Theatres fit for the **future**

Theatres Trust

Ref.: TC/2325

10 November 2026

Development Management
Wakefield One
PO Box 700
Wakefield
WF1 2EB

By e-mail: dmsplanning@wakefield.gov.uk

Application: 26/01906/FUL

Site: Theatre Royal And Opera House Drury Lane Wakefield WF1 2TE

Proposal: Refurbishment of the theatre, including partial demolition, and the addition of a new second floor extension to the West Wing to provide new back-of-house facilities, an accessible entrance, a new accessible lift and stairs, and a new accessible scene dock. Demolition of existing ancillary spaces at the north end of the site and the addition of an enlarged rooftop plant space. External alterations include the addition of smoke vents to the existing roof, new smoke vents to the northern elevation and window replacements. Partial demolition of internal walls and floors, a new bar area, increased WC provision, a new dressing room, and a new studio. Alterations to the auditorium flooring rake, new seating, rearrangement of services and technical equipment, plaster repairs and redecoration of existing interior.

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

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Comment:

Thank you for consulting Theatres Trust on this application for planning permission at Theatre Royal Wakefield. It seeks to undertake alteration, extension and refurbishment partly facilitated through demolition of later additions. We provided the applicant with comments at pre-application stage and participated in a site visit and meeting in February 2026.

Theatre Royal is a Grade II* listed heritage asset, the smallest of the surviving theatres designed by renowned architect Frank Matcham. It is within the Westgate Conservation Area. There has been a theatre at this site since the 1770s, the current building was constructed in 1894. Although films had already been shown for many years, in 1955 it became a dedicated cinema with a projection box constructed at gallery level. From the mid-1960s until the 1980s it was a bingo hall. Theatre Royal was restored as an active theatre in 1986, at which point various internal and external alterations were undertaken including construction of a dressing room block to the rear, excavation to the front of the stalls to create an orchestra pit, installation of a counterweight system, removal of the cinema-era projection box and re-raking of the stalls and circle. Further refurbishments occurred in 1995 and 2002 which enabled redecoration, re-seating and new ventilation. A more significant capital project completed in 2018 added a modern side extension providing foyer/café space and a studio.

Theatre Royal is an important historic, cultural and social asset for Wakefield, with a mixed programme and youth and community outreach programmes. We welcome efforts to further invest in this theatre to enhance its facilities and support its ongoing operation and conservation. Policy HC4.1a of the NPPF (2026) gives substantial weight to the benefits of new and improved facilities.

Despite the theatre's success, in common with other historic venues there remain challenges and deficiencies which need to be addressed to meet the needs of audiences, performers and staff and support continued operation into the future. This was articulated and appreciated in our pre-application discussions and is outlined further within the applicant's submission. This includes a need for general maintenance and repair of the building, addressing issues such as water ingress, poor ventilation, inadequate thermal performance, repair of plasterwork and renewal of technical infrastructure. Moreover, the venue requires better accessibility to improve inclusivity and the experience of audiences. The building does not function efficiently due to its layout. This project seeks to address those issues.

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Since the scheme presented to us in early 2026 the proposed plans have evolved with a number of changes compared to those commented on previously.

At basement level there is some alteration to layout with additional sub-division within the workshop to create stores and a laundry room. This will benefit the venue operationally. This area is considered not to contribute to the building's special interest so with reference to Policy HE5.2 of the NPPF has no effect on significance in heritage terms.

A ground floor level, within the 'butcher's shop' there is a revised WC layout which will provide a much-needed increase of two additional female WCs, two new urinals within the men's block and an accessible WC. A lack of WCs is always a challenge with older venues so this will help improve the experience of audience members by reducing queueing. There is a new ramped entry into this area. Partitions are being removed which makes this area more coherent and will help it function better. Whilst the 'shop' provides some interest externally, internally it dates from the interventions of the 1980s so again is not of significance. As such, these alterations provide significant operational and public benefit whilst having no effect on heritage significance.

Within the foyer a non-original pillar is being removed which removes an obstruction and makes the area more open. Floor levels are being lowered/levelled. This area is of high significance but we are supportive of alteration because in considering Policy HE6.4 of the NPPF there is substantial public benefit arising from improving accessibility.

To the back of house, the current scene dock is also a modern element which is of little significance. There will be upwards extension of this block for much-needed expansion of facilities. The scene dock is being relocated to the location of the current dressing rooms which provides for more efficient get-in/get-out. It enables the addition of a lift, again making much more of the theatre accessible including the new/altered elements within this block. The current dressing room area is of little or no significance. This intervention therefore provides substantial operational and public benefit whilst having no effect on significance.

To the first floor, there will be a further addition of WCs by adding two unisex units and an accessible WC. The second floor of the new block provides additional dressing rooms, an accessible WC and accessible shower, and a new rehearsal studio. Again, this represents a significant increase in the theatre's facilities and

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provision.

To the roof areas will be new and upgraded plant and air handling. This will address one of the key deficiencies of poor ventilation and climate control, and also provide for greater sustainability and energy efficiency. We welcome the installation of air source heat pumps; Policy CC2.2 of the NPPF gives substantial weight to improving energy efficiency of existing buildings.

We are supportive of the design approach for the redeveloped back of house block and altered 'shop'. We consider the replacement back of house block to positively respond to the materiality and character of the historic element and its wider setting. It also helps enhance the theatre's prominence with new signage.

We welcome this project and consider that the proposed plans successfully meet the design brief.

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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