

Ref.: TC/1431

15 November 2024

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Development Management
London Borough of Tower Hamlets
Mulberry Place
Clove Crescent
E14 2BG

By e-mail: development.control@towerhamlets.gov.uk

Application: PA/24/01317/A1

Site: 490 Commercial Road, London, E1 0HX

Proposal: Listed Building Consent for demolition of two-storey ancillary block to the rear of the Troxy building and construction of a seven-storey plus mezzanine hotel (C1 Use Class) and ancillary accommodation for Troxy with associated cycle parking, roof plant, hard landscaping and access; and refurbishment of the existing Troxy building and adjoining former Brewery Tap (Sui Generis) comprising i.) External works: Refurbishment of faience façade and glazing; repair and restoration of original canopy; reinstatement of glazed and leaded timber doors to Ground Floor front entrance; installation of rooftop PV array; repair and extension of existing chimney to rear; and repair and reinstatement of external façade and signage of the adjoining Brewery Tap. ii.) Phased Internal works: Reinstatement of double-height foyer and mezzanine; repair of original ceilings; installation of new lift in lightwell; installation of plant in basement; and general internal refurbishment works on ground floor of to former Brewery Tap

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

Theatres Trust

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Trustees Vicky Browning OBE, Anna Collins, James Dacre, Suba Das, Liam Evans-Ford, Stephanie Hall, Annie Hampson, Tracy Ann Oberman, Lucy Osborne, Saratha Rajeswaran, Truda Spruyt, Michèle Taylor MBE, Katie Town

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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 been brought to the attention of Theatres Trust by the applicant because it is seeking to undertake development, alteration and restoration at the Troxy. We have provided comments on the corresponding application for planning permission under separate cover. We have been engaged in these plans from an early stage, providing pre-application comments parts of which have been included within the applicant's submission.

The Troxy is a Grade II listed heritage asset and is also within the York Square Conservation Area. It was built as both a cinema and a theatre, opening in 1933, and was designed by renowned architect George Coles. It was one of the largest in the UK, seating around 3,520 people. It was built around the Brewery Tap pub which occupies the north-east corner of the site. Internally it is decorated in an Art Deco style.

It was well-equipped for live theatre, with a large stage featuring a triple-revolve stage with double central revolve, fly tower, orchestra pit with lift, eleven dressing rooms and a large workshop. It also had a Wurlitzer organ. Its front of house provision included a café/restaurant to the circle foyer. Although a successful venue in its earlier years it suffered from post-war population decline and clearance of damaged and slum accommodation within its vicinity. It closed in 1960 for three years until it was taken on by the Royal Opera House and renamed the London Opera Centre. They utilised the large stage for rehearsals as it replicated the Opera House stage. The rear stalls area was used for the construction of scenery. Occasional public performances were undertaken. The Opera House vacated in 1990 and the Troxy became a bingo hall with full volume reinstated. This ceased in 2006 and the Troxy briefly became a banqueting hall. This was unsuccessful and reopened as a performance venue in 2008. A Wurlitzer displaced from the Coronet in Elephant and Castle was installed in 2010 allowing recitals to be reinstated. Occasional cinema showings have also returned.

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The Troxy has become an important larger-scale music venue for London which also hosts other events such as clubnights, conferences and award ceremonies. The wider project, elements of which have already been completed, will help reinforce its role, enable it to host a broader range of productions and events, and further reinstate historic features and function.

This application covers a number of works. There is to be significant development to the rear of the building entailing demolition of the current back of house extension and construction of a seven-storey building adjoining the Troxy which will be used for short-stay accommodation. There will be external repairs and restorations including installing new signage and the installation of PV panels to the roof. Internally, the foyer will be altered to reinstate the original full-height volume by removing later insertions, reinstatement of the mezzanine area, installation of a lift to improve accessibility, and general alteration and re-purposing of back of house spaces. Additionally the ground floor pub area of the Brewery Tap is being brought back to use as a café and community venue.

General external repairs and restorations

Repairs to faience cladding and glazing is welcomed because this will help conserve the Troxy into the future. We also welcome reinstatement of the original canopy and glazed entrance door design, and replacement of later signage with new signage informed by historic design. These constitute heritage benefits which will enhance the character of the Troxy and make a positive contribution to its setting. The addition of new lighting will help showcase this during hours of darkness.

To the Pitsea and Caroline Street elevations there is to be repair or replacement of Crittall-style windows. For enhanced sustainability and to preserve as much historic fabric as possible we urge retention and repair as a first priority and for replacement to take place only if necessary.

Addition of PV panels to the roof

We welcome the installation of PV panels to the roof. Paragraph 164 of the NPPF gives significant weight to supporting energy efficiency and low-carbon

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improvements including through installation of panels. This will help enhance the Troxy's environmental sustainability, and is a reversible change.

Refurbishment of foyer and reinstatement of volume

Historic images show the original grandeur and volume of the entry foyer. Significance and function has been diminished through later insertions, firstly to create a rehearsal space during the opera years and later to install a front desk during the bingo era. Some works to the foyer have already been undertaken, with original marble flooring design having been uncovered as part of the earlier phase of work and the desk removed to improve audience flow. These works will remove the mezzanine floor and reinstate the full-height space with large Crittall windows providing light, and plasterwork will be repaired or replicated. This provides a significant heritage benefit, as well as an operational one because the revised mezzanine with bar will be a more attractive space for audiences and give better potential for private hires.

Installation of a lift within a current lightwell

Furthermore, a light well accessed from the foyer area will provide a lift making upper levels accessible. This constitutes a significant public benefit and will enhance the Troxy's inclusivity. With reference to paragraph 208 of the NPPF we consider this mitigates the low level of less than substantial harm arising from loss of fabric.

Return to use of the Brewery Tap

The pub historically has been independently owned. It is not referenced within the list description for the Troxy but can in any case be considered as a non-designated heritage asset. It was closed around 2012 and subsequently the upper levels were converted to residential use. The ground floor pub area has since been in brief unauthorised retail/commercial uses but has otherwise been vacant for some time. It is now within the control of the Troxy. The proposed use of the former pub as a café and community space is welcomed as this will bring it back into use for a purpose similar to its original function. This constitutes a heritage benefit, provides active frontage within the designated Limehouse district town centre and will further diversify the Troxy's offer and value as a cultural asset. This element is supported.

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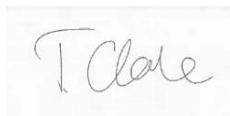
Redevelopment of rear block

This is a significant element of the proposals. The current rear block contains seven dressing rooms, stores, a workshop and other back of house services over two stories. It is a later addition to the rear of the Pitsea Street elevation, which itself is of typically utilitarian form and character which lacks the decorative significance of the front elevation. The extension is constructed in similar materials but is not itself of particular significance and has insensitive modern doorways and other equipment. Maintaining the Troxy's functionality notwithstanding, we have no objection in principle to its loss.

The purpose of the replacement building is to support and enhance the Troxy's facilities and function, and also provides to some extent a form of enabling development to support the wider venue restorations and refurbishments which form considerable heritage benefits. We have provided comment on how this will function within our corresponding comments on the associated application for planning permission. From a specific heritage perspective, we consider the new block to be sensitively designed which integrates well with the original Troxy and the site's wider setting. We therefore raise no objection to this element of the scheme on heritage grounds.

In conclusion, we are supportive of the granting of listed building consent.

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



Tom Clarke MRTPI
National Planning Adviser

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