

Ref.: TC/1074

8 May 2026

Morgan Cheung
Pending Applications
Development Planning
City of Westminster
PO Box 732
Redhill
RH1 9FL

By e-mail: southplanningteam@westminster.gov.uk

Application: 26/02142/LBC

Site: 49 Aldwych London WC2B 4DF

Proposal: Upgrades and enhancements to the existing Fly Tower, including alterations to the external fabric of the Fly Tower structure at The Aldwych 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'.

Comment:

Thank you for consulting Theatres Trust on this application for listed building consent, which seeks upwards extension of the fly tower at Aldwych Theatre along

Theatres Trust

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL

Telephone 020 7836 8591 **Email** info@theatrestrust.org.uk **Website** theatrestrust.org.uk

X @TheatresTrust **Facebook** @theatres.trust **Instagram** @TheatresTrust

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

The Theatres Trust is the national advisory public body for theatres. The Theatres Trust Charitable Fund supports the work of The Theatres Trust, has the same Trustees and is registered as a charity under number 274697

with internal alteration to facilitate a replacement grid and machinery to increase loading capacity. We have also provided comment on the corresponding application for planning permission under separate cover. We have been engaged in pre-application plans for this development and undertook a site visit whilst the scheme was in its early stages.

The Aldwych is a Grade II listed designated heritage asset which opened in 1905, designed by renowned theatre architect W.G. Sprague. Architecturally it features a fine stone-faced classical façade built on a corner plot as a symmetrical twin to the Novello Theatre (formerly the Strand Theatre) with the slightly later Waldorf Hotel sitting between them. It features three major bays each of four storeys plus a sheer attic over the main entablature. The two outer bays, facing Aldwych and Drury Lane respectively, display a giant order of engaged columns through second and third floors, carrying pediments with enriched tympana pierced by lunettes at attic level. The centre bay is recessed and turns the corner as a bold pilastered bow. Internally it saw alteration within the auditorium between the 1960s and 1980s but has since been restored to Sprague's original design. The Aldwych is a notable venue within London's West End 'Theatreland' cluster which hosts high-profile productions. It therefore makes a significant contribution to this area's offer and attractiveness which attracts high numbers of visitors into the city.

Nonetheless, as is common with older theatres there are deficiencies which mean the Aldwych is finding itself unable to meet the needs of modern shows and producers. This application seeks to address the theatre's lack of loading capacity within the flytower, meaning it is currently constrained in what shows can be accepted. In the longer term this is not sustainable and will compromise the theatre's viability. Other historic theatres both within the West End and elsewhere around the UK have sought to address this issue in recent years. We know the current grid capacity at the Aldwych to be significantly below that of other West End theatres.

It is proposed that the height of the fly tower will be increased to enable internal upgrade of the grid and flying system. This will bring the Aldwych's loading into line with comparative theatres and will additionally also provide for safer working conditions.

In terms of the removal of the current grid and pulley systems along with associated supporting infrastructure such as ladders and walkways, some elements are original for which loss generates what we consider to be a moderate level of less than

Theatres Trust

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL

Telephone 020 7836 8591 **Email** info@theatrestrust.org.uk **Website** theatrestrust.org.uk

X @TheatresTrust **Facebook** @theatres.trust **Instagram** @TheatresTrust

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

substantial harm. However, the need to increase loading to maintain the theatre's operation and future conservation is in our view a sufficient public benefit to justify this change.

Furthermore, from the limited images available it appears the pulley system is not original. We have taken some further specialist advice on this; it appears the pulleys are modern based on their welded construction with plain bearings and are part of what seems to be a standard counterweight system. On that basis, as a whole the grid and related infrastructure would not be considered to be of particular significance or rarity. Indeed, the Aldwych does not feature in a backstage survey compiled by the Association of British Theatre Technicians (ABTT) with Theatres Trust in 2009. That guide is considered an authoritative list of items of historically important technical material in existing theatres throughout the UK. However, further detail and images would help conclusively demonstrate a lack of significance.

Assuming this equipment is not of significance as we believe to be the case, we would raise no objection to its removal and replacement particularly as along with the public benefits cited above there are additional benefits in improving safety and working conditions. Even if it was ascertained the system was in fact of historic significance, in our opinion this would impact only the extent to which recording should take place as we consider the project itself to be necessary. We would suggest retention of elements in situ if practical, or to relocation for display elsewhere.

To facilitate the replacement grid and flying the height of the fly tower must be increased, therefore a new structure and replacement lantern will be built up over the existing fly tower and lantern to ensure the building remains watertight and operational during this phase of works. The existing walls will remain and will support the replacement roof and structures. Then existing roof and lantern will subsequently be removed. The new structure will increase the height of the fly tower by around six metres. Whilst materials will be modern, they will match existing brickwork and tone. We support the proposed design approach, and again we consider the development to be necessary to support the theatre's operation as outlined above.

Alongside this will be a mansard roof extension to the third floor above the rear Tavistock Steet elevation which will provide additional dressing rooms. Again, this supports the theatre's function and is supported. It will reduce the impact of the extended fly tower by providing more of a step-up from the existing roof line.

Theatres Trust

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL

Telephone 020 7836 8591 **Email** info@theatrestrust.org.uk **Website** theatrestrust.org.uk

X @TheatresTrust **Facebook** @theatres.trust **Instagram** @TheatresTrust

Chair Dave Moutrey OBE

CEO Joshua McTaggart

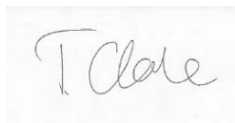
Trustees Vicky Browning OBE, Anna Collins, James Dacre, Liam Evans-Ford, Stephanie Hall, Annie Hampson OBE, Louisa Harris, Mark Johnston, Adam Knight, Tracy Ann Oberman MBE, Lucy Osborne, Saratha Rajeswaran, Michèle Taylor MBE, Katie Town

Theatres fit for the **future**

Associated with that are new internal openings to provide a stair link, as well as a new opening between store rooms along that side of the building. Again we consider that the operational benefits satisfactorily mitigate harm, which is at the lower end of less than substantial.

On the assumption that our information is correct in that the stage machinery is not of particular significance, we are supportive of the granting of listed building consent.

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

Theatres Trust

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL

Telephone 020 7836 8591 **Email** info@theatrestrust.org.uk **Website** theatrestrust.org.uk

X @TheatresTrust **Facebook** @theatres.trust **Instagram** @TheatresTrust

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

The Theatres Trust is the national advisory public body for theatres. The Theatres Trust Charitable Fund supports the work of The Theatres Trust, has the same Trustees and is registered as a charity under number 274697