

Ref.: TC/1704

18 August 2025

Carlton Langford
Somerset Planning – East Team
Cannards Grove Road
Shepton Mallet
BA4 5BT

By e-mail: planningeast@somerset.gov.uk

Application: 2025/1193/FUL

Site: Memorial Theatre Complex Ltd Christchurch Street West Frome Somerset
BA11 1EB

Proposal: Internal alteration and extension to theatre foyer to increase accessibility and toilet provision

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 come to the attention of Theatres Trust because it is seeking to undertake internal and external alteration and extension at the Frome Memorial Theatre. We have not been formally notified despite this falling within our statutory remit outlined above.

Theatres Trust

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL

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

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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

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The Memorial Theatre originally opened in 1922 as the Memorial Hall, with a capacity of 800 across stalls and circle levels. In 1931 it was altered and renamed the Grand Cinema, predominantly operating as a cinema until 1984. After a prolonged period of around fifteen years it was reopened as the Memorial Theatre following significant refurbishment. The theatre has a busy and mixed programme, and is an important cultural facility for local people within Frome and its wider catchment. Paragraph 98 of the NPPF (2024) seeks planning decisions to plan positively for facilities of this nature. The theatre does not have statutory listing but can be considered a non-designated heritage asset and is within the Frome Conservation Area.

These plans focus on the area within and around the theatre's foyer and main entrance. To the front of the theatre (south-west elevation) there will be an extension either side to meet the building line of the existing entrance and canopy. Primarily this will enable provision of much-needed additional WCs, for which it is frequently a challenge for theatres (particularly older ones) to provide in sufficient amounts to meet the needs and expectations of audiences. It also facilitates some further internal rearrangement.

To the rear of the foyer block on the western side there will be a further minor side extension to provide a lift. This will give access to all levels of the building for the first time, making the first floor bar and the circle/balcony accessible. This is a considerable public benefit, and will enhance the theatre's inclusivity. This intervention is welcomed. From the floorplans it appears there may be a slight level change into the projector room; to make this area accessible for staff and other visitors we suggest options for addressing this could be considered either now or at a future point should additional funding become available. Potentially the steps could be ramped, or for a platform lift to be installed, subject to any constraints which might exist.

With regards to the accessible WC on the ground floor, the existing facility looks as though it has an awkward entry due to turning required and whilst the new position is improved it is still appears tight. We suggest another option might be to utilise the position of the relocated box office as an accessible WC, and the current accessible WC position could be used as a store as this is something else theatres often lack space for. Either the drinks or snacks kiosks could provide a box office function, assuming the need for physical ticket sales would diminish.

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Ideally there should be an accessible WC at all levels, however we recognise that current space is limited on the first and second floor. We suggest there might be scope for a future replica small extension the opposite side to the lift which could provide accessible WCs, again subject to future fundraising.

The matters we have raised for further thought and future development relate to internal functionality and meeting best standards, and do not impact on the matters under consideration within this planning application. We consider the proposed extensions and related works are sensitive to the character of this building. With reference to paragraph 216 of the NPPF this scheme offers demonstrable public benefits providing enhancements to this theatre as an important social and cultural facility and its accessibility and inclusivity.

We therefore support the granting of planning permission.

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



Tom Clarke MRTPI

National Planning Adviser

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