

Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC/2787

25 November 2021

Development Management
Civic Centre
Duke Street
Chelmsford
CM1 1JE

By e-mail: planning@chelmsford.gov.uk

Application: 21/02106/FUL

Site: Cramphorn Theatre Civic Centre Theatres Fairfield Road Chelmsford Essex CM1 1JG

Proposal: Replacement of all existing glazed panels and doors to the front and side elevations of the building with new aluminium glazed panels. Installation of an automatic sliding entrance door, addition of another front entrance door. External seating area to front with raised area of pavement to provide a level surface for seating and a screening wall constructed. Addition of a barrier and guard rail surrounding the external seating area.

Remit:

The 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 for planning permission at the Civic and Cramphorn Theatres has come to the attention of the Trust. We have not been formally consulted despite this falling within our statutory remit as set out in Paragraph (x) under Schedule 4 of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015. Please ensure the Trust is notified of any relevant future applications.

We understand these works are part of a wider programme of refurbishment and upgrading. As the national advisory public body for theatres we can provide advice and feedback to the Council on its proposals prior to formal planning submissions or works being undertaken. We would encourage engagement with us. This application seeks external alterations to the Cramphorn part of the building to facilitate enhanced front-of-house provision.

Theatres Trust

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL

T 020 7836 8591 **E** info@theatrestrust.org.uk **W** theatrestrust.org.uk

Chair Tim Eyles **Director** Jon Morgan

Trustees Richard Baldwin, Paul Cartwright, Paddy Dillon, Annie Hampson, Richard Johnston, Gary Kemp, Jane Spiers, Truda Spruyt, Katie Town

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

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The period following World War II saw renewed interest in the arts with public money being used to support the development of theatre in the regions, although at the same time increased television ownership and desire for a more modern lifestyle and buildings resulted in older theatres falling out of use. Many converted to bingo halls or were demolished. The 1960s and '70s saw a period of 'civic' theatre building by local authorities which commonly integrated with other civic and public functions. Those theatres tended to be of simple and functional design. The Civic is a typical and earlier example of this, having opened in 1962 within Chelmsford's Civic Hall complex alongside its central library. It is well equipped with a fly tower, orchestra pit and studio/workshop space and has seating for just over 500 people across stalls and a balcony. Adjoined to it is the Cramphorn, a smaller studio theatre. Both have their own foyers and bars and can either be interlinked or operated independently.

Both theatres have a mixed programme including community provision such as a free pre-school club, free lunchtime concerts and productions by local youth and amateur dramatics societies. The Civic and Cramphorn are valued by local people and are important cultural facilities for the city. Paragraph 93 of the NPPF (2021) seeks planning decisions to plan positively for facilities of this nature.

It is proposed that the existing glazing to the Cramphorn is replaced with new screens with sliding openings. This will slightly increase the overall internal floorspace as both the main entrance and fire exit are currently recessed, although the usable foyer area for audiences and the public will be reduced. This is because a larger servery and preparation area is being installed but an outdoor terrace/seating area will be created in front of the theatre with retractable awning which will increase overall provision.

Efforts to invest in, improve and diversify the Civic and Cramphorn are welcomed and supported by the Trust. These works will enhance the attractiveness of the foyer and activate the public realm whilst enabling the theatre to operate as an all-day venue. This will bring people into the building at different times of day and when there are no performances, including those who do not routinely engage with the theatre. This broadens and maximises the community and cultural function. It also provides a new source of income to support the important arts and theatrical programme. We consider the design to be appropriate, offering a more contemporary appearance.

The proposal is in line with the West End Vision (2017) which seeks to work with the Civic and Cramphorn to strengthen the arts and cultural offer and promote enhancements to shopfronts and the public realm. It contributes towards delivery of Strategic Growth Site Policy 1e within the Chelmsford Local Plan (2020) as supporting paragraph 7.68 expects public realm improvements to enhance the theatre environs. Strategic Priority 9 encourages investment in arts, leisure and cultural facilities to reinforce Chelmsford's regional role. The Plan's 'Vision for Chelmsford' calls for upgraded cultural and leisure infrastructure. Policy DM20 grants permission for existing facilities, for which we consider the relevant criteria to have been met.

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Therefore we are supportive of this proposal and recommend the granting of planning permission.

Please contact us if we may be of further assistance or should you wish to discuss these comments further.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "T Clarke". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Tom Clarke MRTPI
National Planning Adviser

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