

Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC/1984

07 August 2018

David Joyce
Director of Planning
Regeneration & Planning
Development Management
London Borough of Camden
Town Hall
Judd Street
London
WC1H 9JE



CC:
Samir Benmbarek (Case Officer); 

Application: 2018/0846/P

Site: 25 Shelton Street London WC2H 9HW

Proposal: Removal of existing canopy and erection of glass pitched roof and steel structure to infill rear courtyard and installation of ramp in association with the ground and basement unit (Use Sui-generis/A1)

Dear Mr. Joyce

I write with regards to the application described above. This representation has some urgency given the consultation period concluded some time ago and a draft delegated report has been written. However, the Trust was not consulted despite our statutory remit and this proposal has a significant impact on a neighbouring property, the Grade II listed Cambridge Theatre.

We recommend refusal of this application, and suggest urgent review and revision of the delegated report.

Please find our full comments on this application set out below.

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 in England through The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015, requiring

Theatres Trust



Chair Tim Eyles **Director** Jon Morgan

Trustees Richard Baldwin, David Blyth, Pam Bone, Paul Cartwright, Paddy Dillon, Ruth Eastwood, David Ian, Richard Johnston, Gary Kemp, Dara Ó Briain, Simon Ricketts, Peter Roberts, Ann Skippers, Anna Stapleton

The National Advisory Public Body for Theatres

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the Trust to be consulted by local authorities on planning applications which include 'development involving any land on which there is a theatre'.

Comment:

This application has just been brought to our attention by the operators of the Cambridge Theatre, Really Useful Theatres Group. The side wall of the Cambridge Theatre forms part of the application site, therefore we consider that the Council has failed its duty to consult Theatres Trust as per the statutory requirement set out in The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015, Schedule 4, Paragraph (x). Regardless of this, given the nature of the application it would have represented good practice for us to have been notified; we are routinely consulted by other authorities where neighbouring or nearby developments may have an impact on a theatre.

The Trust **objects** to this application as currently proposed, as it will remove access for essential and general repairs and maintenance to the Cambridge Theatre as well as other surrounding properties. This concern is especially critical for the theatre, which is a statutory listed Grade II heritage asset and a valuable element of London's 'West End' theatre offer.

The draft London Plan (2017) recognises the 'enormous contribution' of the West End theatres and cinemas to London's cultural heritage, acting as 'key visitor hubs for Londoners and domestic and international tourists' which should be 'protected and promoted'. Draft Policy HC6.B.6 requires planning decisions to protect and support cultural venues such as theatres. Camden's own Local Plan (2017) also notes that theatres 'contribute enormously to Camden's attractiveness as a place to live, work or study', reflected by Policy C3.

Furthermore, the Council is obliged to consider the heritage implications of this proposal. Of particular relevance to this case is that major refurbishment works at the Cambridge Theatre are necessary due to corrosion of the embedded steel frame affecting its masonry, forcing outer wall finishes away from its structural frame. Such works have already been carried out along the theatre's Earlham Street and Mercer Street elevations. Longer-term failure, or indeed inability, to complete such works would jeopardise the safety, function and continued operation of the theatre. Routine and urgent maintenance works are also undertaken periodically or as required. A failure to be able to undertake such works would also compromise the operation of the theatre, as well as potentially increase its costs to unsustainable levels.

Paragraph 193 of the NPPF (2018) states that, 'When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.' Paragraph 195 goes on to say that where development will lead to substantial harm to a designated heritage asset, consent should be refused unless 'it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or total loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss'. On that basis, we do not

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consider this proposal to be policy-compliant nor does it result in public benefit that would justify or outweigh degradation and potential future loss of the Cambridge Theatre.

Therefore, should the Council be minded to permit this proposal thus compromising the operation of the theatre it would fail to accord with national, London or indeed its own policy on protecting and supporting theatres and other cultural assets and protecting heritage assets.

We do not object to the occupiers of 25 Shelton Street seeking to develop their business and make their courtyard space more attractive to customers, however this must not be to the detriment of neighbouring properties including the Cambridge Theatre being able to maintain their own buildings and facilities. We believe that alternative options exist that would meet the applicant's brief without compromising neighbouring properties. These include:

- shrinking the enclosed space which would allow clear access with equipment to the wall of the theatre
- strengthening the roof of the enclosure to allow it to withstand the weight of scaffolding and other such equipment
- altering the nature of the proposed structure so it is easily removable allowing access to the theatre as and when required

In conclusion, we **object** to this application as currently presented and **recommend that planning permission be refused** for the reasons outlined above. We suggest that the applicant is afforded the opportunity to withdraw this application and we would encourage them to develop an alternative solution and consult with ourselves, Really Useful Theatres Group and the owners/occupants of other neighbouring properties before re-submitting.

Please contact us should you wish to discuss this representation further.

Yours sincerely,



Tom Clarke MRTPI
National Planning Adviser

Theatres Trust



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