



London Borough of Camden Design Review Panel

Report of Formal Review Meeting: 135-149 Shaftesbury Avenue

Friday 28 February 2025

Camden Council, 5 Pancras Square, London N1C 4AC

Panel

Hari Phillips (chair)

Neil Davidson

Amber Fahey

Anna Liu

Fred Pilbrow

Attendees

Laura Dorbeck	London Borough of Camden
Neil McDonald	London Borough of Camden
Nabiha Qadir	London Borough of Camden
Tom Bolton	Frame Projects
Deborah Denner	Frame Projects
Bonnie Russell	Frame Projects

Apologies / report copied to

Bethany Cullen	London Borough of Camden
Collette Hatton	London Borough of Camden
Holly Hayward	London Borough of Camden
Victoria Hinton	London Borough of Camden
Edward Jarvis	London Borough of Camden
Daniel Pope	London Borough of Camden

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1. Project name and site address

The former Saville Theatre, 135-149 Shaftesbury Avenue, London WC2H 8AH

2. Presenting team

Amit Doshi	SPPARC
Trevor Morriss	SPPARC
Gareth Fox	Montagu Evans
Louisa Smith	Montagu Evans
Chris Ray	Yoo Capital
Andrew Thorpe	Yoo Capital
Mark Wilkinson	Hoare Lea

3. Planning authority briefing

The existing building is part-five, part-six storeys in height, with a double-storey basement. Most recently, it has been used as a cinema, but is now vacant. The building was originally constructed as the Saville Theatre in 1929-30 by the architect Bertie Crewe, incorporating work by the sculptor Gilbert Bayes, and is Grade II listed.

The building has a strong rectangular form fronting four streets: New Compton Street to the north, St Giles Passage to the east, Stacey Street to the west, and Shaftesbury Avenue to the south. It is a steel-framed building, clad in red-brown brick. There is an artificial stone plinth and frieze to the front called Drama Through the Ages, which makes a significant contribution to the building's significance, advertising the entertainment use within.

The site is not located in a conservation area, but sits between the Seven Dials Conservation Area to the south, and the Denmark Street Conservation Area to the north. There are no listed buildings immediately adjoining the site, although there are several in the vicinity. These include the Grade II-listed Phoenix Theatre at 110 Charing Cross Road, 50 metres to the north-west. To the north of the site is the Phoenix Garden public open space, a designated Local Site of Nature Conservation Importance.

The current scheme was first presented to the panel in November 2023. The applicant proposes a five-storey roof extension, and six levels of basement. The roof extension will incorporate a hotel with approximately 200 rooms, and the basement will deliver a theatre with a flexible capacity.

Officers asked for the panel's comments, in particular, on the detailed design of the roof extension, including architecture, form, materials, and plant area; the proposals to increase the depth of the basement; and on how well the applicant has addressed the panel's previous comments.



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4. Design Review Panel's views

Summary

The panel is encouraged by positive responses to a number of its previous comments, but remains concerned that other issues remain unresolved, including the project's embodied carbon intensity, impact on the Phoenix Garden, deliverability, and risk of damage to the listed building.

The panel supports bringing the building back into theatre use, and accepts that this may require redevelopment on the scale proposed. The roof extension is now in better proportion to the listed building, and could be an exciting addition. However, the double-skin design will create high embodied and operational carbon. The panel asks for a more work to achieve a thermally efficient building envelope, using low embodied carbon materials and construction. Lowering the roof extension by a storey is a positive decision, and improves the visual impact on the Phoenix Garden. However, it will still partly overshadow the open space. The applicant should demonstrate the nature of this impact, and whether it can be mitigated.

The panel remains concerned about the carbon impact of the proposed basement extension, which is now deeper than previously proposed. The project presents a technical challenge, and evidence is needed to show that both the basement and roof extension can be delivered without damaging the listed building.

The panel ask for more information on how the scheme will improve the public realm on Shaftesbury Avenue and generate more activation on New Compton Street, for example with a more generous hotel entrance. A planted balcony level would be beneficial. Hotel corridors should be naturally lit wherever possible. Negotiations with Transport for London and a construction management strategy will be essential.

Overall approach

- At the previous design review meeting, the panel was not convinced that extending the listed theatre building both upwards and downwards was a justifiable strategy. However, it now considers that, in principle, this approach could be acceptable if it represents the only option to bring the building back into use as a theatre.
- There is significant public benefit in providing a high-quality theatre with a long-term future in a Theatreland location.
- The panel is pleased that an adaptable theatre space is proposed, with a range of possible configurations to support future use. It also supports the flexible design approach to the wider building, including the incorporation of 'soft spots' to allow future adaptation, including increasing the size of stairs and lifts.
- Measures providing long-term flexibility are essential if the theatre is to have a functional life beyond the proposed Cirque de Soleil lease.



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- The panel emphasises the need to show that the extensive remodelling proposed can be delivered without damage to the fabric of the listed building.
- It asks for evidence to demonstrate how both the basement, extending beyond the walls of the existing building, and the roof extension can be successfully constructed. Full information should be provided to reassure Camden officers that the proposals are deliverable.

Roof extension

- The panel welcomes the reduction made in the height of the proposed roof extension since the previous review. It thinks that this improves the proportion of the extension in relation to the listed building below, helping to create a clearer, more sympathetic relationship between the two.
- The panel thinks the integrated green roof, extended since the last review meeting, is a positive addition. It also supports the inclusion of permeable paving, which will contribute to the ecology and drainage strategies, and encourages the inclusion of rainwater harvesting.
- The panel thinks that the overall design of the roof extension has also improved since the last review. It now appears more restrained and less monolithic, in comparison with the previous proposal.
- The extension is potentially exciting, with architectural drama suited to the building's entertainment use. The concept of wrapping a curtain around the upper floors also relates well to the theatre below.
- However, while the panel understands the use of brick to relate to the historic building, it is still concerned about the carbon intensity of the roof extension.
- At the previous review, it asked for a range of material options to demonstrate that the double-skin façade is the best approach in terms of carbon impact.
- This information has not been presented, and the double-skin extension will create high embodied and operational carbon. The panel would like to see the project driven by more rigorous thinking about low carbon materials and construction, and the thermal efficiency of the building envelope.
- It is essential that the extension is of an exceptional architectural quality, to match the quality of composition and form in the existing listed building.
- The design of the roof extension is complex. Evidence is needed to demonstrate how the quality presented will be delivered in the completed structure. Design detail is needed to show how it will be constructed, and maintained in the long term.



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- The panel also notes that placing a brick screen in front of the hotel windows reduces the potential for views, and potentially the quality of rooms. The applicant should demonstrate the visual impact of the brick screen from within the rooms.
- The panel suggests that the raised corner of the brick curtain above the existing fly-tower could be scaled back. While the bulge in the curtain above the main entrance works well, the panel thinks the rear of the building should be quieter and more recessive by comparison. A less fragmented approach to the massing could bring more coherence to the northern elevation. A smaller bulge could be used instead to indicate the hotel entrance.

The Phoenix Garden

- The panel notes that, despite the reduction in height, the roof extension will still overshadow the Phoenix Garden. It is important that the qualitative impact on an important but vulnerable open space is fully understood.
- The panel thinks that the proposals could only be acceptable if the applicant can show how the building would act as a good neighbour to the Phoenix Garden.
- Detailed thinking is required, in discussion with the Phoenix Garden charity, about mitigating the negative impact of the proposals on the space.
- At the last review, the panel asked for evidence of the building's impact on the planting in the garden, and on the viability of the green roof of the Phoenix Garden Community Centre, which is still needed. These effects should be measured, and discussions held to determine whether they could be mitigated with support from the applicant.

Theatre

- At the previous review the panel requested a full survey of the listed fabric to inform a judgement on the balance between any harm to the building and the public benefit of the proposals. This information is still needed to demonstrate exactly what will be retained and what will be removed. This should include information on whole life carbon impact.
- The panel's previous comments on the carbon impact of the basement have not been addressed. The proposed basement is now two storeys deeper, and this is likely to increase the project's overall carbon impact. The applicant should demonstrate the overall carbon impact of this, and explain the measures taken to mitigate it.
- The panel also thinks that more work is needed to ensure the theatre has a civic presence at ground-floor level.



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- For example, the proposed spiral staircase could provide a dramatic portal to a theatre space. It is important that the designs integrate the ground floor with the theatre.

Ground floor and public realm

- The panel asks for more thinking on how the public realm around the building can be improved, in partnership with Camden Council.
- Public realm improvements on Shaftesbury Avenue would be valuable to provide a sense of arrival that begins beyond the building envelope.
- At the previous review, the panel asked for greater public accessibility to generate more activation at ground level on New Compton Street, to the rear of the building. It continues to think that more needs to be done to achieve this.
- As part of achieving this, the panel thinks that the hotel entrance on New Compton Street should be more generous.
- The panel is pleased to see a more uniform lighting approach to the building after dark, which will give it presence in the streetscape.
- There is the potential for a stronger visual connection between the hotel entrance and the theatre foyer and, by extension, between Shaftesbury Avenue and New Compton Street.

Hotel plan

- The panel encourages public access to an outside balcony at sixth floor level at the top of the existing building. The balcony should be planted, taking the opportunity to allow users contact with nature.
- The panel asks for hotel corridors to be connected to the façade, wherever possible, to admit natural light, improving the quality of these spaces.

Construction

- The panel emphasises the need to consult with Transport for London on the practical implications of building close to an active Underground line. Evidence is needed that the discussions have taken place to ensure a buildable scheme
- The panel previously requested a construction management strategy to show how the noise, vibration and vehicle impacts of building such a complex project will be mitigated. It reiterates the importance of convincingly showing how construction will be managed.



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- Evidence should be provided to demonstrate that the proposals can be built without damage to the listed building.

Next steps

The panel asks the applicant team to consider its comments in liaison with Camden officers, and is available to review the proposals again if required.

