

Ref.: TC

10 January 2024

Sophie Sales  
Planning  
Ashfield District Council  
Urban Road  
Kirkby in Ashfield  
NG17 8DA

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

**Application:** Z/2023/0703

**Site:** Sutton Community Academy, Sutton Centre, High Pavement, Sutton In Ashfield, Nottinghamshire, NG17 1EE

**Proposal:** Refurbishment of existing theatre and associated facilities. Minor works to external fabric of building, installation of external goods lift, and new gates.

**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:**

This application has come to the attention of Theatres Trust through press reports because it is seeking refurbishment and external works to upgrade the theatre at Sutton Community Academy and to open it to the public. It will become known as the Cornerstone Theatre. We welcome the investment that is being made into 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

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

**Chair** Dave Moutrey OBE

**Director** Jon Morgan

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

and the arts by the Council and that Future High Street funding is being utilised in this way.

The intention for the refurbished theatre, aside from becoming a public venue, is that it will also be a multifunctional community space with a wider performance function including cinema.

At upper ground floor level what was previously school staff offices will become a foyer with a new opening into the auditorium, with a bar/kiosk to the rear. There is however limited bar space; current technical standards suggest a preferable level of 0.75 square metres per person. It should be designed to accommodate wheelchair users, both staff and audience.

The existing WCs and assumed admin/storage areas will be combined into a single block of WCs which will provide an uplift in cubicles as well as a Changing Places facility which is welcomed.

At stalls level within the auditorium new retractable seating will be installed which will allow for different formats. On the plans upon entering the auditorium in seated mode it appears there are steps at different levels which represents a health and safety issue so this should be clarified. There should also be wheelchair places made available in a variety of positions and under current regulations these should constitute the greater of six places or 1%. Presently there are positions at the balcony level (although without companion seating) but currently there is nothing indicated in the stalls. This could be addressed through making the retractable seating more flexible especially at the lower level. There is also no accessible WC serving the balcony and we would urge that opportunities to provide one within the front of house area are explored. It is however positive and welcomed that the control room can accommodate staff or students in wheelchairs.

To the back of the stage the area will be altered and sub-divided to provide two additional dressing rooms giving a total of four, a green room and an accessible WC and shower. However, there is no specific accessible dressing room so this should also be further considered. Potentially the green room could be utilised in this way if required but it should be suitably equipped, but for best practice one of the two lower dressing rooms should be accessible. It would also be desirable for there to be more than one back of house WC. General access to the back of house area to the rear of the stage is also constrained. It appears the only external access avoiding crossing the stage is through a fire escape which has stairs so the practicality of this will need to be considered and planned for.

#### 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

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

**Chair** Dave Moutrey OBE

**Director** Jon Morgan

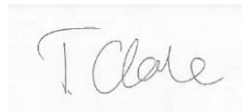
**Trustees** James Dacre, Suba Das, Stephanie Hall, Annie Hampson, Lucy Osborne, Truda Spruyt, Katie Town

A robust operational plan will also need to be drawn up, if not in place already, so that constraints associated with operating within a school environment are fully understood and incorporated within the proposed business model. This would include the impact of the venue potentially being available only outside of school hours due to some elements being shared, and how separation can be achieved for reasons of safeguarding (alongside safety considerations associated with daytime servicing activities). For example, some touring shows might seek daytime performances which could limit the range of events the venue can attract. Soundchecks and rehearsals would also likely require daytime operations. Such a plan and the intended programme of the theatre can be utilised to inform final detailed design requirements.

Whilst we have raised a number of points for further consideration and consider internal function, particularly with regards to accessibility, could be improved and refined we welcome the upgrading of this theatre and the principle and ethos of the project. These are however matters which could be addressed as the project moves forward.

Our overall position is to support the granting of planning permission.

Please contact us 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](mailto:info@theatrestrust.org.uk) **Website** [theatrestrust.org.uk](http://theatrestrust.org.uk) **Twitter** @TheatresTrust

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

**Chair** Dave Moutrey OBE

**Director** Jon Morgan

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