance. Throughout the building will be alterations to doors and partitions to improve accessibility and movement, but also to improve fire safety. This is welcomed and supported.

The new storage area to the rear will improve capacity and efficiency.

At first floor will be an additional WC; older venues often have a need for such facilities and we note there is a longer-term aspiration to generally improve WC provision along with adding lift access and better back of house facilities.

We note there is a longer-term aspiration to introduce lift access along with improved WCs and back of house facilities. The intention of the Arts Centre's operator to invest in and improve the facility is welcomed. These proposals would not compromise future opportunities.

In terms of the impact of development in heritage terms, change to the more sensitive front elevation is relatively modest. However, it provides a substantial public benefit of providing improved accessibility and inclusivity. Similarly internal alterations also improve the Arts Centre's function.

Therefore we are supportive of the granting of planning permission and listed building consent.

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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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