

## Protecting theatres for everyone



Our Ref.: 2003

31 January 2017

Mr David Peres Da Costa  
Planning Services, Development Management  
London Borough of Camden  
Town Hall  
London WC1H 8ND

Dear Sir,

**Koko, 1A Camden High Street, London, NW1 7JE**

Application Ref.: 2016/6960/L and 2016/6959/P

I write regarding the above applications for the external restoration of the former Camden Palace Theatre, now known as Koko, and the redevelopment of former Hope and Anchor Public House and buildings to the rear of the theatre as a hotel, including a glazed roof top extension and use of the dome as a bar.

**Remit:** The 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 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:** The former Camden Palace Theatre/ Koko has been largely preserved, both inside and out, due to its current use as a live music venue and this is recognized in its Grade II listing. The Theatres Trust recognises that the venue is unlikely to return to a theatre use in the near future and therefore agrees that live music and events is the best ongoing use for this building, which will maintain it in a manner that reflects its past and history as a theatre.

The Trust actively encourage the owners of theatre buildings to invest in their assets and ensure they are properly maintained and upgraded to meet current and safety building standards and the expectations of audiences, performers and staff. This includes enhancing venues in a way that will support their competitiveness and viability as a cultural asset. This proposal seeks to develop the former Hope and Anchor public house and buildings adjoining the rear of the theatre as a boutique hotel aimed at attracting artists to perform at Koko, thereby supporting its ongoing financial sustainability. The hotel development also safeguards the theatre from the development of other more sensitive uses that, if built, would be less compatible with the ongoing operation of the theatre, such as housing.

By way of background, the theatre opened in 1900 to designs by renowned theatre architect

**Theatres Trust**

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL

**T** 020 7836 8591

**F** 020 7836 3302

**E** [info@theatrestrust.org.uk](mailto:info@theatrestrust.org.uk)

**W** [theatrestrust.org.uk](http://theatrestrust.org.uk)

**Chair** Tim Eyles **Director** Jon Morgan

**Trustees** Nick Allott OBE, Richard Belbin, Dara Ó Briain, Paddy Dillon, Ruth Eastwood, Oliver Goodwin, Prof Gavin Henderson CBE, Jerry Katzman, Dame Penelope Keith DL, Judith Mellor OBE, Peter Roberts, Simon Ruddick, Ann Skippers, Anna Stapleton

The National Advisory Public Body for Theatres

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WGR Sprague, who ranks after Frank Matcham as one of the most important and influential theatre architects in the United Kingdom. Of the 43 theatres originally designed or rebuilt by Sprague (1865-1933), 13 survive and all are listed, with the exception of the New Theatre in Oxford (1908). His other surviving theatres include Wyndham's Theatre (1899) and the Lyceum, Sheffield (1887) which are both listed Grade II\*. Also the Grade II listed Coronet, Notting Hill (1898), Noel Coward (1903), Aldwych (1906), Novello (1905), Gielgud (1906), Queen's (1906), Ambassadors (1913), St Martin's (1916), and Streatam Hill Theatre (1929) in London, and the Theatre Royal, Lincoln (1893).

Major internal alterations were carried out when the Camden Palace Theatre was converted to music venue use. This included alterations to the two partly cantilevered balconies and closure of the gallery to form a new room (since reopened), leveling the stalls to form a dance floor, creating a deeply cutaway stage with balconies on both sides, and closing off the top half of the stage house. Despite this, it remains rather intact as a theatre building, most notably the beautiful auditorium and plasterwork by Waring & Gillow retains many of the original features such as the shallow domed ceiling, balcony fronts, and the proscenium arch with its segmental pediment and, on either side, marble columns rising from caryatids, defining four bays, which contain boxes at three levels. The building would be perfectly capable of restoration to theatrical use, if required. It is therefore important that any changes to the theatre are reversible and enhance use of the building for live performance.

The Theatres Trust was involved in pre-application consultations and are pleased to see the plans have been revised to address many of the issues raised. We understand that the theatre's front of house facilities, foyers, bars, and auditorium will be left largely untouched and will remain in performance use. The proposal will, however, require alterations to the stage right boxes to connect the theatre to the hotel, convert the unused dome to an additional bar space and create a new stair connection to the rear of the gallery below. Of particular note are the planned repairs and restoration of the external elevations, including replacing boarded up and damaged windows and doors, and reinstatement of the cupola and original scooped parapet.

The main alterations and interventions proposed affect the area above the auditorium and behind the stage house and the stage house itself. This includes partial demolition of the dressing rooms, the building on the corner of Bayham Place and Bayham Street, and the internal structures of the former public house, and construction of hotel building over 6 levels wrapping around two sides of the stage house. This comprises kitchen and back of house facilities in the basement, a lobby and bar/ restaurant in the former pub on the ground level, three levels of hotel rooms (31 rooms/ 1 suite), and an outdoor terrace and glazed lobby at roof level, with a connection to the bar in the dome.

We understand the benefits of enclosing and converting the airspace above the theatre into useable floor space. There is precedent for this at the West End's Playhouse (1882, Gd II) and the Shaftesbury Theatre (1911, Gd II). The theatre is in a prominent location and the dome is a notable landmark in the area, and we appreciate that the design of the new roof top extension spanning the auditorium is subservient to the dome and does not compete with it. Being predominantly glazed and set back from the edge behind parapet has significantly reduced the potential visual impact of this extension, and its ability to be seen from street level. Four main

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structural columns will be inserted through the theatre to support the structure and we note these columns have been carefully located in secondary spaces to avoid interfering with the plasterwork or being visible from within the auditorium.

The biggest intervention within the existing theatre building is the creation of a hotel suite and recording studio on levels two and three in the stage house above the stage. We are pleased this is designed to be supported by a separate structure inserted into the stage house, with columns behind the proscenium arch and on the rear wall to avoid and minimise alterations to the stage house itself. This structure is, in theory, reversible and this is one of the Trust's requirements for supporting this application. We are aware that the upper part of the stage house has for a long time been blocked off from the stage just above the proscenium arch and this insertion stays within that confine. We are also pleased that the original stage flying equipment and the wooden grid will be celebrated and retained in situ and visible from the level below.

We are concerned about the proposed windows on level 2 of the KOKO suite and recording studio which provide a visual link into the auditorium. While we note the application states the openings have been carefully located to sit within the framed plaster panels, further detail is needed to show how this works and how it affects the appearance of the auditorium and the structural integrity of the surrounding plasterwork. Further details are also needed to demonstrate how the stage house fly tower will be sound proofed, when the statement notes the exposed brick will be retained.


Our main concern is with noise and vibration mitigation. We are keen to future proof the theatre as a live performance venue, and this is not usually compatible with a hotel or residential use. There is clear guidance in para 123 of the NPPF that existing businesses, such as live music venues, must not be affected by a change in the use of the development around it. We acknowledge the intent that the hotel will be mainly used by artists, crew and those attending the concerts, however at other times (such as during rehearsals and events), there is a risk this will conflict with general guests in the hotel and this could therefore affect the hotel's viability. It is therefore vital that the noise and vibration mitigation measures proposed ensure the hotel guests are not disturbed by the live performance in the theatre.

The Trust would also recommend that while undertaking these works, and to future proof the venue, consideration be given to making the stage accessible from the back of house areas for performers and crew with disabilities.

If Council is minded to permit the applications, we would expect a condition requiring the full recording of all the features being affected and altered, or any revealed during the works.

Please contact us if we may be of further assistance.

Yours sincerely,

  
Ross Anthony  
Planning Adviser

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