

Ref.: TC/3098

13 March 2026

Samuel Walker
Planning Services
Norwich City Council

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

Application: 26/00164/F

Site: Norwich Playhouse 42 - 58 St Georges Street Norwich NR3 1AB

Proposal: Refurbishment and extension of Norwich Playhouse.

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 Norwich Theatre Playhouse. It seeks to carry out alterations to improve the theatre's front of house facilities, construct a new bar and to partly refurbish the auditorium and back of house.

The Playhouse opened in 1995 following conversion of nineteenth century riverside maltings. Previously operated as a warehouse, builders merchant, restaurant and a pub, local theatre impresario Henry Burke purchased it and realised his vision of

Theatres Trust

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL

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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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converting it to a theatre. Much of the cost was privately funded. Architecturally the building is of red brick construction with a ground floor shopfront and first floor symmetrical sash windows to its front elevation. Its lower level contains surviving fragments of Norwich Hippodrome. The auditorium walls display brickwork which show evidence of previous alterations. Theatres Trust's database describes this as an "extremely effective performance space". The main building can be considered a non-designated heritage asset and sits within the City Conservation Area, although the bar is a later construction dating from the conversion works and is of lesser significance.

The Playhouse has a mixed programme including theatre productions, comedy and talks. It has a capacity of just over 300, complementing the larger offer of Theatre Royal. It plays an important role as part of Norwich's strong cultural offer and range of venues, which both contribute to the social and cultural well-being of local people and helps attract visitors into the city. As well as the theatre itself, the Playhouse's bar is a popular venue providing an all-day offer. Income helps support the core arts and cultural offer, but importantly it also helps broaden engagement with the theatre. Paragraph 98 of the NPPF (2024) seeks planning decisions to plan positively for facilities such as this.

The need and rationale for this project is understood. It appears that such is the popularity of the bar that it detracts from the experience of audiences, who at particularly busy times encounter congestion and increased serving times. Therefore there is merit in expanding provision. The theatre itself is now thirty years old, and requires a degree of renewal to bring it up to modern standards.

This proposal constitutes a significant development and expansion of the theatre, with a particular focus on the bar building which will be redeveloped. The design and massing is such that the bar building moves from being clearly subservient to being of slightly greater profile than the main theatre. We consider the design and materiality to be sensitive to the original theatre building and its wider setting, being in the style of traditional maltings. There will also be a larger and more defined link between the two, more clearly articulating the two elements. This provides an opportunity to give enhanced prominence and visibility to the theatre, achieved through integrating bold lettering and integrated show signage.

Internally the function and layout of the auditorium and back of house areas are unchanged, although there will be general refurbishment. The bar building expansion facilitates alterations to the foyer and front of house which will improve the theatre's

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facilities. In particular there will be a substantial uplift in provision of WCs achieved through rearrangement of circulation, with installation of a new lift. This improves accessibility and inclusivity. The first floor offices and meeting spaces will be rearranged, and the upper level of the bar will be a flexible event space. This could be used for a number of functions, and will further improve the theatre's offer and opportunities to generate income.

Further to these works will be renewal of heating and ventilation, which should improve efficiency, as well as general building repairs and replacement.

We welcome this investment into the Playhouse and the development and expansion of its facilities. We anticipate this will help sustain this important theatre into the future.

We support the granting of planning permission.

Please continue to engage with us should plans further evolve.

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



Tom Clarke MRTPI

National Planning Manager

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