

Ref.: TC/1097

12 December 2024

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Application: 2024/5072/L

Site: Ambassadors Theatre West Street London WC2H 9ND

Proposal: Creation of hospitality lounge and bar space in existing staff offices on second floor of Ambassadors 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:

Theatres Trust

[REDACTED]

Thank you for consulting Theatres Trust on this application for listed building consent at Ambassadors Theatre. It seeks internal alteration to convert back of house office space to a front of house bar and hospitality lounge.

There have been several applications for various interventions at the theatre over recent years associated with a programme of improvement for the venue. We have been engaged by the applicant at pre-application stage and have undertaken site visits.

Ambassadors Theatre is a Grade II listed heritage asset with a number of areas of significance referenced within Historic England's listing report. It was designed by prominent theatre architect W G R Sprague, who also designed the adjacent St Martin's Theatre on the opposite side of Tower Court, and at 375 seats was one of the smallest playhouses in the West End (and remains so). It sits within a particularly small and constrained site for a theatre; the stage and stalls are located entirely below ground level due to adhere to a right to light restriction at the time of construction. However, its compact design meant that only limited front and back of house facilities could be provided which have proved totally inadequate for the demands of modern audiences.

Recent works have addressed a number of issues, for example making the theatre accessible to wheelchair users for the first time, increasing the number of WCs and expanding bar provision. This project continues that by reviewing the use of the theatre's second floor level, currently used for offices and staff accommodation.

The area of the manager's office, adjacent staff desks and staff WC and kitchenette to the north-east end of the building will be altered with stud walls removed/relocated. This will be refitted to move the manager's office to the location of the current WC/kitchenette and shifting staff desks along. This will create greater space within the staff office area.

The rest of the second floor level curving round to the southern end contains a duty manager's office, locker room and staff room. Much of the outer part of this area will have its partitions/stud walls removed and then converted to a single space to provide a front of house 'Ambassador Lounge' with a small service counter and seating. This is an additional bar which can be utilised for hospitality and hires – for example opening nights. It will be served by a WC, which effectively replaces the one lost within the staff office area.

The inner part of this area will be used for the staff area including a kitchenette. Whilst this is reduced in scale, it is a more efficient use of space and there are some

Theatres Trust

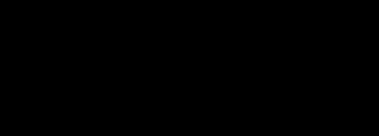
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benefits. For example, currently the kitchen opens directly to the staff WC which does not constitute best practice.

Although the theatre is historically significant with a number of internal features of interest, the area subject to this application is generally of lesser architectural and decorative significance. This area has been previously altered, for example the stud walls were later additions. Part of this level was originally designed as a bar, therefore some historic function is being reinstated. There will be loss of two historic walls and a chimney breast, however with reference to paragraph 208 of the NPPF (2023) we consider the less than substantial harm this generates is mitigated by the public benefits of improving the theatre's facilities and offer to audiences, further addressing its shortfall in bar provision. This also ultimately contributes to the theatre's ongoing conservation. There will also be retention and relocation of a cast iron fire surround, which is welcomed.

We therefore support 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 Adviser