

Ref.: TC/321

14 May 2025

Graeme Hyde
East Lindsey District Council
Tedder Hall
Manby Park
Louth
Lincolnshire
LN11 8UP

Application: 02123/25/FUL

Site: Spilsby Theatre Church Street Spilsby Lincolnshire PE23 5DY

Proposal: Planning Permission - Part change of use and alterations to existing theatre and bar, which is a listed building, to provide community spaces, cafe, meeting room, offices, heritage display and outdoor seating area and construction of a vehicular access.

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 planning permission has been brought to the attention of Theatres Trust by the applicant. It is seeking to carry out development, alterations, restoration and refurbishment at Spilsby Theatre, as well as a change of use. This is

Theatres Trust

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL

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

X @TheatresTrust **Facebook** @theatres.trust **Instagram** @TheatresTrust

Chair Dave Moutrey OBE

CEO Joshua McTaggart

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

The Theatres Trust is the national advisory public body for theatres. The Theatres Trust Charitable Fund supports the work of The Theatres Trust, has the same Trustees and is registered as a charity under number 274697

to facilitate the building's return to use as a community arts venue supported by funding through the council from a successful Levelling-Up fund bid.

This building became Spilsby Theatre in 1984 following conversion of a former sessions house and gaol. It is Grade II listed, originally built in 1827. The auditorium is within the original courtroom. It was an important cultural and community asset serving Spilsby and its rural catchment, run by a local charitable trust providing various activities and events alongside a theatre and performance offer. However, the previous owner struggled with the costs of maintaining the building and the auditorium was closed on safety grounds in 2015 due to the roof becoming unsafe and at risk of collapse. Structural support was installed and whilst the auditorium was closed activities continued in other parts of the building. Those were further curtailed when a section of plaster ceiling collapsed in the bar two years later. All public activities subsequently ceased.

This is a priority case for Theatres Trust. The building was added to our national Theatres at Risk Register in 2015. A viability study undertaken in 2018 concluded there was demand and potential for Spilsby Theatre to be returned to use as a broader community facility with a programme of theatre, other live performance and cinema with community provision and workspace. A more recent economic impact assessment found such a project would generate an additional £500,000 per year in visitor spend to the area and £80,000 in additional employment. We consider the charitable group which is leading on this project to realise that vision to be credible and we are keen to see this important asset returned to active use. We are therefore supportive of this project and its objectives.

We have been engaged on plans for this building throughout their formulation and have provided support to the applicant. Various site visits have been undertaken, most recently in March 2025 prior to submission of this application.

This project and application has two core objectives. One is to deliver on the cultural and community potential of this building's offer, and the other in parallel is to save and secure the future conservation of this important heritage asset. This will include interventions to broaden the use of the building and to make it more accessible to its users. There is a corresponding application for listed building consent to which we have provided comment under separate cover.

There are a number of elements to this project, those pertinent to the planning permission are reviewed below. Additionally, internal alterations are covered in our comments on the listed building consent.

Theatres Trust

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL

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

X @TheatresTrust **Facebook** @theatres.trust **Instagram** @TheatresTrust

Chair Dave Moutrey OBE

CEO Joshua McTaggart

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

The Theatres Trust is the national advisory public body for theatres. The Theatres Trust Charitable Fund supports the work of The Theatres Trust, has the same Trustees and is registered as a charity under number 274697

Front forecourt and entrance

To the front of the building is a gravel area which has been used as informal car parking. This detracts from the significance of the building's impressive façade which features an imposing tetra-style portico. It is proposed that this area will be re-landscaped with self-binding hoggin which is a material sensitive to heritage whilst being suitable for use by pedestrians including those with accessibility needs, and for occasional vehicles (for example external food/drink sellers and other servicing). There will also be some new planting.

Additionally, new ramping and steps and a raised area will be installed alongside the portico steps making them accessible. This provides an opportunity to optimise the proposed front of house provision enabling it to utilise the front forecourt in good weather, and to provide direct access into the main auditorium. We consider this intervention to be sensitive and necessary to help support accessibility and inclusivity and to optimise the front of house offer which will be important in supporting the overall viability of the venue.

With the loss of parking, the needs of wheelchair parking spaces must be further considered. This could be addressed by way of seeking a dedicated on-street 'blue badge' space.

General repairs and restorations

As referenced above, the overall condition of the building is poor due to its vacancy in recent years and lack of maintenance and repair prior to that. This is particularly acute in certain areas. This includes cracking and corrosion, water damage, missing and damaged roof slates, broken and blocked guttering, broken and damaged windows and frames. Whilst some rectification has already been carried out following earlier funding there is need for further work to bring the building up to standard and to help safeguard and conserve it. We therefore welcome that these issues will be addressed, which again we consider to be undertaken in a sensitive manner with like-for-like repairs and replacements or utilising alternatives which are otherwise compatible with the building's character and significance.

With regards to roof works, there will be some minor alteration due to the slate porch roofs being reformed at a lower pitch and re-clad with lead to conceal air handling units and to alleviate previous issues with damp and water ingress. PV panels will be installed to the roof of the main auditorium. Whilst this creates some alteration to the overall level, we consider the impact to be limited. Efforts to improve energy efficiency and sustainability are to be welcomed, and paragraph 167 of the NPPF (2024) gives significant weight to such adaptations.

Theatres Trust

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL

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

X @TheatresTrust **Facebook** @theatres.trust **Instagram** @TheatresTrust

Chair Dave Moutrey OBE

CEO Joshua McTaggart

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

The Theatres Trust is the national advisory public body for theatres. The Theatres Trust Charitable Fund supports the work of The Theatres Trust, has the same Trustees and is registered as a charity under number 274697

The roofing above the WCs around the former cells towards the rear of the main building will be re-covered in a zinc batten roll rather than the current lead, the rationale is that this area is vulnerable to lead theft. We raise no objection to this change.

Some lead valleys will be widened, the visual impact of this is negligible but again is important in preventing previous issues around blockages and water ingress and will help future maintenance and conservation of this asset and help futureproof against additional rainfall associated with climate change.

Former exercise yard

This area, which was originally the exercise yard for prisoners just behind the former cells, became WCs for the theatre. It is covered by poor-quality corrugated sheeting. This will be replaced with glazing which will both provide more adequate cover but also in heritage terms provide a benefit by re-enabling natural light to reach the former cells. There will also be glazing to the access to the accessible WCs.

Outbuildings

To the rear of the main building are a number of outbuildings including a former garage and sheds which are either disused or have been used for storage. These are in generally poor condition, and on our site visit were observed to have suffered water ingress and infestation by pigeons. These will be repaired and made watertight, and again fittings beyond repair will be replaced on a like-for-like basis. Initially the garage will be used as a workshop and other buildings for storage but in future, should funding become available, they have the potential to be further adapted and re-purposed; ridge and eaves ventilation is being incorporated which future-proofs possibility of insulation. Paving around these areas will also be re-laid making it safer and more accessible. Given the condition of the outbuildings the proposed interventions are welcomed, as they will provide greater operational flexibility and help enhance setting.

Alongside those works, the application also seeks a change of use of this building which reflects its wider purpose and function beyond just theatre. This is supported, as its offer including an expanded front of house with all-day café/bar spilling into the forecourt, workspace and meeting rooms will provide a facility supporting the social and cultural wellbeing of local people. Return of theatre, live performance and a broader cultural offer will also help bring people into the town, supporting wider economic development. Those uses are compatible with the building's form and function, maintaining cultural and community use.

Theatres Trust

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL

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

X @TheatresTrust **Facebook** @theatres.trust **Instagram** @TheatresTrust

Chair Dave Moutrey OBE

CEO Joshua McTaggart

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

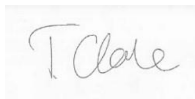
The Theatres Trust is the national advisory public body for theatres. The Theatres Trust Charitable Fund supports the work of The Theatres Trust, has the same Trustees and is registered as a charity under number 274697

Paragraph 98 of the NPPF seeks planning decisions to plan positively for facilities such as this. The proposal is in line with Strategic Policy 15 of the council's Core Strategy (2018) which seeks to widen the inland leisure economy and support where they extend and diversify the tourism and leisure economy, provide additional employment opportunities, provide opportunities for the enjoyment of the District's historic towns and are of a scale and intensity compatible with their surroundings.

This is an important project which will sensitively and compatibly re-purpose this important heritage, social and cultural asset for Spilsby. Being granted planning permission is a vital next step in safeguarding the funding which has been allocated for this project and allowing it to move forward.

We are supportive of the granting of planning permission.

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



Tom Clarke MRTPI

National Planning Advice Manager

Theatres Trust

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL

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

X @TheatresTrust **Facebook** @theatres.trust **Instagram** @TheatresTrust

Chair Dave Moutrey OBE

CEO Joshua McTaggart

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

The Theatres Trust is the national advisory public body for theatres. The Theatres Trust Charitable Fund supports the work of The Theatres Trust, has the same Trustees and is registered as a charity under number 274697