

The Theatres Trust

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Our Ref.: VS/121
Please contact: Ms Vicki Simon

23 February 2010

Ms Jean Palmer
Corporate Director of Planning & Community Services
London Borough of Hillingdon
3 North, Civic Centre
High Street
Uxbridge UB8 1UW

Dear Ms Palmer,

**RAF Uxbridge, Hillingdon Road, Uxbridge
Application Ref.: 585/APP/2009/2752**

Thank you for consulting The Theatres Trust on an outline application for full planning permission to redevelop the RAF site at Uxbridge which includes for the Grade II listed former cinema building and a new theatre. The Theatres Trust has **no objection in principle** to the application but please see our detailed advice below.

Remit: The Theatres Trust is The National Advisory Public Body for Theatres. The Town & Country Planning (General Development Procedure) Order 1995, Article 10, Para (v) requires the Trust to be consulted on planning applications which include '*development involving any land on which there is a theatre.*' It was established by The Theatres Trust Act 1976 '*to promote the better protection of theatres.*' This applies to all theatre buildings. Our main objective is to safeguard theatre use, or the potential for such use but we also provide expert advice on design, conservation, property and planning matters to theatre operators, local authorities and official bodies.

Advice/comment: The Trust has no objection in principle to the proposed change of use for the Grade II listed **cinema/theatre building** to 'non residential institution' (D1) and 'assembly and leisure' (D2), as this will widen the options for sympathetic reuse of this building which has a significant presence and historic significance to the area. These uses should maintain the architectural and historic interest of the listed building and are unlikely to preclude the return to original use at some future date. However, since a future use or occupier has not yet been identified, we anticipate that further works may be required to the interior. These may require listed building consent and we would expect any subsequent applications for the site to be referred to us.

The cinema/theatre is the most impressive of the group of buildings designed for the RAF's Armaments School, which relocated to Uxbridge in 1918. It was designed by the Royal Engineer Lieutenant J. G. N. Clift for the Air Ministry's Directorate of Works as a two-storey structure consisting of auditorium with stage and retiring rooms below, with a projection room and rewinding room above. It reflects the importance placed by the military on providing recreation and cultural facilities for recruits, providing a space for films, concerts and theatre. The building was converted into a gymnasium in the 1960s and has most recently been used as a store. The Trust would welcome the return of the building to public use as it is included on our Theatre Buildings at Risk (TBAR) register.

Protecting theatres for everyone

Director Mhora Samuel **Chairman** Rob Dickins CBE
Trustees Jason Barnes, Phil Clark, Marilyn Cutts, Venu Dhupa, Tim Foster, Penelope Keith CBE DL,
Dr Pauleen Lane CBE, Baroness McIntosh of Hudnall, Anne McReynolds, Matthew Rooke,
Chris Shepley CBE, Sam Shrouder, Ben Twist

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



The outline application also proposes **the construction of a new 1,200-seat theatre** with orchestra pit and fly tower as part of an enhanced cultural quarter for Uxbridge Town Centre. And we note that it is intended to have the capacity and facilities to cater for large West-End productions which could contribute to the cultural and economic vitality of the region, providing social, environmental and educational benefits.

While The Theatres Trust would always welcome proposals for new theatres it would also advise that rigorous investigation should be undertaken into whether the area can sustain a theatre of such a size within the catchment area proposed. Indeed, we note that the community consultation (submitted as part of the outline application) raised concerns that a number of nearby theatres were struggling to attract audiences and would wish to be satisfied that a new venture would be a viable proposition for the area.

We would draw your attention to Planning Policy Statement 4 (PPS4): Planning for sustainable economic growth, which sets out the Government's policy for town centres and main 'town centre uses', which includes arts, tourism and cultural activities, particularly the practice guidance on need, impact and the sequential approach published by the Department for Communities and Local Government in December 2009. Appendix C contains guidance on the assessment of need and impact for, among others, new theatres. It recommends that, when planning for new cultural facilities, advice should be sought from the local authority arts and cultural development teams, regional representatives of the Arts Council England (ACE) and the Regional Cultural Consortium, where appropriate. Consultation with key stakeholders including the regional office of the ACE and existing regional cultural providers such as orchestras and touring theatre companies, local schools and amateur arts groups is also important in assessing the demand for new facilities.

Assessments of need for theatres and performing arts facilities are best undertaken at local rather than regional level, although adjoining local planning authorities should work together. Assessment of impact is usually addressed through an analysis of the competition with other similar facilities and the impact on the vitality and viability of any town centres in the catchment area. In considering planning applications it is worth noting that considerable work is likely to be needed to support an application for public funding for such facilities. Funding bodies typically require evidence of need for the development to be demonstrated by catchment and competition analysis, public and stakeholder consultation. They also require evidence of long term sustainability. This information can help inform the assessment of need from a planning perspective both in terms of plan-making and also development control decisions.

I hope you have found these comments useful. Please do not hesitate to contact the Trust regarding any issues raised in this letter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark J Price', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Mark J Price MRTPI, IHBC
Planning and Heritage Adviser