

Ref.: TC/1242

9 February 2024

Viv Pearson  
Planning  
Warrington Borough Council

By e-mail: devcontrol@warrington.gov.uk

**Application:** 2023/01487/LBC

**Site:** Pyramid Arts Centre, Warrington, WA1 1BL

**Proposal:** Internal remodelling and external renovations to the Pyramid Arts Centre building. External works include replacement of existing cladding, replacement of existing flat roof finishes, and a new double door and loading platform to the rear of the Exhibition Hall (Museum Street facade).

#### **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 for listed building consent has come to the attention of Theatres Trust because it is seeking to undertake internal and external alterations to the Pyramid Arts Centre. There is a corresponding application for planning permission to which we have responded under separate cover.

#### **Theatres Trust**

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL

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**Chair** Dave Moutrey OBE

**Director** Jon Morgan

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

The Pyramid Arts Centre opened in 2002, utilising the Grade II listed County Court building and neighbouring former Inland Revenue office with a modern extension. It is an important arts and cultural venue for Warrington and its wider catchment, providing a 200-seat studio theatre, a large exhibition hall, dance studios and meeting rooms. It sits within the Palmyra Square Conservation Area.

The external works covered by this application includes like-for-like replacement of Kalwall cladding in order to provide better thermal performance and arrest damage from water ingress, and replacement of flat roof finishes. These centre on modern elements of the building and does not therefore create negative impacts on historic fabric or the wider setting and significance of the conservation area. There will also be a new door to the rear of the exhibition hall in order to make loading and removal more efficient, improving function and flexibility.

There will be infilling of a high-level window to the east wall of the exhibition hall to allow for acoustic lining to be installed which is improving acoustic separation between the Arts Centre's venues. We consider this intervention to constitute less than substantial harm, mitigated through reversibility and improvement of the venue's function which is a public benefit.

Internally, there will be a number of interventions.

Within the Studio Theatre will be a new full-height wall lining for acoustic separation, with existing half-height panels removed. Whilst this results in some visual impact due to the windows to the north and west elevations being overlaid internally this is a reversible change and will enhance the theatre's function.

There will be infilling of an existing lightwell void between the McCarty Room and Postlethwaite Studio which will become a store. This will similarly be lined with panels for acoustic separation as currently there is particular bleed between these two spaces. There will furthermore be an acoustic lobby to each of these rooms within the upper circulation space. Whilst elements of these works generate less than substantial harm in heritage terms, we consider this to be justified through the benefits of improving the function of these spaces and making them more attractive to users and hirers. Ultimately, this will assist with the venue's overall viability and ongoing conservation.

At the basement level the existing commercial kitchen will be stripped out with the space sub-divided to provide a store and a green room, and a 'dumb waiter' installed to serve the café above.

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At the ground floor there is currently a large toilet block directly serving the exhibition hall. This will be altered and sub-divided to provide a chair store, two dressing rooms and three retained WCs. This will improve the hall's flexibility and make it more conducive to meeting the needs of live acts. At the opposite end of the hall the existing store will be converted to five WCs. The overall shortfall is addressed through further WCs to the ground floor and mezzanine level above created through an infill. This results in a net gain of WCs which is welcomed and supported, as is provision of a Changing Places facility which will help enhance the venue's inclusivity.

As a general comment we suggest that an opportunity might be being missed to provide a dedicated dressing room to the studio theatre. There is already a large green room on the ground floor and a further one is being provided within the basement. Part of the ground floor green room could therefore be given over to dressing rooms, and the WCs serving this area appear to be of ample space to include a shower room. This would improve provision for performers and make the venue more attractive to producers.

In conclusion, we are supportive of these works. They will result in improved facilities and operational benefits for the Arts Centre whilst not harming the special character of the more sensitive former County Court or detracting from the character and significance of the wider conservation area. With reference to paragraph 208 of the NPPF (2023) we consider that where there is generation of less than substantial harm this is mitigated through the scheme's public benefits as described.

We therefore support the granting of listed building consent.

Please contact us should you wish to discuss these comments in further detail.



Tom Clarke MRTPI  
National Planning Adviser

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