

Ref.: TC/915

04 March 2024

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Planning Department
Riverside
4 Canning Road
Lowestoft
NR33 0EQ

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

Application: DC/23/4537/RG3

Site: Battery Green Car Park And Surrounding Land Marina Road Lowestoft Suffolk NR32 1HA

Proposal: Part demolition of the existing Battery Green car park and northern wing of the Marina Centre building, realignment of Marina road, the erection of a new circulation core in the retained car park area. Change of use of partially retained car park to competitive leisure use New cultural building consisting of single and two storey elements, containing multi use hall, lobby, cafe, studio spaces, plant areas, restaurant and first floor multi use space. Externally providing new soft and hard landscaping with external lighting scheme to create new linkages and new public realm

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'.

Theatres Trust

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL

Telephone 020 7836 8591 **Email** info@theatrestrust.org.uk **Website** theatrestrust.org.uk **Twitter** @TheatresTrust

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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 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

Comment:

Thank you for consulting Theatres Trust on this application for planning permission at the Battery Green car park site. We have been notified because the development includes a building currently utilised by the Marina Theatre for its box office, café/bar, community room and back of house functions and is directly linked to the original Marina Theatre building. The southern end of the site is directly adjacent to Players Theatre. Furthermore, the proposed development includes provision of a new live performance venue.

This project is part of a wider successful Towns Fund bid, with this element to deliver a 'Cultural Quarter' to support and expand the town's creative sector and cultural and leisure offer, alongside enhanced public realm. The site currently consists of car parking and 'The Marina' building which houses Council functions and an effective extension to the Marina Theatre. The site is allocated for development of this nature through the Local Plan. Subject to retention of the Marina Theatre element and the ability of both the Marina Theatre and Players Theatre to expand and develop in line with their respective aspirations, we are supportive of the principle of development.

The most critical element for the Marina Theatre is the redevelopment of the Marina building. The rotunda and southern element are being retained but the northern wing will be demolished. The theatre operates from the rotunda and part of the southern block, and the proposed plans show that this area is outside the scope of the application. The proposed layout would not compromise the Marina Theatre's own ambitions, which have been subject to a separate planning application on which we commented in 2023. Therefore we have no objection particularly in light of the opportunities created as discussed subsequently. However, it is vital that the theatre can continue to operate and that if there is a need for temporary displacement from the Marina building during demolition and construction works that alternative suitable accommodation is provided in the interim.

In terms of public realm works, there will be a new public square in the space between the Marina Theatre, the remaining Marina building and the proposed new building. This will extend to London Road North and Battery Green Road. This will include tactile paving, planting, outdoor seating and cycle parking. This will improve and activate the area, better enabling existing and future uses to spill onto the outdoor space. An enhanced environment will help draw people into the area. Therefore this element of the project is supported.

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At the southern end of the scheme will be a widening of the road at the Battery Green Road junction. This will improve service access for large vehicles visiting the Marina Theatre. This is also welcomed. It is regretful the public realm scheme stops just short of the Players Theatre at this stage, although future extension to better integrate the theatre into the cultural quarter remains possible.

The largest element of the proposal is a new mixed-use leisure scheme to partially replace the existing car park. This will contain a restaurant, café, creative studios/rehearsal spaces, and a large flexible community/events/performance hall.

The proposed flexible venue has an indicative seated capacity of 286, and it is to be assumed much greater for standing events. It is stated that it can be sub-divided dependent on the needs of individual events or hirers.

We would strongly encourage that there is a realistic business plan for the proposed new venue so that in terms of performance and live events its place in the local market is understood, and that its indicative programme would complement rather than compete with existing venues in the area. It is to be assumed that live events will form a substantial part of its purpose because it is quite well equipped in terms of dressing rooms, and has a large backstage area.

In principle we can support delivery of this space, subject to its role and purpose being understood, because potentially it can add to the strength and diversity of the local cultural offer and provide a different type of facility to those already present. However, we have some general comments which will help improve its design and function and ensure it meets the needs of users.

There does not appear to be a back of house accessible WC; any wheelchair users would have to utilise the audience facility which does not constitute best practice particularly for a new-build development. There is also a shortage of WCs. Under minimum standards set out in the Technical Standards for Places of Entertainment there should be at least eight female WCs whereas the plans show just six. More would be required if capacities exceed the indicative seated total of 286. Provision of male facilities meets the minimum level, but there could be a shortfall for higher capacities. This should similarly be addressed. However, these matters can be addressed at a subsequent stage of design and do not impact our overall advice.

In conclusion we are generally supportive of these proposals, subject to the safeguards outlined for the Marina Theatre. We therefore conditionally support the granting of planning permission.

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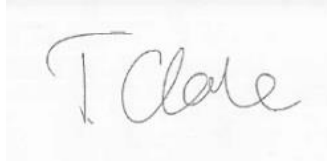
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Please contact us if we may be of further assistance or should you wish to discuss this representation in greater detail.



Tom Clarke MRTPI
National Planning Adviser

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