

Ref.: TC/1954

29 May 2026

Emma Fibbens
Planning Applications Team
Thanet District Council
PO Box 9
Cecil Street
Margate
CT9 1XZ

Application: F/TH/26/0411

Site: Winter Gardens Fort Crescent Margate Kent CT9 1HX

Proposal: Change of use of Winter Gardens from theatre to mixed use incorporating theatre, drama school, nursery, restaurant/bar and cafe (sui generis use), together with erection of two storey rear extension to north elevation with roof terrace, and access from upper promenade level (including lobby extension and external staircases); erection of single-storey front extension to south elevation; erection of single storey detached office building to north; alterations to fenestration and refurbishment works; and hard and soft landscaping and associated works, including new steps and ramps to north, plant equipment, parking, boundary treatment, and partial demolition of existing structures.

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'.

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

Comment:

Thank you for consulting Theatres Trust on this application for planning permission at Margate Winter Gardens. It seeks to undertake various internal and external alterations with extensions to facilitate the refurbishment and return to use of the venue. We have also been consulted on the corresponding application for listed building consent to which we have responded under separate cover.

The Winter Gardens have been closed since August 2022 when its previous operator withdrew, although its programme post-opening after the lockdowns of 2020 and 2021 was infrequent. The complex is a Grade II listed designated heritage asset within the Margate Conservation Area. It is a significant venue for Margate and one we are keen to see restored and reopened. We undertook a site visit in July 2025.

We welcome progression of plans for this venue, 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 and bringing the Winter Gardens back to use and enhancing its offer will contribute towards that objective. Paragraph 98 of the NPPF (2024) seeks planning decisions to plan positively for facilities such as this.

With regards to the change of use, the Winter Gardens already has different spaces and effectively functioned more broadly than purely as a theatre. This scheme maintains its existing venues – the Main Hall and Queen’s Hall – but will complement this with further compatible uses and functions. Therefore this is not a loss of a cultural facility, but a strengthening of it. By broadening the building’s use and increasing engagement throughout the day and evening its future operation and viability will be supported. We therefore support the change of use.

There are new extensions either side of the building (north and south) to provide a new restaurant/bar/café and a nursery respectively.

The restaurant/bar/café will have an outlook over the seafront which will make this an attractive proposition and help draw people towards this area. It will also provide an active frontage and increase the prominence of the Winter Gardens on the lower promenade. We concur with comments in the application documents with regards to this being of improved design compared to the pre-application scheme. We consider this element to be sensitively designed.

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

The nursery is to an extent concealed within the gardens, particularly given its green roof which will soften its impact when viewed from above (Fort Crescent). We broadly approve of the design of this extension, although suggest there is scope for some refinement. We consider the double doors and window could be articulated better, perhaps through an inset with two equal vertical openings for synchronisation. It also isn't clear what the materiality of this section is – on the drawing it looks like it could be rendered – as it is not labelled whereas other materials are. We note the steps from Fort Crescent lead down to the nursery, it will need to be ensured there is sufficient and clear signage and wayfinding to avoid users of the rest of the complex going down and into the nursery.

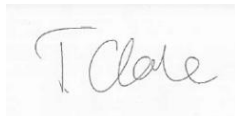
The proposed office space is free-standing off to the side of the venue, we have no objection in terms of impact on setting or principle of use and this would appear to be in any case an easily reversible installation.

We welcome there will be general repair and refurbishment of this asset.

Although we have raised some points for further consideration, these are not material to determination of the application and can be addressed at subsequent stages of design.

We 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

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