

Ref.: TC/2384

09 January 2024

Mrs Amy Harrap
Planning Services (Scarborough Area)
North Yorkshire Council
Town Hall
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North Yorkshire
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By e-mail: planning.services.sca@northyorks.gov.uk

Application: ZF23/02008/LB

Site: Scarborough Theatre Trust Ltd The Stephen Joseph Theatre Westborough
Scarborough North Yorkshire YO11 1JW

Proposal: Internal refurbishment of existing McCarthy auditorium including installation of new platform lift, redecoration, new bar and new WCs. Together with replacement air handling system and other works at roof level and minor alterations to west and east facades

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

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Chair Dave Moutrey OBE

Director Jon Morgan

Trustees James Dacre, Suba Das, Stephanie Hall, Annie Hampson, Lucy Osborne, Truda Spruyt, Katie Town

Comment:

Thank you for consulting Theatres Trust on this application for listed building consent at Stephen Joseph Theatre. It seeks to undertake refurbishment of its auditorium along with external works around its roof including repairs and the upgrading of the theatre's air handling system. With regards to the external works there is a corresponding application for planning permission to which we have responded under separate cover.

Stephen Joseph Theatre has cultural significance through having formed as the first theatre in the round in the UK. Stephen Joseph set up a theatre company devoted to theatre in the round upon returning from the USA where he studied for a degree in playwriting. He had been unable to secure an appropriate venue in London so utilised the concert room at Scarborough's Central Library during the summer of 1955. During that winter he toured other towns around the country whilst attempting to find a permanent home. In 1962 a disused cinema in Stoke-on-Trent was acquired with fellow playwright Peter Cheeseman. Joseph was appointed as a fellow and lecturer at University of Manchester and re-founded his Scarborough venture as the Scarborough Theatre Trust. This found success including supporting new playwrights which included Alan Ayckbourn. However, in 1967 Joseph died from cancer. His ideas and plans were taken forward with the Stephen Joseph Theatre being initiated. From 1976 it was located at the former Scarborough Boys' High School. When the town's Odeon Cinema closed in 1988 it was acquired and re-opened as the Stephen Joseph Theatre in 1996.

The current theatre was built in 1936 as a dedicated cinema; there was no stage or other facilities for live performance. It is a Grade II listed heritage asset on the basis of being a good example of the Odeon's typical architectural style and having being the only one with its auditorium being in an original and undivided state. All of its original architectural features and most fittings remain. The theatre's programme consists of its own productions along with touring shows, comedians and cinema screenings. It is operated as a registered charity and is an important cultural and social facility for the town and its wider catchment. Paragraph 97 of the NPPF (2023) seeks planning decisions to plan positively for facilities such as this.

There are two primary elements to this proposal and these are dealt with in turn.

Much of the internal works are focussed on the smaller McCarthy auditorium which is within the former upper circle of the main auditorium. This remains largely as installed in the 1996 works to convert the former Odeon into the theatre and

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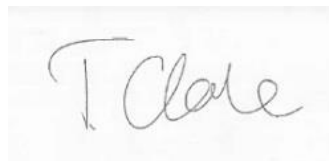
therefore elements are in need of upgrading and there is also potential to improve the function and accessibility of this space. The Design & Access/Heritage Statement outlines current challenges and opportunities, including constrained wheelchair access for performers with stage right being inaccessible and stage left being constrained, there being no accessible WC and wheelchair seating positions only being available on the front row (modern best practice is for a variety of positions). The bar is sub-optimal operationally because its open position means that activities disturb performances, therefore preventing things such as interval pre-orders.

We welcome and support these plans. They will improve accessibility and provision for wheelchair users. The new position of the bar with its acoustic separation from the rest of the auditorium will improve service to audiences and reduce waiting times. Whilst the waiting space for the accessible WC potentially blocks the entrance to the male WCs we recognise this is challenging to avoid due to the building's constraints. This area was altered in the 1996 works and therefore is of less significance in heritage terms, nonetheless these improvements particularly for accessibility constitute a public benefit.

The external works are largely related to the replacement of the theatre's air handling equipment due to it having reached the end of its life. Alongside this will be some general rooftop repairs, replacement as well as adaptations to improve insulation. These works are supported, and in heritage terms there is limited impact constituting less than substantial harm which is mitigated through public benefits of improved energy efficiency and the ongoing upkeep and conservation of this important heritage asset.

We therefore 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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