

2571/08-1606GC01dl

15 June 2016



London Borough of Camden  
5 Pancras Square  
London  
N1C 4AG

Dear Sir/Madam

**TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990  
PLANNING (LISTED BUILDINGS AND CONSERVATION AREAS)  
ACT 1990 AND TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING (CONTROL  
OF ADVERTISEMENT) REGULATIONS 2007**

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**DOMINION THEATRE, 268-269 TOTTENHAM COURT ROAD,  
LONDON W1T 7AQ**

I enclose two applications for Advertisement Consent and Planning Permission and Listed Building Consent for a projecting LED sign at the Dominion Theatre.

These are a duplicates of the current applications ref 2014/5532/L, 2014/5533/A and 2014/5219/P which were agreed for approval subject to a Section 106 Agreement.

My clients continue to want to conclude the Agreement for this sign but there has been a succession of Planning and Conservation Area Officers arriving and leaving the Council without advancing matters and, as a result, our respective solicitors have been unable to conclude an Agreement without further instructions.

These applications are being re-submitted in the hope that this will result in an Officer being allocated who can resolve the matter.

In order to simplify matters a draft Agreement is included with this re-submission.

The applications consist of the following documents:-  
(Planning Portal Refs: PP-05239339 and PP-05238679)

- 1) This letter;
- 2) Application forms and certificates;
- 3) Cil questionnaire;
- 4) Site Location Plan 2243-03-001;
- 5) Existing Elevation and Section 2243-03-002;
- 6) Proposed Elevation and Section 2243-03-003G;
- 7) Proposed LED Steel Framework 2243-03-006E;
- 8) Unilateral Undertaking (in draft).

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The following supporting information is also included:-

- 1) Photographs of Dominion frontage signage 1931 to 2014;
- 2) Theatreland Lighting and Signage informal guide 2008;
- 3) Similar signs in West End;
- 4) Sign visibility analysis;
- 5) Letter of support from The Theatres Trust.

The above is the material previously submitted, for completeness I set out below a summary of the position.

### **Summary**

The Dominion, in common with almost all West End theatres, was covered by various forms of show signage virtually from the day it was completed up until the closure of the last show in 2014. This is illustrated in the supporting set of historic photographs included with this application.

The signage on theatres reflects the risky nature of investing in the production of West End shows. The risks were such that it created an atmosphere where-by producers felt they could not afford (literally) to allow any doubt in the minds of passers-by as to what was showing at a theatre, how good it was and how they must come and see it too. Marketing opportunities in the past were more limited and the street impact of signage on a theatre was vital to the funder's peace of mind. It also created a drama of the theatre itself and added to the fun and excitement of visiting the theatre.

Gradually over the last 20 years there has been a transformation in theatreland with a trend away from blanket facade signage in favour of bespoke installations that work with the building and the show. Creativity and new technology have helped this along.

With the end of the run of We Will Rock You the Dominion has been the subject of a major and well received refurbishment costing in excess of £4m. These works included the repair and re-instatement of the stone facade which, as the history shows, has never really been seen. The theatre's classical stone facade now sits in a run of three classical facades at the end of Tottenham Court Road which form the gateway from Westminster to Camden that will be even more significant with the coming of Crossrail.

The Dominion is one of the West End's largest theatres with 2,065 seats despite having the upper circle converted to offices many years ago. With such a large capacity the Dominion needs to compete with other venues for shows and audiences and although it has enjoyed success in recent decades it was on the verge of closure and demolition before it was acquired by Nederlander in the early 1990's.

Camden Council campaigned to save the theatre at that time and the difficulties with advancing these simple proposals, do not reflect the commitments that the Council has previously made to support the theatre.

The new sign is designed to take advantage of LED technology to achieve two principal advantages.

The first is to reduce the need for signage across the front of the theatre thereby allowing the facade to be enjoyed as it is now for the first time in its 87 year life. The orientation of the sign, perpendicular to the facade, means that it is viewed 'end on' in views from the opposite side of Tottenham Court Road where the building is seen in full elevation. The orientation and projection away from the facade also means that it is seen only when approaching the theatre from the north or south along the pavements and when leaving the underground. In these views the canopy theatre lobby and the sign are the main focus of the view and are typical of a West End theatre and entirely in character with it.

The second advantage is to allow the theatre to operate in repertory mode hosting many shows and events when there is no long term resident production. The lack of a long term production increases the financial risks for any theatre but especially for a large house and the ability of an LED sign to provide different high quality images for current and forthcoming productions easily and consistently is a great advantage. Up until the advent of digital technology this could only be done by constantly repasting poster billboards or changing the lettering of 'redo-graph' signs. The LED allows a poster for a one off show to be displayed one day and to be changed at the press of a keyboard for the next show.

LED technology is now capable of providing very high quality images without high levels of illumination and can perform many roles which reduce clutter and improve quality. Whilst the sign has advantages in times of multiple productions and events it would also be of great value to long term productions, premiers, previews, first nights and awards.

All of these advantages benefit the Theatre as a Listed Building as the sign reduces clutter and improves its character and appearance. It is also fundamentally important for the decision to recognise that although there is the opportunity to reveal facade in this way the very strong link between the need for signage and the ability of the Dominion to attract productions has not gone away. As has been explained to previous Officers the Dominion competes with the rest of the West End and will be under threat if it cannot offer producers the equivalent opportunities that they get in Westminster.

As the principal judgement on this sign is its visual impact the applicant has consistently resisted the proposition that the legal agreement should limit the installation to three years. This would make the investment uneconomic and would also be thoroughly impractical as it could involve a producer having to countenance a sign being taken down in the middle of a show run. The objection is however simply based on the fact that it is without justification on planning grounds. If the sign is visually acceptable for three years there can be no grounds to say it becomes unacceptable thereafter. The agreement does however include provision for control over the removal of the sign and re-instatement works in the usual way.

With regard to controls over the sign content the theatre only wishes to use the sign for current and forthcoming productions and the exclusion of extraneous advertising is included in the draft agreement. The agreement also limits the content to productions and events that are current or forthcoming.

The main use of the sign will be to show what are, in effect, digital 'posters' that are static displays with a refresh from one display to another. For the reasons explained above, where there may be short run shows, or single events, it is helpful if the refresh rate of the sign can be such that a passer-by would capture that information. There is no need for movement in the refresh, there would be a simple dissolve from one display to the other. This is also covered by the draft agreement included with this re-submission.

Finally, the Dominion has proved to be a successful venue for variety, television and gala evenings of various types and a regime for these special 'red carpet' events is also proposed in the draft agreement so that the screen may be used to show video in limited slots related to those special events as is now agreed at other similar venues.

We trust that the re-submission of these applications will result in these matters finally being processed to an approval as the lack of progress is very frustrating and contrary to the interests of safeguarding the future of this listed building.

Yours faithfully  


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