

Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC/2076

15 March 2019

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By e-mail: planning@camden.gov.uk;

Application: 2017/7051/P & 2018/0037/L

Site: 135-149 Shaftesbury Avenue LONDON WC2H 8AH

Proposal: The comprehensive refurbishment of the existing Grade II listed building and the provision of a new two storey roof extension and new basement level, providing a new four-screen cinema (Class D2) and spa (sui generis) at basement levels, a restaurant/bar (Class A3/A4) at ground floor level, a 94-bed hotel (Class C1) at part ground and first to sixth floors and associated terrace and bar (Class A4) at roof level, together with associated public realm and highways improvements

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 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 Trust previously submitted comments objecting to this proposal on 15th October 2018. These comments have been drafted to supplement our previous representation.

In our previous representation we noted the lack of marketing exercise to demonstrate the site cannot support alternative cultural use as required by policy and challenged the applicant's assertion that "the existing accommodation is unable to meet the needs and demands of commercial occupiers". At that stage we noted interest from at least one operator seeking West End accommodation at the scale offered at this site.

Theatres Trust

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Chair Tim Eyles **Director** Jon Morgan

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The National Advisory Public Body for Theatres

The Theatres Trust Charitable Fund co-operates with Theatres Trust, has the same Trustees and is registered as a charity under number 274697

Since that time a number of further credible operators have come forward with specific interest. This site represents the last and only opportunity in the West End to provide a large scale cultural venue such as a theatre with a fly tower, as it still has the volume and footprint to provide one. It has the potential to offer an auditorium seating up to around 1,400 seats.

We consider it critical that this application is either not determined or refused, and certainly not permitted, until such time as a proper marketing exercise has been undertaken. If potential operators have expressed their interest to us without prompt, we find it inconceivable that a formal and appropriate marketing exercise by the applicant would have drawn no interest.

We would also like to further elaborate on previous critiques of figures contained within the applicant's supporting documents. The Condition Report prepared by Hallas & Co. estimates costs of £10 million to make good defects with the building. The majority of these are as a result of poor management and maintenance; we would have expected the property to have been let on a repairing lease meaning dilapidations are the responsibility of the former tenant or owner which may now have passed to the new owner. Furthermore, much of this would have been rectified in any case as part of the redevelopment proposed thus should not be used as a basis to demonstrate the supposed unviability of maintaining cultural use at the existing scale. On that basis, the £26 million figure would also seem to be inflated because that figure is inclusive of the £10 million.

We continue to **object** to this proposal and urge that the issues we have raised are further explored. In particular, it is clear the applicant has not made any realistic effort to market the site for continued cultural use and this must be addressed.

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

Yours sincerely,



Tom Clarke MRTPI
National Planning Adviser