

Our Ref.: MP/77

26 August 2010

For the attention of: Ms Amanda Peck

Ms Rachel Stopard
Director of Culture & Environment
Development Control
London Borough of Camden
Town Hall, Argyle Street
London WC1H 8HD

Dear Ms Stopard,

Ambassadors Theatre, West Street, London WC2H 9HD
Application number: 2010/2840/L

Thank you for consulting The Theatres Trust on the above listed building application for the installation of two internally illuminated projecting signs, to the West Street and Tower Street elevations of the *Ambassadors Theatre*. The Trust is not opposed in principle **but requests revisions to the scheme**. 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 supports the proposal for two new signs in principle because they will provide a new opportunity to strengthen the visibility of the building; and moreover, will not adversely harm the architectural significance of the heritage asset. Signs of this nature are essential to advertise the theatre. Commercial performance venues require substantial improvement if they are to keep pace with the public's expectations and the needs of performers and producers and the Trust is keen to help owners do more to improve their buildings and to attract new audiences. Nevertheless, we have substantial concerns over the design which appears to conflict with the Theatreland Lighting and Signage guide produced by Westminster City Council in November 2008 but endorsed by Camden and the theatre industry. The guide suggests (page 8) that new opportunities should be to strengthen visibility '*of such signs by introducing more appropriate lettering units that respect the architectural style of the building.*' The opportunity has certainly been taken at the *Shaftesbury Theatre* (also grade II listed) where individual back-lit brush-metal lettering is being negotiated and considered. There are also many other such good examples throughout the West End which we could draw your attention to.

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Director Mhora Samuel **Chairman** Rob Dickins CBE
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Chris Shepley CBE, Sam Shrouder, Ben Twist

In the circumstances, we would like to be able to offer advice on site about the points raised in this letter. Key to our advice is that we always try and take a realistic and pragmatic approach to the development and alterations to theatre buildings and are keen not to hold up the planning application decision process. We therefore **request a meeting to offer advice, discuss possible alternatives and resolve our substantial concerns.**

Signage is in fact a traditional feature on theatre buildings and has always been used to attract theatregoers. This was optimised in the 1920s and 30s with the use of neon, and in the 1960s and 70s with the use of internally illuminated light boxes. However, modern show signs, using modern lighting techniques (such as low energy voltage sources) and discreet wiring, can be very successful in advertising a theatre and indeed can liven up the building while allowing the historic asset to be appreciated behind. Innovations in flat panel technology have rendered the bulk of old-fashioned light boxes unnecessary. The opportunity should be taken to ensure that the new signs are as slick as possible; after all, it is often the first visual indicator a theatregoer is presented with.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if we may be of further assistance. I look forward to a meeting to discuss revisions.

Yours sincerely,

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

Mark J Price, MRTPI, IHBC
Planning and Heritage Adviser

cc Victoria Pound, Conservation & Urban Design Officer, Camden