

Ref.: TC/1404

9 January 2026

Somerset Planning – South Team
Brympton Way
Yeovil
BA20 2HT

By e-mail: Planning.South@somerset.gov.uk

Application: 25/02959/FUL

Site: Octagon Theatre Hendford Yeovil Somerset BA20 1UX

Proposal: Refurbishment and extensions to the Octagon Theatre. Improvements to the external areas with landscaping

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:

Thank you for consulting Theatres Trust on this application for planning permission at the Octagon Theatre in Yeovil. It seeks to extend and refurbish the theatre, in a revised scheme to that previously granted consent in 2023.

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 Octagon opened as the Johnson Hall in 1974. It was built as a multi-purpose event hall for concerts, exhibitions, dances, boxing and other such functions. It was renamed to the Octagon in 1985 and subsequently underwent works to install fixed tiered seating and an improved stage area so it could function effectively as a theatre. Our database notes the Octagon to be well-equipped with a wide stage, orchestra pit, excellent servicing arrangements and good back of house facilities. Architecturally it is quite plain with a functional exterior and interior. The building is set within an area of open space.

We are aware from our discussions with the theatre and its design team at the time of the previous scheme that although the theatre performs well there are opportunities to enhance its facilities and improve engagement with the communities that use it. As with many buildings of its age standards of accessibility fall below modern standards and expectations, as does its environmental efficiency. We welcome efforts to address this.

The previous scheme was to set to add an expanded front of house with two cinema screens, a dance studio, additional WCs and new lift access. Audience capacity of the main auditorium was to be increased. There were back of house refurbishments with additional dressing rooms and a more efficient get-in. Due to budgetary constraints this has had to be reviewed with the application scheme being less expansive.

This scheme retains a front of house extension, but it is of reduced scale and massing. The cinema screens, dance studio and main auditorium expansion have been removed, but is still an enhanced front of house café/bar offer with additional WCs, a new Changing Places facility (although the previous first floor facility has been lost) and lift access. There is some rearrangement of back of house spaces particularly around the dressing rooms. There continues to be upgrade to technical capabilities and to the building's efficiency and environmental sustainability.

Having reviewed the planned layout, we consider this scheme to be well-designed. The only point we would raise in terms of function is that there is extensive storage at ground floor level but there does not appear to be an obvious route between this and the café/bar above. We would suggest consideration of a goods lift or dumbwaiter in this area to provide a direct route and minimise need for movement of goods through public areas.

This scheme continues to support the venue's longer-term financial sustainability. Policy EP15 of the South Somerset Local Plan (2015) supports provision of new

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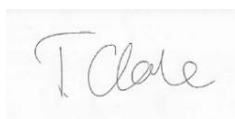
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facilities, which this scheme would deliver. Paragraph 98 of the NPPF (2024) seeks planning decisions to plan positively for facilities of this nature. We still consider the external design of this scheme to respond positively to its setting.

We again support 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 Manager

Theatres Trust

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