

Ref.: TC/278

20 August 2025

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

Application: FUL/354727/25

Site: Coliseum Theatre Fairbottom Street Oldham OL1 3SW

Proposal: External alterations including the creation of a new external frontage along Fairbottom Street, extension of plant deck at roof level, installation of external plant, access works, and other associated works incidental to the wider refurbishment works at the Oldham Coliseum Theatre

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

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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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Comment:

This application for planning permission has come to the attention of Theatres Trust because it is seeking to undertake internal and external alteration at the Coliseum, including minor extension. We have not been formally notified despite this falling within our statutory remit outlined above.

The Coliseum is an important theatre and cultural venue for Oldham which is highly valued by local people. It has been closed since March 2023 which has left Oldham without larger theatre provision, something of great concern to us. There have been previous plans for a replacement smaller theatre, although we have advocated for interim provision including options for retention of the Coliseum given that development may have been some time in the future. We welcome that the existing Coliseum is being retained and reopened, and support the principle of redecoration and alteration to facilitate that and to help address some of the venue's limitations. Paragraph 98 of the NPPF (2024) seeks planning decisions to plan positively for facilities of this nature.

The Coliseum was originally built in 1887 as a replacement for the earlier Meyer's New Grand American Circus. At the start it had a capacity of 3,000 but this was significantly reduced when the building was divided in the early 1900s. In 1931 it was converted into the Colosseum Super 'Talkie' Theatre. At that point a projection box was installed and the building was altered externally with its stage house demolished. That venture was short-lived, closing later that year with its fixtures and assets sold. It briefly re-opened, but then closed again until 1939 when it was taken on by the Oldham Repertory Club and returned to theatre use under its current name. The building was again altered in the 1960s with a fly tower reinstated in 1974. Despite its alterations the building retains 1930s character and internally it is described within our database of having a "charming auditorium with its traditional character and atmosphere". The building is not listed but can be considered a non-designated heritage asset.

There are a number of interventions proposed. At basement/sub-stage level there are very minor alterations, with a partition added to one staircase and some change to the layout of the other. At ground floor/stalls level there is to be opening up of a back of house entrance. The overall back of house layout appears similar to existing (many spaces aren't labelled on existing plans) but with some re-purposing, as well as an altered layout of the accessible dressing room and shower. Front of house, the WC located just within the main entrance below the stalls bar will be merged into part

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of the space of an existing WC providing a new or enlarged accessible WC, which is welcomed. Externally there will be new paving and entry into foyer will be extended to meet more modern standards. On the first floor there are new/relocated WCs serving the back of house with a net gain of a cubicle, and one of the dressing rooms has been enlarged by removing the WC which was within it. This improves and optimises facilities for performers and other staff, and there is also a new sloped access to back of house from the northern side. At second floor, there is some alteration to an office with partition removed. There is new external access onto an extended plant deck and redundant flues are being removed from the deck to the opposite side. There will be new roof access to the fly tower, enhancing access and safety for staff and other personnel carrying out maintenance, inspections and other such necessary tasks. Most of those works sit outside of necessity for planning permission, nonetheless they appear to be rational interventions which meet the overall objectives of improving the theatre's function and accessibility.

We believe there is further scope to even further enhance accessibility for example providing a front of house lift, however we acknowledge current constraints and that this is largely a refurbishment project. This might be further considered in future should the opportunity and funding arise. Similarly whilst bars and front of house spaces are being refurbished they remain small for the audience capacity and opportunities for future extension should be explored.

There will be some change to the building's footprint including a minor increase in height to facilitate re-roofing and insulation which both address deficiencies which have caused water ingress and other issues, and will provide the theatre with suitable insulation and energy efficiency. This is important in reducing operating costs and ensuring the future upkeep and conservation of this asset. To the rear of the theatre there is a small poor-quality lean-to WC block which is being removed, but as set out above there is to be alternative provision internally and a new back of house accessible WC will be delivered which further enhances inclusivity. External plant is being replaced to meet modern standards. With reference to paragraph 216 of the NPPF, whilst this generates some impact on significance we consider this to be very minor and there is mitigation in the benefits they generate in restoring and reinstating this theatre.

The frontage to Fairbottom Street is being refurbished and repainted with a new canopy and prominent signage. This better activates the theatre and improves its visibility, providing a stronger sense of arrival. We consider this element to constitute a heritage benefit, enhancing the character and setting and giving stronger identity

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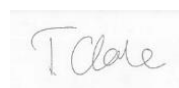
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as a theatre. Some consideration might be given to supplementing this with digital signage to more dynamically promote upcoming shows and events (this might already be the case as stills are shown on the visualisation).

Overall whilst there are some areas which might be further developed in future, this scheme has responded well to the Coliseum's more immediate opportunities and limitations. It is bringing this important and valued theatre back to active use, repairing and restoring the building.

We 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, and continue to engage with us should plans be revised.



Tom Clarke MRTPI

National Planning Adviser

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