

Theatres fit for the **future**

Theatres
Trust

Ref.: TC/1839

29 January 2026

Mr Cameron Hurst
Development Management Section
PO Box 17
Corporation Street
Blackpool
FY1 1LZ

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

Application: 25/0910

Site: GRAND THEATRE, 33 CHURCH STREET, BLACKPOOL, FY1 1HT

Proposal: Alterations to the layout and re-seating of the Gallery including new handrails and amphitheatre barrier, opening up the side slips and introducing a follow-spot position in the centre of the rake with direct access off the corridor below.

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 listed building consent. It seeks to undertake alterations including re-seating and associated works within the Gallery at Blackpool Grand Theatre.

Theatres Trust

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL

Telephone 020 7836 8591 **Email** info@theatretrust.org.uk **Website** theatretrust.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 Grand is a Grade II* listed heritage asset within the Town Centre Conservation Area. It is considered one of the finest works of renowned theatre architect Frank Matcham. It is a valued cultural venue for Blackpool, hosting a busy programme which both meets the needs of local people as well as contributing to Blackpool's visitor offer. Paragraph 98 of the NPPF (2024) seeks planning decisions to plan positively for facilities of this nature.

Currently the Gallery level (the top tier) consists of bench seating. Whilst this is the original form of seating at that level, there have been various alterations over the years. They are now cushioned which wouldn't have been the case originally, and there have been different schemes of upholstering. We have on file a red cushion scheme around the turn of this century whereas they are currently blue. Positions and levels have also been altered through re-tiering and associated installation of handrails.

The comfort of the Gallery tier is sub-optimal for audiences and the handrails obstruct views towards the stage. It is only opened for sale for a relatively small number of shows where demand is greatest and audiences are willing to accept those constraints to be able to attend. The Grand is not alone in this respect; some other historic theatres have similar challenges and have sought to address them including Theatre Royal Newcastle which is shown as an example within the Heritage Statement. We therefore appreciate and understand the rationale for this project.

It is proposed that later tiering is removed, reinstating previous levels. The benches will be replaced by seating of similar type as installed throughout the rest of the auditorium. Currently there are ten rows whereas under the new scheme there will be five rows of seats with a partial sixth row along the rear. This will provide appropriate comfort and sightlines to make these seats attractive for audiences. Although this results in a decrease in capacity it improves the usability of the Gallery and will enable the theatre to generate greater income which will support its ongoing viability and conservation.

In heritage terms the loss of bench seating, which is the original format, generates less than substantial harm. However, with reference to paragraph 215 of the NPPF this must be balanced against the heritage and public benefits and mitigations of reinstating original tiering and sightlines, improving usage of the Gallery, reinstating the side slips as an area of seating, and providing a better experience for audiences.

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The associated changes to facilitate this, including replacement handrails and safety barriers and the addition of a follow-spot position are also supported.

We therefore support the granting of listed building consent.

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



Tom Clarke MRTPI

National Planning Manager

Theatres Trust

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