

Operational Management Statement

**125 Shaftesbury Avenue
London WC2H 8AD**

This statement is provided to support the application for the temporary change of use of first, second, third, fourth and ninth floors of the office building located at 125 Shaftesbury Avenue, London WC2H 8AD as leisure/entertainment (sui generis) use.

The document sets out the operational arrangements that would take place at the site between 1st September 2024 and 30th September 2025.

1. Background

The proposals seek to temporarily use the 1st to 4th and 9th floors of this partially vacant building for leisure/entertainment (sui generis) use. Much of the building was vacated in July 2023 although there are active ground floor uses.

. The site will be coming forward for redevelopment in the near future; however, in the meantime it is proposed to use these vacant floors for theatre purposes (*Sui Generis*).

The facility will be operated by the You Me Bum Bum Train Theatre Company (YMBBT Productions Limited) for a time-limited temporary period which will raise funds for their partner charity Raise Your Hands.

2. Who Are We

You Me Bum Bum Train (YMBBT) is a not-for-profit arts project, recognised as a leader in innovative theatre, which seeks to engage non-traditional theatre audiences and build confidence and skills in a community of volunteers who build and run the show.

YMBBTs a not-for-profit, community project which seeks out properties in transition and transforms them into hubs of artistic creativity. YMBBT helps bring people together from across different backgrounds, locations, and walks of life to form communities by providing opportunities, workshops, and training in various fields such as set building, acting, prop-making, scenic arts and event production.

It specialises in producing theatre shows in disused buildings which have not previously been used as arts spaces. Rather than being rooted around one stage, full buildings are used so that different scenes can be provided in different rooms.

Audience members are participants known as Passengers. The show content is kept secret with all participants, volunteers and press signing an agreement not to speak about what will happen. This means that each experience is totally unexpected for the Passenger, encouraging them to act on instinct in the moment, which helps them to discover new sides of themselves in a safe and supportive environment.

The last show which took place in the Foyles building in Manette Street in 2015/16 received wide critical acclaim, including five 5 star reviews from the national press and won awards including The Evening Standard Theatre Award and the Oxford Samuel Beckett Theatre Award.

The show sells out very quickly and we auction our hard-to-get tickets to raise funds for our partner charity Raise Your Hands (RYH). RYH exists to increase the impact of exceptional small charities to transform lives, and uses cutting edge immersive experiences as a key means of fundraising.

3. The Site

The site is located at 125 Shaftesbury Avenue, London WC2H 8AD.

125 Shaftesbury Avenue is an existing Ground + 9 storey building, with additional car park basement level and external plant spaces; located at the borders of Soho and Covent Garden, central London. It is bound by Charing Cross Road to the west, Shaftesbury Avenue to the south, Stacey Street to the east and Phoenix Street to the north. It is listed on the Title Registry as 84 to 102 (even) Charing Cross Road, 24 Cambridge Circus and 115 to 129 (odd) Shaftesbury Avenue, London.

It is situated within walking distance of Leicester Square, Covent Garden and Tottenham Court Road underground stations and has the highest possible PTAL rating, 6B.

4. Proposals

Tickets would be sold through the YMBBT website and there would be no box office on-site. Purchasers would be sent an e-ticket which they would present to front of house staff at 125 Shaftesbury Avenue within the building upon their arrival.

The experience is intentionally kept below the radar, with no online information, limited marketing and is spread by word of mouth. Once available the tickets sell out in minutes.

Members of the public would be allocated an individual time slot and travel around the production alone. They would only be able to purchase a maximum of 2 tickets per household, and each show night would have a maximum of 75 audience members, as each slot is staggered with 3 minute intervals. This means that unlike traditional theatres a large number of people would not arrive or leave at the same time and cause queuing outside the building.

The Passengers would have their QR code tickets checked by SIA registered security and be shown to the lifts, before entering the show. Any guests arriving without a ticket would not be admitted to the building and would not be able to purchase one.

Audiences experience YMBBT in a controlled way from the moment they arrive at their allotted time, to how they are funnelled through each scenario with the show meticulously timed and stage managed throughout the experience. Audience members and staff would arrive and leave via the main egress to the building on Shaftesbury Avenue.

The main production would be on the following floors: Ground (ingress & egress only), First, Second, Third, Fourth and bespoke sets would be created on these floors for the show, the final scene would be located on the Ninth floor.

Audience members are moved seamlessly from one scene to the next by our staff so that a carefully managed and timed flow is possible.

At the end of the experience on the Ninth floor, Passengers are provided with the opportunity to purchase refreshments and to spend some time decompressing from the experience and recounting their experiences before they then leave. By allowing this time for decompression after the experience, the customers leaving the venue exhibit better standards of behaviour than may occur in other entertainment venues and assists with customer management when persons leave the premises.

Typically, the participation in the show would take between one to two hours to complete, including briefing and decompression time.

5. Operational Timing

The proposed timeline is as follows:

July 2024	Secure planning permission and announce show
August 2024	Public ticket ballot
August 2024	Set prep and pre-build begins
September 2024	Set build begins
October 2024	Rehearsals start
November 2024	Show Run 1 begins
midDecember 2024	Christmas break
endDecember 2024	Show Run 2 begins
endSeptember 2025	Show ends
end September 2025	Derig and remove sets/vacate building

It is envisaged that performances would take place between 6.00pm-11:30pm, four days a week (usually Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday).

The final scene where guests process their experience and meet the preceding Passengers in an ancillary bar area would be provided on the Ninth floor of the building. This would be open until 1am on show nights only. This would only be open to audience members and performers. It would provide no right of admission to members of the general public. It would be curtained off and would be positioned in a part of the building adjacent to the Odeon and away from any nearby residential neighbours.

During the construction period, deliveries of materials and props would be made to the existing loading bay on Phoenix Street between the hours of 08:00 and 18:00. Given the town centre nature of the site's location, the use of appropriately sized vehicles would be employed as required.

6. Capacity

The number of Passengers is restricted to 75 per show night because of the nature of the production where they travel through the show individually.

The show would have a core staff of approximately 60 professional production & design crew, plus volunteer cast

This is significantly less than would be using the space if it were office building usage.

7. Transport & Servicing

Given the proximity of the site to a number of underground stations and bus stops it has an excellent PTAL rating of 6B. It is therefore envisaged that audience members and performers would arrive at the site via public transport. Car parking would not be provided.

It is considered that there would be no material impact on the existing highway network.

Cycle parking for staff members is available within the demise of the building.

Cycle parking for visitors is available in an existing cycle parking area on Stacey Street.

Lifts already exist within the structure, both for customers and goods depending on the area. This provides ready access.

Given the model of operation, it is anticipated that little would be required in terms of servicing, apart from the occasional delivery of replacement props or stock and disposal of items from the bar scene. Existing service and delivery arrangements for the building in this scenario would be operated, although it is anticipated that this requirement would be significantly less than the previous office use.

There are a large number of modern and accessible WC facilities located on each floor which could be used for the production.

9. Design Proposals

No changes are currently proposed to the exterior of the building. Should any external alterations be required in the future then these would be the subject of a separate application, as required. A separate advertising consent application will be submitted for an exterior sign on Shaftesbury Avenue.

There are no proposed changes to the supporting structure of the building and all of the sets within it are capable of being removed.

As the sets are primarily static and, unlike a theatre, are not regularly changed, there is little infrastructure that would need to be brought into the building once the initial set design is in place.

We work with SafetyGeeks, a globally recognised process safety company, that provides Health & Safety, Environmental Management and Licensing Consultancy for all of our shows.

We ensure that the venue is secure at all times and is regularly patrolled. Our security guards are SIA certified and will ensure that the passengers are not drunk/under the influence on their arrival. Any bad behaviour will result in passengers being turned away from the premises.

We carry out detailed Risk Assessments, COSHH Assessments and Fire Safety Management Plans and provide training to staff members to ensure compliance with safety rules, guidelines and procedures.

8. Waste Strategy

Given that the use of the building revolves around the provision of an experience rather than a physical item, it is anticipated that there would be little waste generation. That which does arise is likely to be from the refreshment area, which can be more than accommodated through the existing arrangements for waste disposal.

9. Accessibility

The existing building has excellent disabled access with step free access to all floors via multiple elevators and we will endeavour to make as many scenes of the show accessible to all comers as possible. In the past we have hosted special nights for palliative care patients and nominated exceptional people and have been able to adapt the show journeys to meet a variety of access needs.

There are a large number of modern and accessible WC facilities located on each floor which would be used for the proposed development. The quantity already within the property is more than sufficient for the numbers of audience planned.

10. Neighbours and Local Engagement Strategy

We are engaging with all nearby commercial and residential neighbours via a letter drop before taking occupation of the building and are happy to meet with any who have concerns so that they are addressed immediately. We will have a dedicated email address and telephone number for community members to contact us at any time before and during the production.

We have already engaged with local community groups including the Covent Garden Community Association and The Phoenix Gardens Association.

Once we are casting and training volunteers we will be engaging with local organisations and educational establishments such as University of London, The Roundhouse, Slade School of Fine Art, Central School of Speech & Drama and Camden People's Theatre to see if they would like to get involved in the production.

No noise would be audible outside the building, as a key part of the show concept is that it remains a mystery to unsuspecting audience members. We have to ensure that sound cannot travel between adjacent scenes. It is also important that no details of the content are discoverable by the public, therefore both window covering and soundproofing are an essential part of this process.

We would also ensure that neighbours are not affected by any light pollution by ensuring that any areas of the building that would need to be lit after dusk will have blackout drapes covering the windows.

The proposed development would ensure the application site continues to be occupied and remains active, preventing any potential crime and disorder that is usually associated with vacant properties.

Overall, it is envisaged that the proposed temporary development would have a positive impact on the surrounding area and the neighbourhood.