

PD14093:PJB/JH/EM

email: tim.miles@montagu-evans.co.uk
james.huish@montagu-evans.co.uk
anna.manley@montagu-evans.co.uk

22 July 2022

Camden Council
Planning – Development Control
Camden Town Hall
London
WC1H 8ND

PLANNING PORTAL REF. PP-11406273

**AMBASSADORS THEATRE, WEST STREET, LONDON, WC2H 9ND
TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990 (AS AMENDED); PLANNING (LISTED BUILDINGS AND
CONSERVATION AREAS ACT) 1990 (AS AMENDED)
APPLICATION FOR FULL PLANNING PERMISSION AND LISTED BUILDING CONSENT**

Dear Sir / Madam,

On behalf of our client, Ambassador Theatre Group (“the Applicant” or “ATG”), please find enclosed an application (“the / this Application”) for full planning permission and listed building consent at the Ambassadors Theatre, West Street, London, WC2H (“the Site” / “the Building”).

The description of development for these proposals (“the Proposed Development”) is as follows:

“Internal alterations to the Grade II listed theatre, including repairs to internal fabric, alterations and refurbishment of seating, installation of lift, upgrading of building services, new lighting and speakers, structural alterations to the dome, alterations to the bar and other internal decorations, plus external works comprising installation of plant deck at roof level, works to ventilation/plant equipment and various repair work and redecoration.”

The purpose of this Application is to secure the refurbishment and restoration of the listed building to improve the accessibility, functionality and viability of the theatre which is currently restricted owing to the compromised plan form and lack of step free access.

The majority of the works proposed relate to internal alterations to this Grade II listed buildings. A small number of external works are also proposed, hence both planning permission is being applied for alongside listed building consent.

This Application is formed of the following documents:

1. Completed Application Form (with Ownership Certificates);
2. This Cover Letter (including Planning Statement) prepared by Montagu Evans;
3. Site Location Plan (1:1250);
4. Community Infrastructure Levy Form;
5. Application Drawings prepared by Citizen Design Bureau (“CDB”), including
6. Drawing Issue Sheet, prepared by CDB;
7. Design and Access Statement prepared by CDB;
8. Set of Structural Drawings, prepared by Momentum;
9. Heritage Statement, prepared by Montagu Evans; and
10. Plant Noise Assessment, prepared by ALN Acoustic Design.

The requisite application fee of £266.20 (including service charge) has been paid at the time of submission, via the Planning Portal.

BACKGROUND TO THE SITE AND PROPOSALS

The Site is located within the jurisdiction of the London Borough of Camden (“LBC”), on its southern extremity, adjacent to the boundary with Westminster

The Site comprises The Ambassadors Theatre, which is a Grade II listed building built in 1913 and located within the Seven Dials Conservation Area. The Site is located within Central London, on the corner of West Street and Tower Court.

The lawful use of the property is as a theatre (sui generis). A full description of both the external and internal parts of the building is set out in more detail within the Design and Access Statement and the Heritage Statement.

The site has been subject to previous applications for planning and listed building consent, including the proposed demolition of the theatre and the erection of a new, larger building behind a retained façade in 2016 (ref. 2016/4869/P0 & 2016/5032/L. This secured a resolution to grant in 2018, but subsequently withdrawn by the Applicant.

As noted above, the purpose of this Application is to secure the refurbishment and restoration of the theatre which has a number of existing issues.

There are considerable issues with the existing inaccessibility of the theatre in tandem with general circulation issues, a lack of dedicated space for the technology and servicing required for the production of stage shows, and the constraints of the existing bars within the theatre which are too small to be open and function adequately to cater to patrons before or after shows.

The poor functionality of the theatre presents serious operational challenges for the Applicant, touring theatre companies, and patrons of The Ambassadors Theatre.

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The key aims of the Proposed Development is to:

- Repair damaged fabric and protect the significance of the Grade II listed building;
- Introduce wheelchair accessible seating within the auditorium via a new lift;
- Upgrade the building services including ventilation and cooling, lighting and heating to create a safe and comfortable environment;
- Integrate performance infrastructure such as theatre lighting and speakers, more sensitively and neatly within the historic space;
- Relieve structural stress loading on the dome over the auditorium;
- Enlarge and improve the bar and refreshment provision;
- Refurbish the seating; and
- Renew the decorative scheme whilst removing an accretion of unsympathetic and temporary-fx installations that have remained for many years.

The full details of the Proposed Development is set out within the application drawings and the Design and Access Statement.

One element of the proposals is the need to upgrade existing services and plant equipment, which is due to be overhauled to enable the existing building to perform better and more efficiently in line with modern standards. Ventilation and air condition would be renewed across the building, with revised ductwork and outlets. At roof level, a new steel deck will be installed to provide a platform for the new plant. This is the primary reason for also seeking planning permission.

The Proposed Development has been developed in consultation with the Theatres Trust, full details of which is set out in the Heritage Statement.

PLANNING FRAMEWORK

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) requires planning applications to be determined in accordance with policies of the statutory Development Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise and Section 16 (2) of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

The statutory Development Plan comprises:

- The London Plan (March 2021); and
- Camden Local Plan (July 2017).

As noted above, the Site is situated within the Seven Dials Conservation Area and is also a Grade II listed building. The Policies Map also notes that the Site is within an Archaeological Priority Area and the Central Activities Zone (CAZ).

The National Planning Policy Framework (“NPPF”) (2021) sets the Government’s policy approach to town planning, together with the National Planning Practice Guidance, both of which are material considerations in the assessment of these proposals, together with the various Supplementary Planning Guidance and Supplementary Planning Documents prepared by LBC and the Mayor of London.

There is currently no emerging planning policy of relevance.

PLANNING POLICY ASSESSMENT

Principle of Development

Local Plan Policy C3 (Cultural and Leisure Facilities) seeks to protect such uses and manage their impacts. The existing building provides a theatre within Central London, an important use contributing to Seven Dials and wider ‘theatreland’.

The Proposed Development seeks a number of alterations to the building to deliver refurbishment and improvement to its accessibility, functionality and viability. The principle of the improvement works, should therefore be supported, in relation to Policy C3 and all other development plan policies relating to the aims and objectives of ensuring a successful Central London.

Design and Heritage

High quality and inclusive design is encouraged at all policy levels. NPPF (Section 12) promotes the creation of high quality buildings and places. This is reinforced by the London Plan Policy D4 (Delivering Good Design) and D5 (Inclusive Design). At the local level Camden Local Plan Policies HC1 (Heritage Conservation and Growth), C6 (Access for All), D1 (Design) and D2 (Heritage) are all relevant.

The Heritage Statement, also prepared by Montagu Evans provides a full assessment of the Proposed Development against the relevant development plan, and its impact upon the significance of the listed building (and the character and appearance of the conservation area).

The Statement sets out that the principal significance of the listed building comes from its evidential interest in that the building conveys the historic and present use as a theatre on the site, plus the historic interest as a building which was designed as a theatre and continues in its original use.

It also notes that in developing the scheme, the sensitivity of the listed building and the requirement to preserve its inherent character and significance has been a primary consideration in the evolution of the design proposals. The outcome, in our judgement, is a scheme that successfully address fundamental issues with the operational requirements of the theatre in a manner that is sensitive to the historic fabric and character of the listed building. Proposed works to the decorative scheme reflect the intention to restore and enhance the positive architectural and aesthetic qualities of the theatre summarised.

Four key benefits are considered to be facilitated as a result of the works proposed:

1. Improvements to accessibility and circulation across the theatre and particularly at stalls level;
2. Enhancing and securing the viability of the theatre through maintaining its seating capacity and providing a new bar where patrons can dwell;
3. Enhancements to audience experience through the above means and also by improving sight lines, improving ventilation, providing a WC at stalls level, and rationalising visual clutter provided by existing cable runs and equipment; and
4. Rationalising and improving the aesthetic appearance of the auditorium through implementing a new decorative scheme, restoration of historic features and removal of unsightly servicing and paraphernalia.

The Heritage Statement identifies some limited harm to the significance of the building, which arises from works that are direct interventions into the historic fabric. However, it is considered that any harm arising from these works would be demonstrably outweighed by the substantial public and heritage benefits set out at 1-4 above. These benefits can be achieved without negatively affecting the intrinsic significance of the theatre.

This is a view shared by the Theatres Trust who also identified some loss and harm to historic fabric, although considers the overall principle to be necessary and proportionate to enable access to the theatre and for the building to better address deficiencies in modern standards such as ventilation (and fire).

In design terms, the proposed external alterations are limited, but will ultimately improve its aesthetic and architectural quality, overall improving the building. The scheme would meet a number of criteria within Policy D1, including heritage related limbs, but also ensuring the use of high quality materials, integration of the plant deck within the roof and improving the accessibility of the theatre as a whole.

In those terms, we consider that the Proposed Development is compliant with both heritage and design related policies within the Development Plan.

Other Planning Considerations

As noted above, the external physical works, or works which require planning permission are relatively limited. There is an overhaul of the services to improve the ventilation and performance of the building. This includes the replacement of existing plant, which is due to be located in the same position at roof level, albeit on a new steel plant deck, which reduces stress load on the domed ceiling below.

The replacement and rationalisation of the building's servicing will improve the functional quality of the theatre, enhance the comfort and overall experience of patrons through improved ventilation, and remove unsightly ductwork which detracts from the aesthetic appearance of the auditorium. The relief of structural loads from the auditorium dome is considered to be a positive and sensitive element of the proposals which safeguards the future structural integrity of the theatre.

For completeness, the Application is supported by a Plant Noise Assessment, prepared by ALN. This provides a noise assessment for the replacement ventilation and cooling plant equipment, providing a background noise survey at the site and assessed the proposed plant in accordance with Camden's guidance and the British Standards.

The Site has some nearby noise sensitive receptors and the assessment indicates that the plant noise is much lower than the representative background noise level, and would therefore have a low impact. It is therefore considered to be able to operate without causing harm to local amenity and in accordance with Local Plan Policy A4.

Conclusion

This Planning Statement has provided an assessment of the proposals against the Statutory Development Plan. The Proposals have been formulated in accordance with the NPPF, the London Plan and the Camden Local Plan, as well as in consultation with the Theatres Trust, who are supportive of the proposals.

The Proposed Development, the majority of which relate to internal works are considered to comply with the statutory duties relating to works to a listed building and conservation area. Insofar that the works relate to planning matters, the Proposed Development is also considered to comply with the development plan, as well as being consistent with national planning policy and material considerations.

A number of benefits of the Scheme would be delivered including improvements to accessibility and circulation throughout the theatre, enhancements to audience experience and rationalising its aesthetic appearance. Overall, the works enhance the secure the viability of the theatre through maintaining seating capacity and providing a new bar. The performance of M&E is to be improved and this can be achieved without detriment to either local amenity or the significance of the listed building.

APPLICATION PROCEDURE

We would be grateful if LBC could confirm that our Applications are complete and will be validated shortly. In the meantime, should any further clarification, information or assistance be required, please do not hesitate to contact Tim Miles (tim.miles@montagu-evans.co.uk / 07818 012 444) or James Huish (james.huish@montagu-evans.co.uk / 020 7312 7484) at this office in the first instance.

Yours faithfully,

MONTAGU EVANS LLP

MONTAGU EVANS LLP

Enc.