

Ref.: TC/2079

23 April 2026

Megan Harris
Planning Applications Team
Thanet District Council
PO Box 9
Cecil Street
Margate
CT9 1XZ

Application: F/TH/26/0260

Site: Theatre Royal Addington Street Margate Kent CT9 1PW

Proposal: Demolition of existing lean-to structure and erection of two storey side extension, installation of plant equipment and solar panels to roof, refurbishment of windows, facades and features and associated repair works.

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. It seeks to construct an extension to Theatre Royal Margate along with installation of new plant and PV panels to its roof along with general refurbishment and repairs to

Theatres Trust

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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, Louisa Harris, Mark Johnston, Adam Knight, Tracy Ann Oberman MBE, Lucy Osborne, Saratha Rajeswaran, Michèle Taylor MBE, Katie Town

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its exterior. This forms part of the project to reopen this theatre. We have also been consulted on the corresponding application for listed building consent, to which we have submitted comments under separate cover.

Theatre Royal is a priority case for Theatres Trust, with the building having been on our Theatres at Risk Register for some time. It is also on Historic England's Heritage At Risk Register. It is a Grade II* listed designated heritage asset; it is the last remaining theatre with design intact by noted architect J.T. Robinson who was the employer and father-in-law of renowned theatre architect Frank Matcham and surveyor to the then Lord Chamberlain. It was originally built in 1787 and remodelled in 1874 with an auditorium compared to that of the same architect's 1871 design for the Old Vic in London but on a smaller scale. It has two horseshoe balconies supported by slender iron columns along the line of their fronts. With the exception of some very brief periods Theatre Royal remained in active theatre use until 1963 when it became a bingo hall. Even during that period there were occasional plays. It was later taken on by the Margate Theatre Royal Trust and reopened in 1988 as a 'members only' theatre club. In 1998 it returned to being a fully public theatre.

It is the country's second oldest operational theatre but has been closed since April 2022 prior to refurbishments being undertaken. The building was added to our Theatres at Risk Register in 2018 due to its fragile condition which requires capital investment along with essential maintenance and repair work.

We are keen to see its return to active use, and have been engaging with the council for some time. We have been consulted on pre-application proposals and undertook a site visit in July 2025. We welcome further progression of these plans, which will provide positive cultural, heritage and economic benefits for Margate and its wider catchment. Policy SP10 of the Thanet Local Plan (2020) seeks to support the continued regeneration and development of Margate as a contemporary seaside resort. Bringing Theatre Royal back to use will contribute towards that objective. Paragraph 98 of the NPPF (2024) seeks planning decisions to plan positively for facilities such as this.

This project has an aspiration to develop the adjacent building, 19 Hawley Square, for studios, artist accommodation and other functions complementary to the main theatre building. Plans for that building were included within pre-application engagement. Whilst there remains an ambition to bring such development forward, it

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is not included within this application which is focused only on the original theatre building.

In terms of this application there are three core elements; the demolition of the ground floor 'lean-to' structure to the middle of the Hawley Square (southern) elevation to be replaced by a two-storey extension, the installation of new plant equipment and PV panels to the roof, and external repairs and refurbishments. We will deal with these in turn.

Demolition of lean-to and construction of extension

Whilst the lean-to structure dates from Robinson's remodelling, formed by infilling what was a front garden with a pitched roof between the boundary wall and stage wall to provide dressing rooms and back of house accommodation, this element is of little significance. It was altered externally in the 1930s when it was rendered and lost its windows, and has been extensively altered internally. The principle of its redevelopment is therefore supported.

The extension enables provision of facilities important for the operation, function and inclusivity of the theatre, in particular an accessible dressing room and a lift. This constitutes a substantial public benefit. We note the design of the extension has evolved having reflected on the advice of consultees and stakeholders in pre-application discussions. We are supportive of the proposed approach, considering the extension to respond positively to the main original building and its wider setting within the conservation area. It is subservient to the front of house block and is consistent with the height of the adjoining back of house area. Policy CM01 of the Local Plan seeks to permit extensions to existing community facilities subject to various conditions which we consider this proposal to be consistent with.

Installation of plant equipment and PV panels to the roof

It is common for plant, air handling and other such mechanical infrastructure to be located on top of theatres. These are installations necessary for the theatre's operation. They are largely shielded from public view, thereby minimising impact on the setting and significance of the host building as a heritage asset and the wider conservation area. We therefore raise no objection to this.

With regards to PV panels, these will be located towards the eastern end above the original building. Again they are shielded from view. Paragraph 161 of the NPPF seeks the planning system to support a transition to net zero by 2050 and to and

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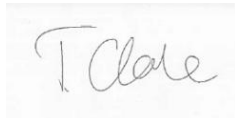
support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure. Paragraph 167 gives significant weight to supporting energy efficiency including through installation of heat pumps and solar panels. Whilst this application includes solar panels, it is noted there is an aspiration for future installation of heat pumps. Both the proposed addition of PV panels and potential future heat pumps are supported.

External refurbishment and repair

These interventions are necessary to support the return to use of the theatre, and to ensure its ongoing conservation. Repair and restoration will be on a like-for-like basis utilising compatible materials. This is supported.

We welcome further progression of efforts to invest in and reopen this important theatre. We consider these proposals to be sensitively designed and necessary to ensure the building meets the needs of modern audiences and shows. 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 in greater detail.



Tom Clarke MRTPI

National Planning Manager

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