

Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC

01 November 2022

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Planning Service
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By e-mail: PlanningServices@rctcbc.gov.uk

Application: 22/0313/10 & 22/0314/12

Site: SAVOY BINGO HALL, COLLENNA ROAD, TONYREFAIL

Proposal: Retrospective - retain small dressing room block, add an extension to the front elevation, install a gate to a side alley. Install three removable bollards to front driveway. Install a 4 inch high disabled ramp with handrail to the side, rear external fire exit doors. Repair and restore the grade II listed facade. Retain a small wooden shed in side yard; and

Retrospective permission - retain small dressing room block, add an extension to the front elevation, install a gate to a side alley. Install three removable bollards to the front driveway. Install a 4 inch high disabled ramp with handrail to the side, rear external fire exit doors. Repair and restore the grade II listed facade. Retain a small wooden shed in side yard. (Application for Listed Building Consent (LBC)).

Remit:

Theatres Trust is the National Advisory Body for Theatres and was established by The Theatres Trust Act 1976 'to promote the better protection of theatres'. The Trust is a statutory consultee in the planning system and local planning authorities in Wales are required to consult the Trust on planning applications for '*development involving any land on which there is a theatre*', '*residential development within 50 metres of a theatre*' as well as for proposed theatres. The definition of theatres within the Act defines a theatre as 'any building or part of a building constructed wholly or mainly for the public performance of plays', and therefore applies to theatres, playhouses, arts centres, ciné-varieties or buildings converted for theatre use, old and new, in other uses or disused.

Comment:

These applications for retrospective planning permission and listed building consent have come to the attention of the Trust because they relate to alterations and development at the Savoy

Theatres Trust

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL
T 020 7836 8591 E info@theatrestrust.org.uk W theatrestrust.org.uk

Chair Dave Moutrey **Director** Jon Morgan

Trustees Paul Cartwright, James Dacre, Suba Das, Stephanie Hall, Annie Hampson, Richard Johnston, Gary Kemp, Lucy Osborne, Jane Spiers, Truda Spruyt, Katie Town

The National Advisory Public Body for Theatres

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Theatre, Tonyrefail. We do not appear to have been directly notified despite this falling within our statutory remit as described above.

The Savoy is a Grade II listed heritage asset. It opened in 1914 as the Picture Theatre, changing to the New Cinema by 1934 and then the Savoy in 1944. It is believed to have converted to bingo use in the 1970s which closed in 2002. After around ten years of vacancy it was purchased and converted into a theatre which opened in 2015. Its programme includes an annual pantomime along with shows by local amateur groups, live music, comedy and other events. It is an important cultural and social facility serving its local community, contributing to well-being and providing opportunities to access and participate in culture and the arts.

The Savoy is listed on the basis of being a rare surviving early provincial cinema with strong architectural quality in relation to its decorative front elevation. Internally it retains its plan form but with later interventions.

There are a few elements to this proposal, which have already been undertaken as part of the works to re-open the building and convert it for theatre use. These are an extension to provide dressing rooms, installation of a gate to the side, installation of removable bollards to the side driveway, installation of a ramp and handrail, insertion of a rear fire door and repair and restoration of the building's front façade.

The dressing room block utilises a former garage which has been converted and linked to the original building through a new structure in between. This provides three dressing rooms, a back of house WC, a store room and a further room. We have no record of the Savoy having been anything other than a cinema and therefore we assume it was built without any particular back of house facilities and that fitting them within the existing footprint would be problematic without interrupting original form and the layout and volume of the auditorium. Provision of dressing rooms is a necessary addition to allow this building to function as a theatre. Similarly, the addition of a rear fire door and ramp and handrail are also necessary additions to ensure the venue is accessible and that it has the right safety standards to operate.

Whilst no images appear to be available of the side or rear of the Savoy these tend to be less sensitive elevations which are necessarily utilitarian and therefore harm from new additions is minimised. The fact the Savoy is able to provide three dressing rooms is particularly important given its use by local amateur groups because this is the minimum needed for safeguarding purposes where performances may include children and young people. The Savoy had been vacant for a prolonged period prior to being returned to use. Theatre represents one of limited potentially viable and compatible uses for this heritage asset. Therefore the public benefits of positive active use without need to alter plan form and its sensitive front elevation also justify the need for this extension and mitigates any harm that arises.

Repair and restoration of the front façade is also included within these applications. There does not appear to be a proposed plan/elevation drawing provided, but in principle this would be supported because it will help conserve this important heritage asset into the future and again

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help provide the theatre with the additional functionality it needs to successfully operate. The addition of signage and lighting for example will help improve prominence, although it will be important to ensure that this is sensitively designed and applied. It appears that some or all of these works have yet to be carried out.

We have no objections to the installation of bollards and retention of the external workshop/shed.

Subject to the clarifications we have set out we would be supportive of the retrospective granting of planning permission and listed building consent.

Theatres Trust is a source of advice for theatres, we can provide assistance and guidance to the applicant should they require it.

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

Tom Clarke MRTPI
National Planning Adviser

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