

Ref.: TC/357

22 May 2026

Development Control  
Powys County Council  
The Gwalia  
Ithon Road  
Llandrindod  
Wells  
LD1 6AA

By e-mail: [planning.services@powys.gov.uk](mailto:planning.services@powys.gov.uk)

**Application:** 26/0190/FUL & 26/0186/LBC

**Site:** Wyeside Arts Centre Castle Street Builth Wells LD2 3BN

**Proposal:** Erection of rear storey extension and internal reconfiguration

## **Remit:**

Theatres Trust is the National Advisory Body for Theatres and was established by The Theatres Trust Act 1976 'to promote the better protection of theatres'. Theatres Trust is a statutory consultee in the planning system and local planning authorities in Wales are required to consult Theatres Trust on planning applications for '*development involving any land on which there is a theatre*', '*residential development within 50 metres of a theatre*' as well as for proposed theatres. The definition of theatres within the Act defines a theatre as 'any building or part of a building constructed wholly or mainly for the public performance of plays', and therefore applies to theatres, playhouses, arts centres, ciné-varieties or buildings converted for theatre use, old and new, in other uses or disused.

## **Theatres Trust**

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL

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**CEO** Joshua McTaggart

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## **Comment:**

These applications for planning permission and listed building consent have come to the attention of Theatres Trust because they seek to carry out development at Wyeseide Arts Centre, with an extension and internal alteration to expand and enhance the venue's offer and support its future sustainability.

Wyeseide Arts Centre is a highly-valued cultural venue serving Bulth Wells and its wider catchment. It provides a programme of theatre, cinema, comedy, live music, talks and other events alongside an art gallery, classes and community space. It is within a Grade II listed former Market Hall and Assembly Rooms which date from 1877, converted to the current use in 1976. The venue is charitably run.

Whilst a popular venue held in high regard by its users, in common with older buildings there are opportunities for improvement. For example, levels of accessibility fall short of modern standards and there is a need for general upgrade and refurbishment of the building's infrastructure. The proposed extension and alterations respond to these challenges and will expand Wyeseide's offer through increasing the audience capacity of the Market Theatre, providing an additional cinema screen, expanding front of house provision and improving accessibility. Alongside this there will be a general opening-up of the building to provide a more active frontage with increased prominence and visibility to make it more welcoming, improvement of acoustics and soundproofing, upgrades of heating and lighting. These principles are supported and welcomed.

## Theatre

The theatre currently has 158 seats within a single block of retractable seating. To make the venue more attractive to touring shows, which would diversify the theatre's programme and increase engagement with local audiences, it is proposed that the capacity is increased to 216 seats across pit, stalls and gallery. This will be achieved through replacing the current retractable seating with fixed seating. This rearrangement, along with wider internal alterations across this part of the building to revise access and function, will significantly improve audience flow and provide relocated and additional wheelchair places. These better reflect modern standards, for example there is a wider choice of places and there will be better movement into and through the auditorium including lift access which is welcomed. For even better standards of accessibility and inclusivity, we suggest the whole row (or at least further seats) at street level could be made into potential wheelchair places. With the

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first four rows (pit seating) being flat floor it should be ensured that sightlines are assessed.

Improved accessibility also applies to the back of house, where there will be an accessible dressing room with shower room. Enhanced accessibility and inclusivity both front and back of house constitutes a significant public benefit. In heritage terms the theatre has already been significantly altered through the conversion works in the 1970s and has been further altered and refurbished since. The existing retractable seating block is a modern insertion of no significance. Whilst the addition of new openings generates some harm, this is considered to be necessary to support the venue's function and the wider improvements and benefits cited above.

To back of house, alongside enhanced and refurbished dressing rooms the get-in (for delivery and removal of sets and equipment) will be improved. The existing doorway will be bricked up and instead the doorway into what was previously the Tank Room will be utilised. Once inside the building there is currently limited space, but there will be a new opening between the new and old get-in to expand this function and provide a second wing dock. This is supported.

## Front of house/Cinema

The main entrance to the Wyeside is currently to the western end of the southern elevation. This is a relatively narrow and constrained means of entry, leading into the box office and bar/foyer which is interrupted by remaining parts of wall from the previous shops. This sits behind the arches along the front (southern) elevation which have been bricked up with modern windows inserted into non-original brickwork. The bar/foyer, which is small in size considering it serves all functions which could include both the theatre and cinema at full capacity, leads into the theatre via non-original stairs and across to the art gallery and meeting rooms. From the main entrance is a lift directly to the side (which doesn't meet modern standards) and a staircase which leads upstairs to the cinema, general WCs and a staff office and downstairs to further WCs including the accessible WC. The downstairs route also leads across to the dressing rooms and back of house, although that route is convoluted. Cinema users requiring the accessible WC must travel down from the upper level cinema to the basement level; this is an inadequate solution by modern standards.

Access into the venue and user experience once inside would be transformed through these plans. The original arches along the front elevation will be reinstated,

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with metal framed glazing installed. This will open up the frontage, providing views into the foyer which makes it much more inviting and welcoming and will provide a statement to passers-by that this venue is open to visit. The central doorway will be reinstated as the main entrance; this is also more prominent and is of greater width which will improve access and egress. What was previously the gallery will become a relocated bar and separate box office, with seating within what was the previous bar and foyer. The existing lift will be removed with a new lift (which meets modern compliance) installed at the back of what was the gallery opening onto the main entrance foyer.

To meet best practice there should be an accessible WC at all levels. The ground/street level does not have one even though the main café/bar is at that level. We suggest there might be an opportunity to provide one in the location of the office along the rear of the bar next to the lift. To provide greater space in that area, consideration might also be given as to whether a box office is required and whether ticket sales function could be fulfilled at the bar. The basement WCs are being upgraded; the location of the male and female blocks is being swapped which gives an additional female cubicle including a baby change and an ambulant unit. The basement accessible WC is also being relocated and upgraded in footprint. The upper level WC locations are similarly being shifted, this again gives an extra female cubicle and a further accessible WC. This increase in provision is much-needed, particularly given the increased capacity of the theatre. Furthermore, a Changing Places facility and a family room are being provided which again supports accessibility and inclusivity.

The existing cinema is being sub-divided. This will provide greater flexibility and choice in programming, again this will help increase engagement with the venue and expand the town's offer.

The upper-level rear extension to the northern side of the building will provide a new multi-function 'assembly' room with external terrace. This mitigates loss of the existing gallery space, the function of which can be accommodated either within the new assembly room or elsewhere in the building. This space with its outlook over the river and hills beyond would be an attractive space for functions and hirers, supporting diversification of the Wyeside's income generation.

Whilst we have raised some matters related to internal function for further consideration to help optimise this scheme, these are not material to the

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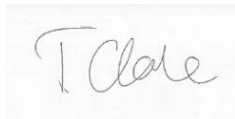
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determination of this application and can be addressed by the applicant as the scheme progresses. We welcome this development and the investment being made into the venue and its offer.

We therefore support the granting of planning permission and 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

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