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By email

23 March 2018

For the attention of: Samir Benmbarek

Dear Sir/Madam

**Application reference: 2018/0846/P : 25 Shelton Street, WC2**  
**Objection on behalf of Really Useful Theatres Group, owners of the Cambridge Theatre**

On behalf of our client, Really Useful Theatres Group, owners of the Cambridge Theatre, we wish to object to the above reference planning application.

It should be recorded that Really Useful Theatres Group received no notification from the Council of this application. The Cambridge Theatre abuts the application site and its future operation is jeopardised by the application. The side wall of the Theatre forms part of the application site.

Really Useful Theatres Group is the owner of seven central London theatres. Theatres and "Theatreland" provide a significant benefit to central London's attractiveness and economy, and their importance and operation are rightly and appropriately promoted and protected in planning policies at a national, strategic and local level, including Development Plan policies for Camden. Really Useful Theatres Group supports complimentary activities and proposals which seek to enhance the vitality and vibrancy of central London, and is aware of the investment Shaftesbury makes across its portfolio.

The Camden Local Plan (July 2017) recognises (paragraph 4.49) that theatres "*contribute enormously to Camden's attractiveness as a place to live, work or study. These facilities support opportunities for people from all walks of life to meet and interact and promote a sense of belonging and connection. The variety and richness of culture and leisure facilities has an influence on community identity and mix, townscape character and the local economy*".

Paragraph 4.50 notes that part of the West End theatre district lies in Camden and paragraph 4.52 specifically notes that development in the vicinity of facilities, "*particularly live music venues and theatres*" can "*affect their viability and may even lead to a facility closing despite of its wider community benefit, diminishing the mix and richness of Camden's culture and leisure offer*". Whilst the single example quoted in the text relates to new housing, it is apparent that such concerns –

and planning policy protection - properly relates to any proposed development activity which could jeopardise the viability of a theatre.

This is made clear in the wording of Policy C3 Cultural and leisure facilities: *“The Council will seek to protect cultural and leisure facilities and manage the impact of adjoining uses where this is likely to impact their continued operation”*.

The Cambridge Theatre, which opened in 1930, is one of the most attractive theatres in the West End. As Policy C3 makes clear, in places such as central London, with neighbouring uses closely arranged, it is essential that as activities seek to evolve and/or expand on one site they do not negatively impact upon the activities of adjoining sites. This is, unfortunately what has happened with this proposal. The absence of any pre-submission discussions by the applicant and their advisors with Really Useful Theatres Group has resulted in a proposal which will significantly affect the Cambridge Theatre, placing its long-term future at risk.

The application proposal seeks to completely infill the rear courtyard of no. 25 Shelton Street, as accessed off Earlham Street. As has already and separately been noted by residents of the upper parts of no. 25 Shelton Street, this rear courtyard not only provides access to the rear of the ground floor uses, it also serves as the primary access to parts of both the adjoining and upper buildings. Its complete enclosure will, therefore, remove any means of access to parts of the adjoining and upper buildings. The implications for such actions are far more significant than may at first appear to be the case.

With respect to the Cambridge Theatre, the proposal will remove access to the side wall of the Theatre. This will completely remove the ability to access the wall for either planned or unplanned repairs and maintenance.

In addition to the difficulties this will present in all cases, major refurbishment works are necessary to all the elevations of the Theatre as a result of corrosion of the embedded steel frame affecting the masonry. As a consequence of this condition the outer wall finishes are forced away from the structural frame (known as “Regent Street disease”). This is clearly a very significant problem, with remedial works expected to last at least 25 years. Significant restoration schemes having recently been completed to the elevations on Earlham Street and Mercer Street, with these elevations prioritised due to their greater exposure to public walkways. The courtyard wall is currently covered with sheeting due to concern about the parapet level and the wall itself.

Additional routine maintenance would typically be considered on a five-year cycle of inspection and works.

It is clearly essential that access to the side wall of the Theatre is maintained at all times. Both the identified significant works and routine maintenance require continued access to the wall to either erect a structural building scaffold or for a “cherry picker” to enter the courtyard. Both options would be precluded by the proposed completely glazed courtyard. Without such access, there is a significant risk to the future of the building structure itself and, therefore, the future of the theatre operation.

As previously noted, Really Useful Theatres Group remains supportive of Shaftsbury's objectives and has reviewed the submitted documentation to understand the aims of the proposal and how these can be accommodated whilst maintaining reasonable access for neighbouring properties and activities.

It is readily apparent that the stated objectives as set out in the Design and Access Statement can be reasonably achieved without the full enclosure of the courtyard and the inevitable harm that would unfortunately result to surrounding occupiers. It is considered that the simplest and most obvious approach would be to retain a two metre "clear zone" (with no structures) from the Theatre wall to allow scaffold to be erected, with the ability to access the courtyard to erect such. A potential alternative approach would be to construct a "structural zone" within the scheme (roof) that would have the capacity to take the weight of a scaffold to the side of the building.

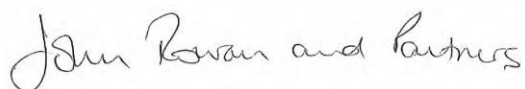
It is a matter of regret that Shaftsbury and their advisors did not seek to discuss the proposals with neighbours prior to submitting the application. Really Useful Theatres remain willing to discuss options and alternatives with the applicant to seek to identify a way in which both the future of the Cambridge Theatre can be protected and enhancement proposals for the site progressed. Until and unless such dialogue occurs Really Useful Theatres will maintain its strongest objection to the proposal.

It is apparent that in its current form, the proposal is contrary to Policy C3 of the recently adopted Local Plan 2017. There are no material considerations which outweigh that significant policy conflict and, as such, in accordance with Central Government guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework, the application in its current form should be refused.

In the event that planning officers are considering supporting the application in its current form, we would request that the application be referred to Planning Committee for determination due to the potential threat to the future of the Cambridge Theatre and the clear conflict with the adopted Local Plan and Central Government advice.

Please contact Ian Blacker of this office if you have any queries.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John Rowan and Partners".

**John Rowan and Partners**