

Ref.: TC/1080

21 November 2024

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Application: 2024/1697/01/LBC

Site: Tyne Theatre And Opera House, 111 - 113 Westgate Road, Newcastle Upon Tyne, NE1 4AG

Proposal: Listed Building Application: Fixing of plaque to the elevation fronting Westgate Road, internal alterations to include restoration of the gallery tier, demolition of the later 1986 over-tiering and seating, restore original tier beneath the existing tiering, installation of Victorian style seating to increase by 147 total seating 344.

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'.

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 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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Comment:

This application for listed building consent has come to the attention of the Trust because it relates to works at Tyne Theatre and Opera House. It is seeking to undertake internal alterations within the auditorium's gallery and to install a local history plaque to the front elevation.

Tyne Theatre and Opera House is a Grade I listed heritage asset, one of very few purpose-built theatres across the UK to be designated at the highest level. The Theatres Trust database describes its auditorium as one of the finest of its date in Britain and structurally the same as when originally built in 1867. In 1919 it was converted into a cinema by the architectural practice of renowned theatre architect Frank Matcham but those works little altered the building; they just added a projection box in the upper circle and a projection screen onto the stage with a grid dividing partition to reduce heating requirements within the large stage house. Machinery and other significant features were concealed behind.

The cinema closed in 1974 and for a short time the building was vacant before being reopened as a theatre in 1977 by a local community group. In 1985 the theatre suffered a fire which destroyed the fly tower and subsequently the stage and machinery were damaged when the remaining standing wall collapsed in poor weather three weeks later. The stage house was quickly restored and re-opened eleven months later. The theatre came into the ownership of the council who in turn transferred it to a local trust. The theatre currently has a busy programme including high-profile comedians, speakers, live music and theatre. As well as being a heritage asset of great significance it is also an important part of Newcastle's cultural offer.

The installation of the plaque is supported. This element appears to be retrospective, having already been installed. There appears to be no reference to it within the Heritage Statement, however its purpose and scale is evident from the elevation diagram and the general nature of these plaques. As outlined above, this is a highly significant theatre associated with important persons of their time. The plaque provides some very brief historic context which will help educate and inform those passing by the building, enhancing appreciation.

Subject to funding there are various plans for restorations and enhancements at the theatre, for which we have been engaged. Site visits have been undertaken, most recently in late 2023. The theatre has already been successful in obtaining a grant from the North of Tyne Combined Authority towards works to its Grand Saloon. This

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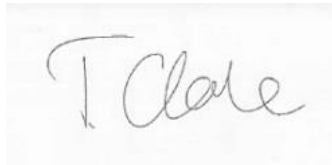
proposal would facilitate a separate project within the gallery tier to support a separate bid.

The need and rationale for this has been set out within the Heritage Statement, addressing previous unsuccessful alteration in 1986 which has prevented the theatre reaching its full potential in terms of audience capacity, comfort and its ability to attract the full range of shows it could potentially receive. In turn this reduces financial sustainability and conservation of this asset.

The original rake to the gallery will be restored and made good, thereby providing a heritage benefit. It would be beneficial for further details of replacement seating to be provided to confirm compatibility and sensitivity, but this can be managed by condition. The theatre is working with reputable consultants and there are illustrations within the Heritage Statement. We support the principle of this project.

On that basis, we can support the granting of listed building consent.

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



Tom Clarke MRTPI
National Planning Adviser

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