

Introduction

This document provides the Heritage and Sustainability Salvage Strategy, as required by the London Borough of Camden, pursuant to recent listed building consent granted in 2022.

This report has been prepared by Citizen Design Bureau, in conjunction with the Ambassadors Theatre Group (the Applicant) and Montagu Evans (the planning/heritage consultant).

Listed Building Consent was granted by the London Borough of Camden in October 2022 for a number of internal and external alterations to the Ambassadors Theatre.

Condition 4, attached to the listed building consent (ref. 2022/3599/L)

“Prior to the relevant part of the works all historic elements within the building to be removed as part of the works hereby approved shall either be used elsewhere within the building or stored in safe storage on site for future use as part of a comprehensive heritage and sustainability salvage strategy to be submitted and approved in writing prior to the local planning authority.

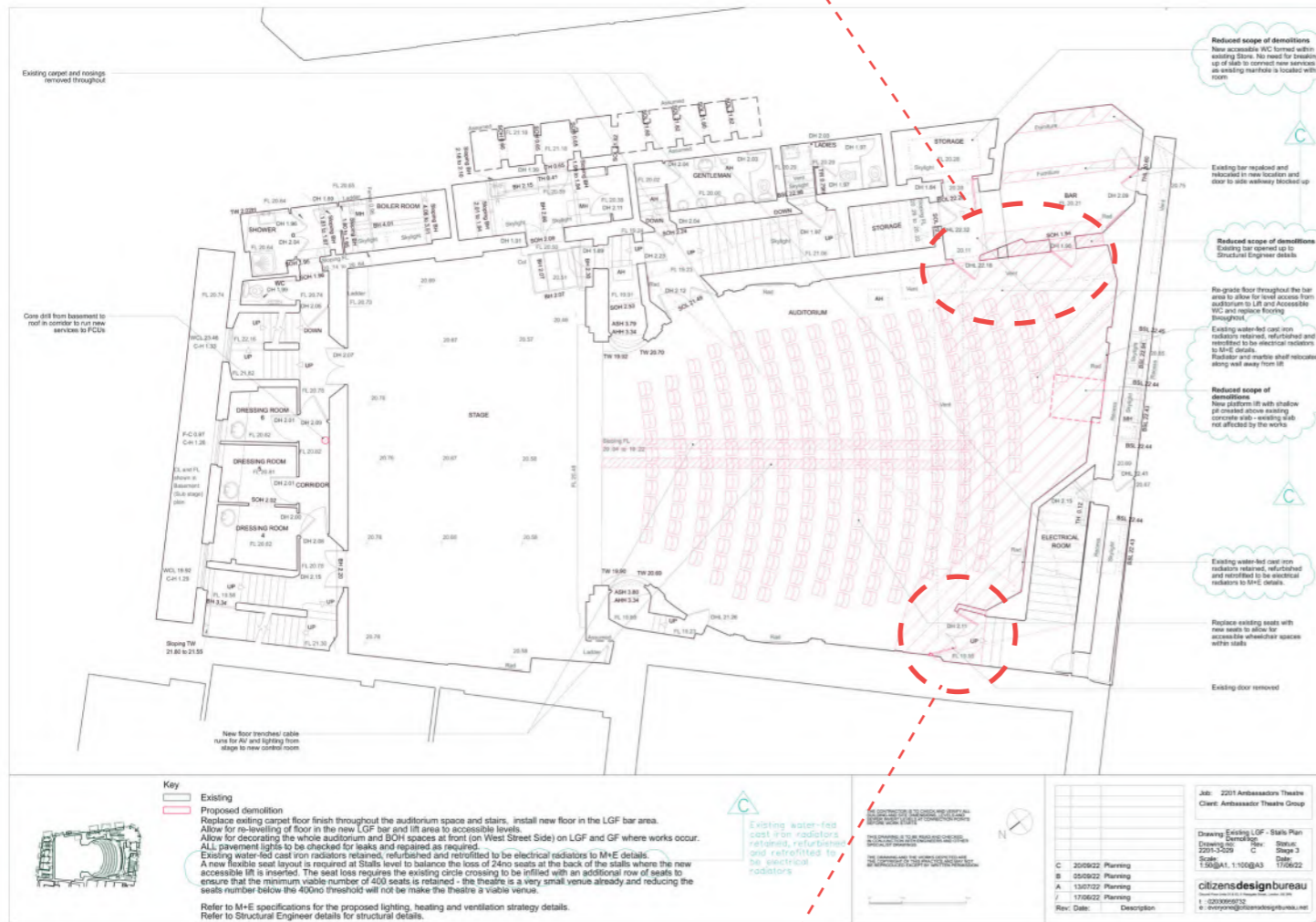
Any off-site storage required as a result of operational reasons shall be required to be agreed in advance by the local planning authority.”

In granting LBC, Camden applied the above condition *“to ensure that any removed fabric of value (including the auditorium seats) would be reused rather than discarded.”* The condition therefore secures the salvage strategy for the removed historic features so that they can be re-used in a suitable context elsewhere as part of the works.

Of the heritage salvage, this report identifies the strategy for storage and salvage of the historic doors, the metal seat side panels and the glazing to the WC. Not all of the seats are capable of being refurbished and re-used as the Applicant has undertaken extensive discussions with other theatres to find alternative locations for the seats, to ensure these are re-used in a new venue, and not discarded nor stored without prospect of re-use.

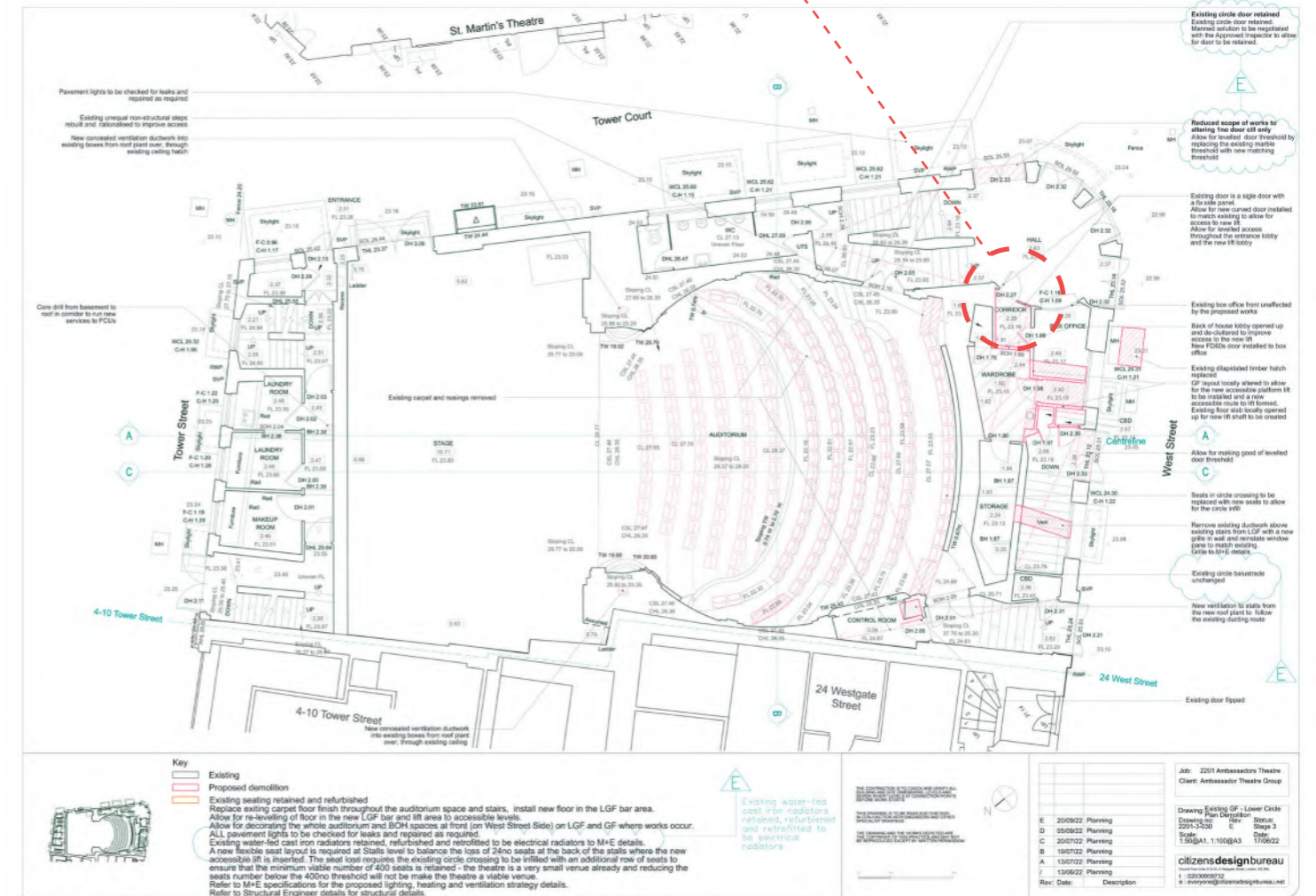
1. Historic Doors Retained On Site

1. Bar doors



2. Rear stalls door

3. Entrance lobby curved door



Before the renovation works the auditorium was completely inaccessible to people with mobility issues. The rear of the stalls at LGF and GF spaces around the box office have been therefore re-layed out to allow for a platform lift to be installed between ground level and stalls and to introduce new wheelchair accessible spaces and associated accessible WC at stalls level. As part of the relaying out works, the existing bar has been opened up and a new 'get round' route created behind the back of the stalls to allow the audiences to access the stairs, lift and bar independently, including before the shows (works allowed under the Planning and Listed Building Consent ref. 2022/3105/P and ref. 2022/3599/L). As a result of these alterations, the panelled doors identified on the drawings above were carefully removed and safely stored on site.



1. Bar doors



2. Rear stalls door



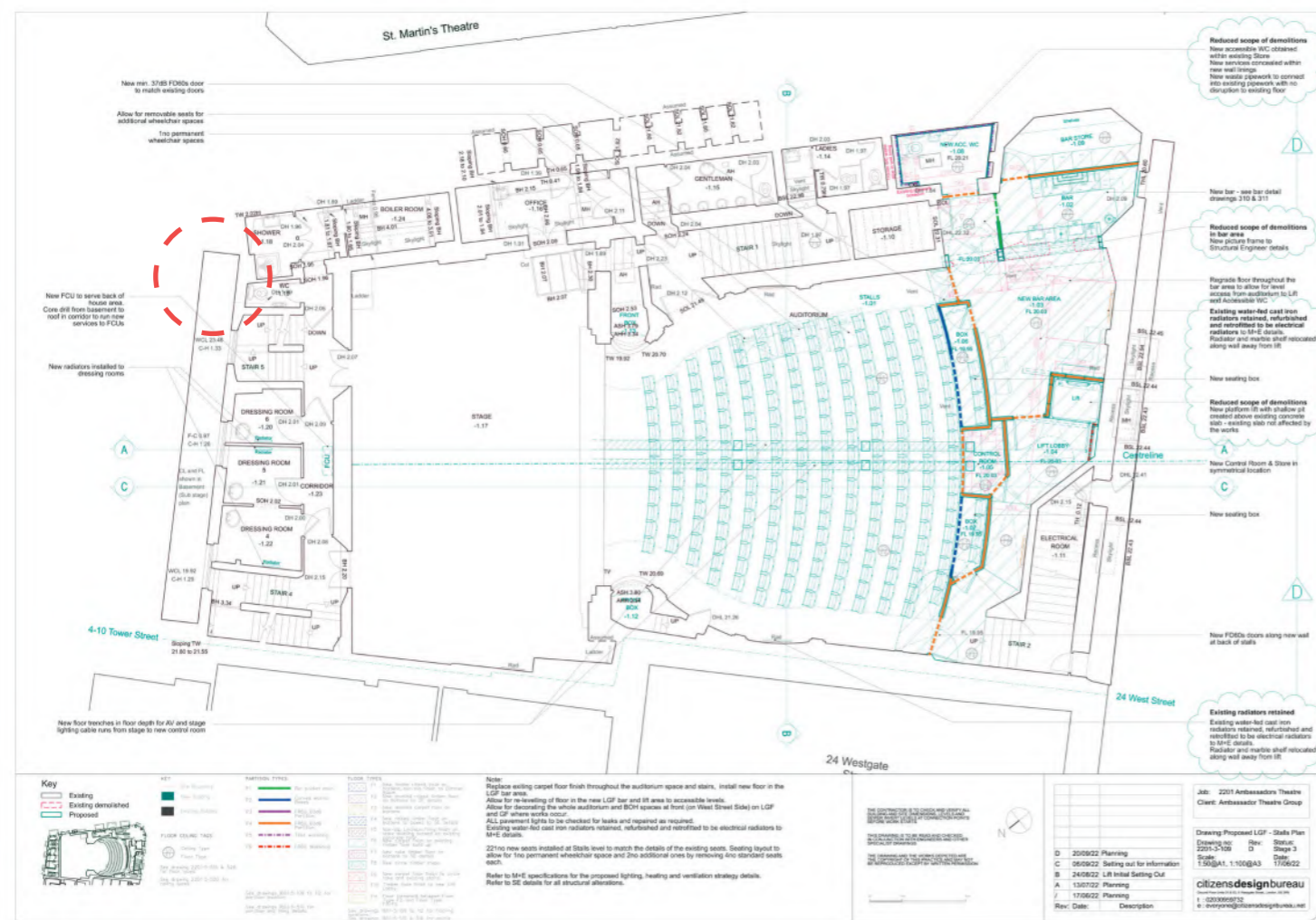
3. Entrance lobby curved door

As a result of the relaying out works at stalls level the existing bar and stalls doors (1. and 2.) were carefully removed and safely stored on site. The existing glazed timber door adjacent to the box office (3.) consisted of a single leaf door and fixed side panel. The clear opening of the single leaf door was only 525mm against the minimum 750mm required to allow for a wheelchair user to access the new accessible lift under the current Building Regulations. A new curved glazed timber double door to match the existing was proposed to achieve a minimum 750mm clear opening and allow for wheelchair user to travel across the entrance lobby and to the new lift. Detail and layout drawings were submitted and approved under the Planning and Listed Building Consent ref. 2022/3105/P and ref. 2022/3599/L.

Reuse of the salvaged doors in alternative locations was considered during the design stage but excluded as an option as the existing doors did not meet the spatial and Building Regulations requirements (such as wheelchair access and fire safety) required by the new door functions/ locations and dimensions. Making the existing doors compatible with the new function /location and dimensions would have also resulted in altering the existing doors for adaptation beyond repair.

Preserving and storing these doors on site has been therefore deemed as an alternative acceptable solution, with all the historic doors safely stored on site within the LFG gallery on Tower Street - see following page.

1. Historic Doors - On-Site Storage Location

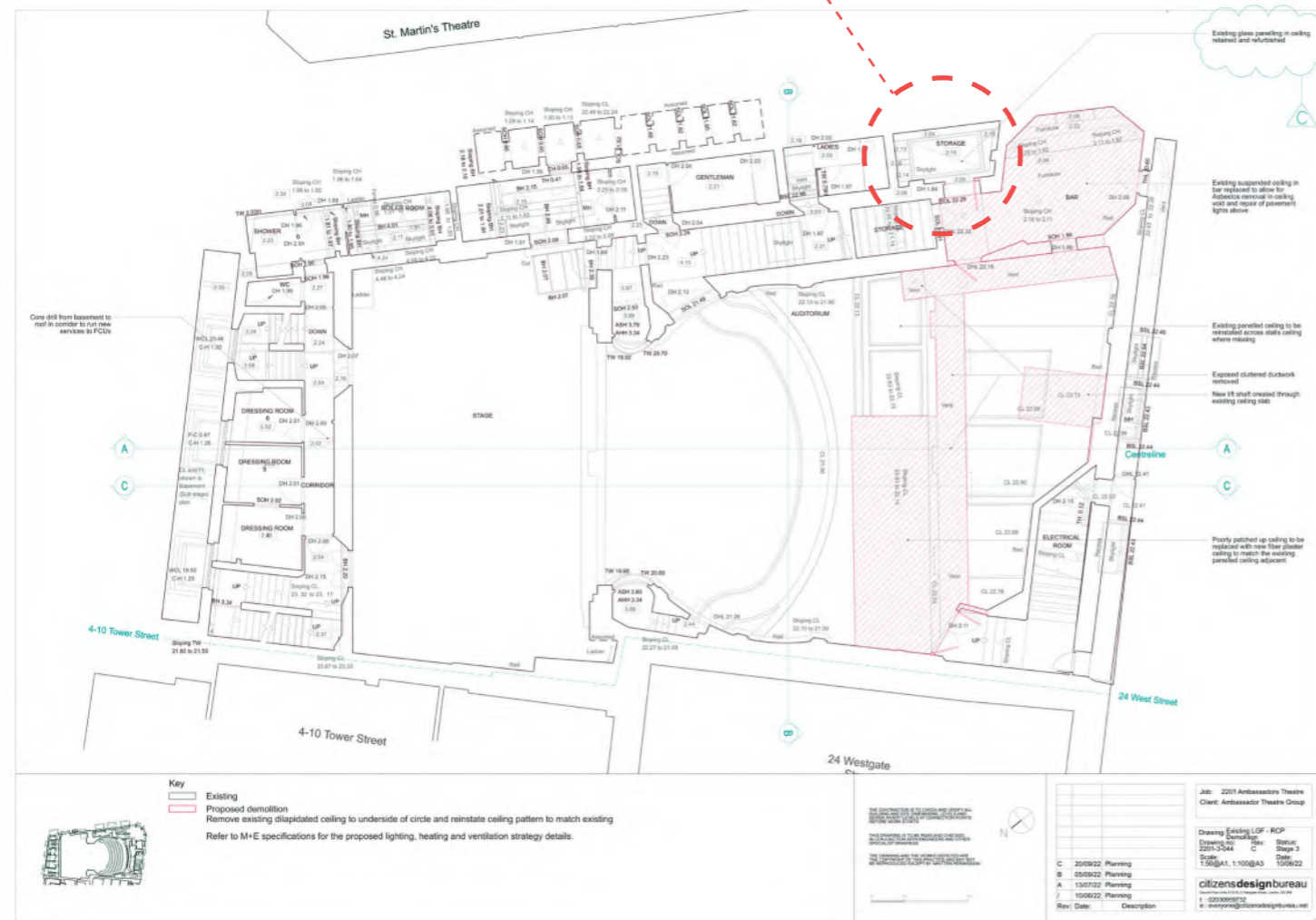


All the salvaged doors are safely stored on site within the LFG gallery on Tower Street. This space is a secured space managed by the Ambassadors Theatre staff



2. Georgian Wired Glass Panels in New Acc. WC, Lower Ground Floor

Ceiling glass panels in LGF new Acc. WC



Demolition drawing submitted and approved under the Planning and Listed Building Consent ref. 2022/3105/P and ref. 2022/3599/L, showing the location of the retained ceiling glass panels

Existing ceiling glass panels before the renovation works (1 no panel missing) characterised by Georgian wired glass panels and painted timber frame structure, fixed within the reveals of the pavement lights above

The Georgian wired glass panels were located within the existing stalls store, now converted in a new Acc. WC.

As part of the renovation works approved under the Planning and Listed Building Consent ref. 2022/3105/P and ref. 2022/3599/L, the existing timber framing and Georgian wired glass panels were carefully removed during the strip out works and reinstalled in the same location within the new Acc. WC as shown in the photo below.

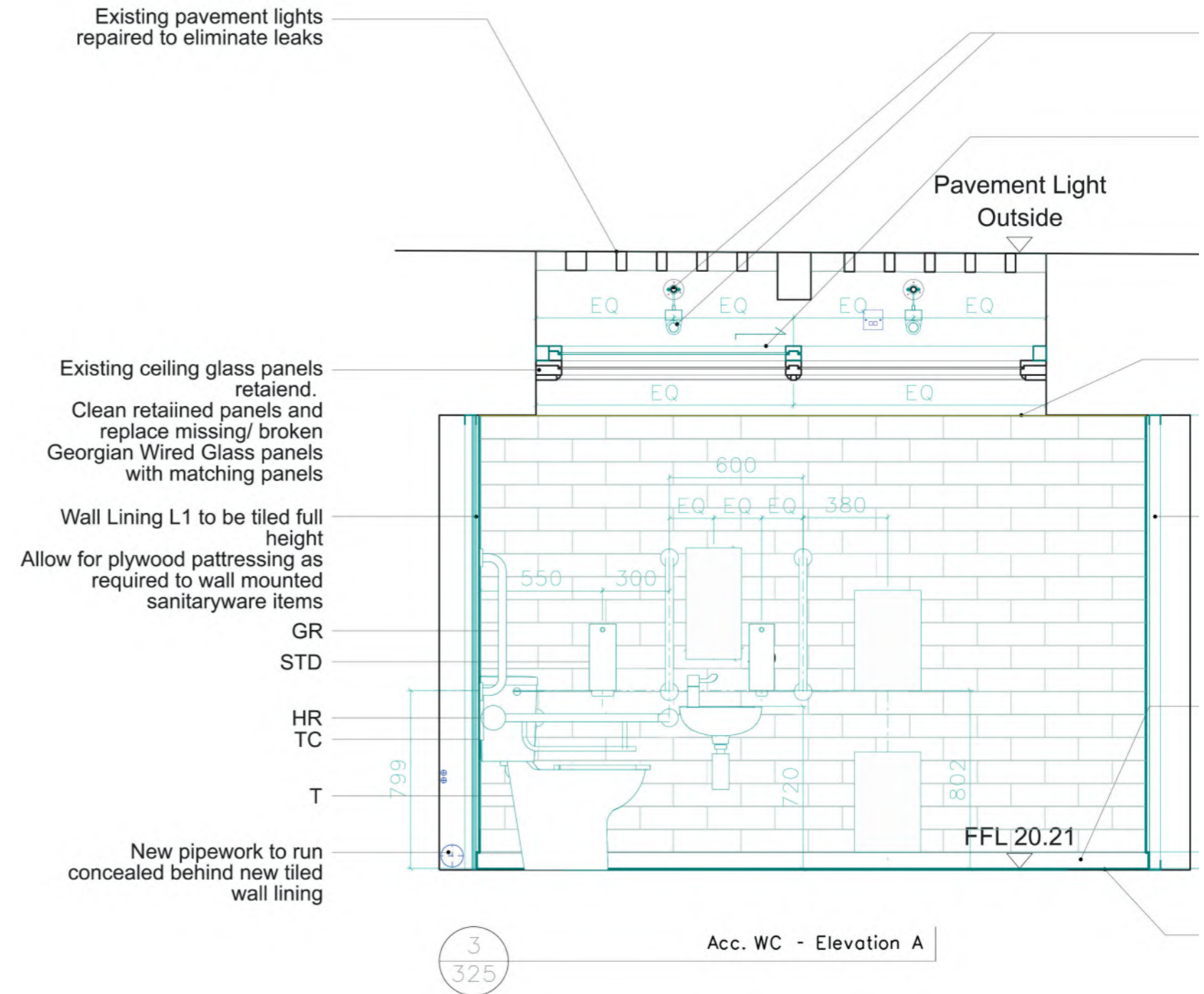
1 no missing glass panel has been replaced with a matching Georgian wired glass panel.

2. Georgian Wired Glass Panels in New Acc. WC - As installed



View of the new Acc. WC completed, with the original ceiling glass panels installed

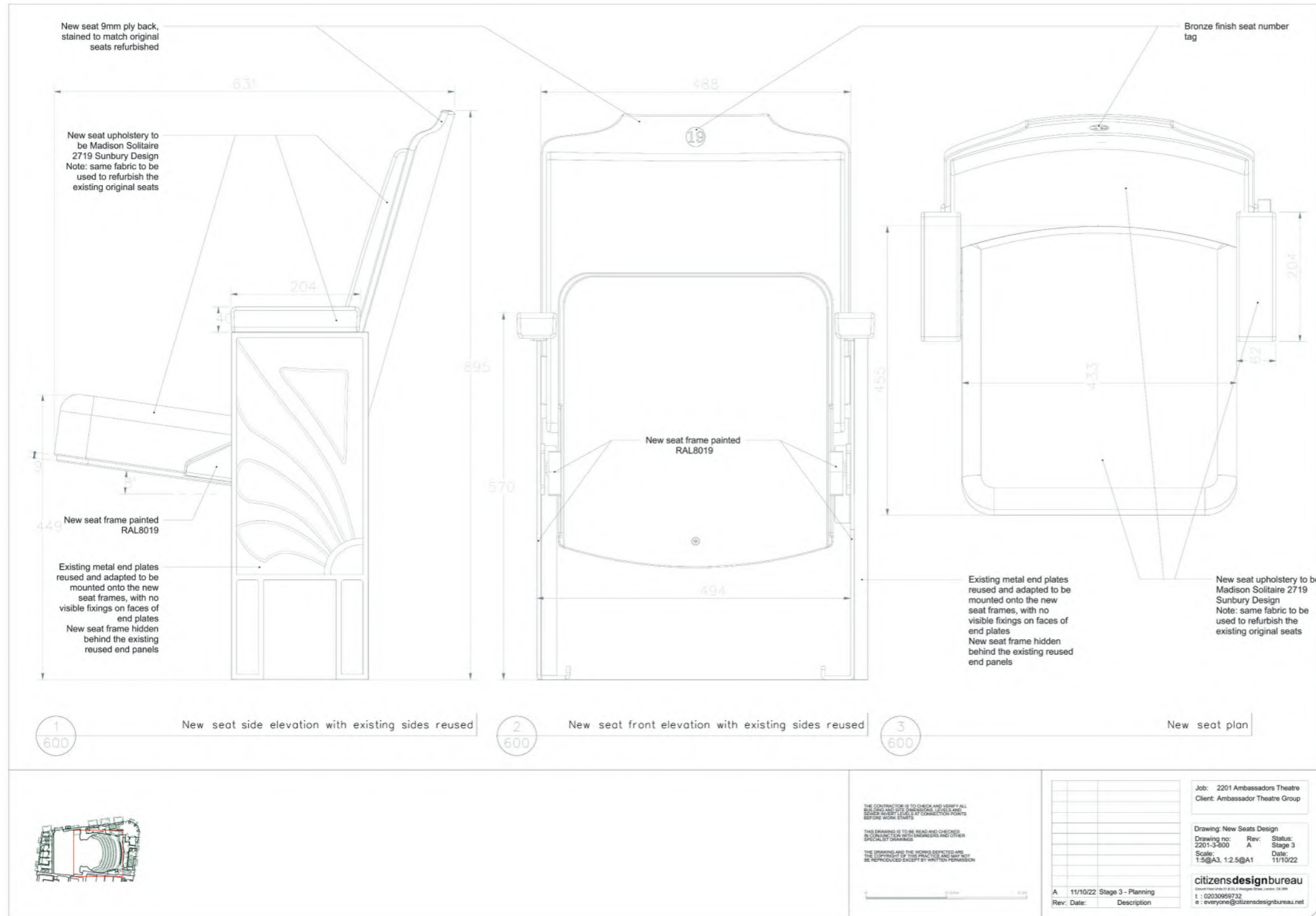
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Detail from the elevation drawings submitted and approved under Planning and Listed Building Consent ref. 2022/3105/P and ref. 2022/3599/L, showing the retained original ceiling glass panels

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3. Reused seat end panels

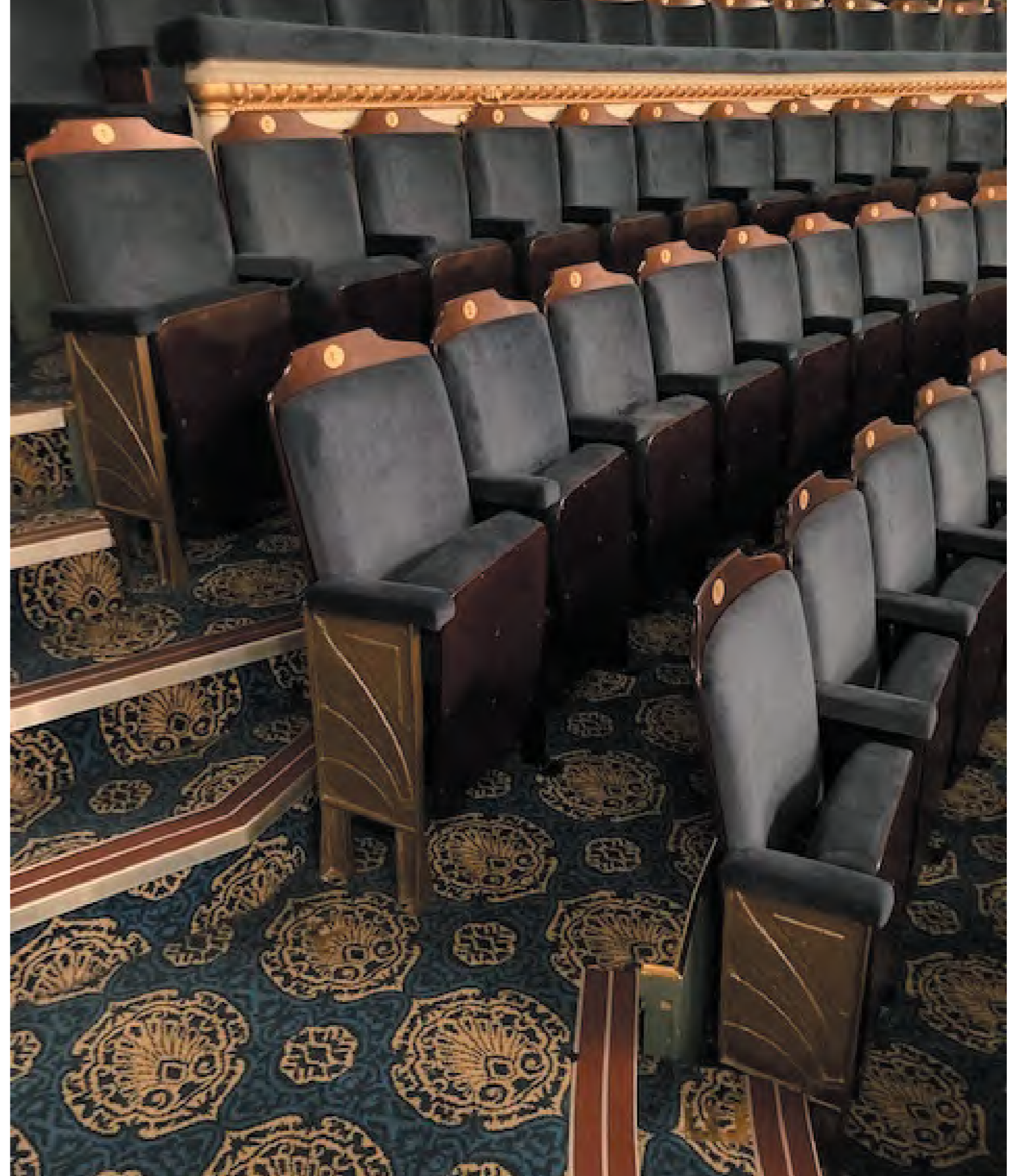


From the existing theatre seats, all the 46no cast metal end panels have been reused to form the end panels of the new seats installed at stalls and lower circle level. The reuse of the existing seat ends was discussed with the Planning Officer Elaine Quigley on 12th October 2022. The drawing detail above showing the existing seat ends being reused was circulated for comments to the Planners following the meeting, and subsequently approved under the Planning and Listed Building Consent ref. 2022/3105/P and ref. 2022/3599/L. Please see the following page for photos of the existing (before the works) and new (after the works) seats showing the existing seat end panels refurbished and as installed.

3. Reused seat end panels



View of the existing seat end panels before the works



View of the original seat end panels refurbished and reinstalled as part of the new seats design

4. Existing seats

For a West End theatre, The Ambassadors Theatre is unusually small, with a maximum seating capacity before the works of 410, ideal for more intimate performances and shows from smaller and regional theatres transferring to the West End to extend their run.

Before the renovation works, the auditorium was completely inaccessible to people with mobility issues. Deep balcony overhangs created severely compromised 'letterboxed' sightlines to the rear of the stalls seating area. This area was therefore identified as the most suitable location to allow for a new platform lift to be installed (between ground level and stalls) and to introduce new wheelchair accessible spaces and associated accessible WC at stalls level. As part of the relaying out works, the existing bar has been also opened up and a new 'get round' route created behind the back of the stalls enabling direct access to the bar area. This will also help to relieve some of the external congestion caused by audiences queuing on the street before shows. A new dedicated control room has been introduced at stalls level to allow for the original circle box seating to be restored.

The above proposals necessitated the removal of 4no rows of existing seats at the rear of the stalls (i.e. 41no existing seats omitted from the existing layout). As the building is particularly modest in size by West End standards, financial viability was a constant concern during the design stage, forcing the designs to provide a minimum of 400no seats and as many seats as possible to bring the new seat number as close to the 410no existing seats.

Whereas the original 56no seats located within the rear upper circle have been fully retained and refurbished, the other 354no tired and more recent, non-original seats have been replaced with 350no new seats to match with the original design and materials. This is to introduce new seats within the stalls and circle in a more efficient layout and to improve comfort (which was very poor in the circle area in particular due to the reduced back to back spacing and low seats height which made the audience experience unpleasant during performances). The original circle box previously used as control room has also been reinstated introducing 4no new seats, which is of heritage benefit and ensures that a minimum of 406no seats are retained together with the ongoing viability of the theatre.

To summarise, as a result of the proposal approved under the Planning and Listed Building Consent ref. 2022/3105/P and ref. 2022/3599/L:

- a total of 410no existing seats were present before the works at the Ambassadors Theatre;
- 56no of which were identified as original seats (upper circle). These seats have been refurbished and retained in their original location;
- 354no tired and more recent, non-original seats have been replaced with 350no new seats to match with the original design and materials. These seats were removed and stored off site and advertised for donation to other theatre venues - see following page.
- all the 46no existing cast metal end panels removed from the existing seats above have been reused as described under 3. *Reused seat end panels* above.

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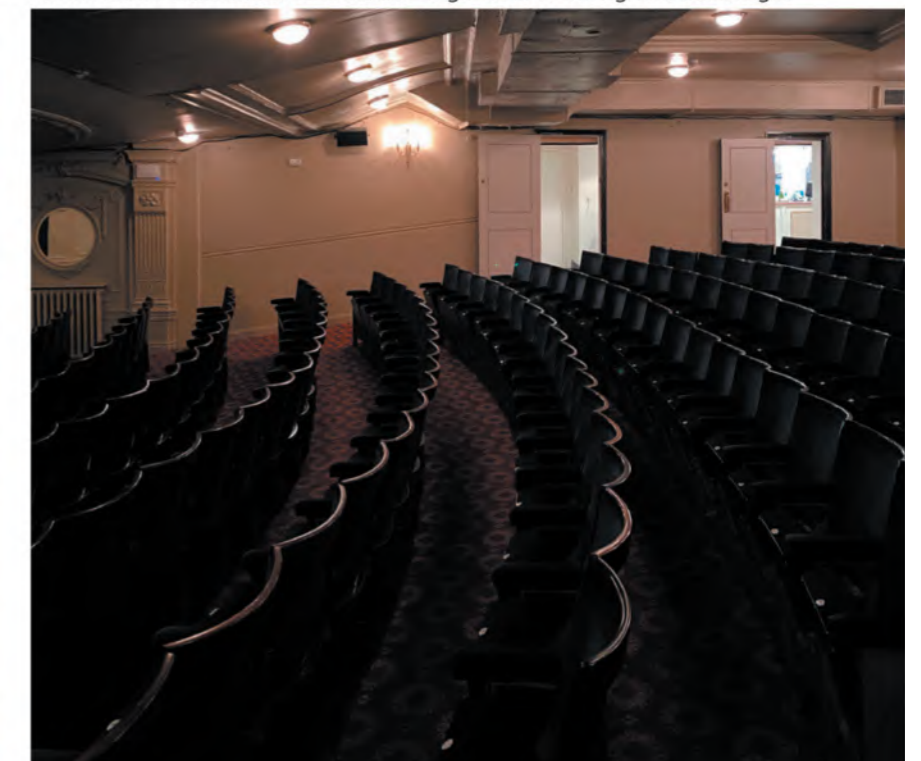


View from the seats in the rear stalls

Uneven step risers in the upper circle



Soffit of the rear stalls is compromised with unsightly ducts. The only access to the bar for the entire stalls audience is via the single door in the right of the image.



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4. Existing seats - Information provided by The Ambassadors Theatre

The below information has been provided by The Ambassadors Theatre Group in relation to the relocation of the existing seats removed.

- 356no existing seats were removed, disassembled and stored in a dedicated storage facility (Kennington Storage Units, 289 Kennington Ln, Rugby Rd, London SE11 5QY) to enable the refurbishment works to proceed. The offsite storage of the seats costs approximately £3,000 per month (£36,000 per year) which is a significant ongoing cost for a theatre as theatres often operate on the margins of viability and it is not feasible or viable to place the seats in long term storage.

- Since the continual storage of non-historic seats with no prospect of re-use was not an appropriate nor viable option for the The Ambassadors Theatre, adverts were published for the donation of the existing seats both on the Association of British Theatre Technicians portal on 17th November 2022 (<https://www.abtt.org.uk/west-end-theatre-seats-giveaway/>) and on the Theatres Trust portal on 18th November 2022 (<http://www.theatretrust.org.uk/latest/news/1928-ambassadors-theatre-seats-giveaway>) - see following pages for the full article published on the ABTT website.

- Within two weeks, The Ambassadors Theatre received 23no enquires from venues (theatres as well as charities and community venues) and professional companies, such as producers and hire firms. Despite stating in the articles mentioned above that The Ambassadors were looking to donate the seats in bulk, 39 individuals, some of whom had a personal connection to the Ambassadors, also inquired about acquiring smaller quantities of seats.

- Based on Camden's preference that the recipient body should, if possible, be based in London, the following short-list was compiled (on 04th January 2023):

- On 28th November 2022 the Arcola Theatre (London) requested 300no seats;
- On 22nd November 2022 the Opera Holland Park (London) requested the entirety of the available seats;
- On 20th November 2022 the Esher Theatre (Weybridge venue) requested 320no seats;
- On 23rd November 2022 the Sandpit Theatre (St Albans) requested 250no seats;
- On 23rd November 2022 the Montgomery Theatre & Arts Centre (Sheffield) requested the entirety of the available seats.

- The short-list was subsequently reduced (10th January 2023) to the Arcola Theatre and Esher Theatre, as the Opera Holland Park is an open air venue and only active for three months of the year, hence the chairs would only have been used for a quarter of the year for the foreseeable future.

- The Arcola Theatre was therefore contacted on 13th January 2023. Upon receiving the exact measurements of the seats, they eventually declined the offer on 25th January as installing the seats donated by the Ambassadors would have reduced their audience capacity.

- The Esher Theatre was contacted on 25th January 2023. The person who originally sent the confirmation of interest in receiving the seats from the Ambassadors had left the Esher Theatre in the meantime, which caused a delayed response and on 2nd February 2023 they declined the offer without giving feedback.

- The Opera Holland Park was contacted on 1st February 2023. They responded that the seats for the 2023 season had been sorted and that the seats from the Ambassadors were no longer required.

- The Sandpit Theatre was contacted on 2nd February 2023. Its director, Miles Leven, replied the following day, confirming that the theatre was still interested in receiving the seats from the Ambassadors. After receiving the measurements and testing out some of the seats in their auditorium, The Sandpit Theatre confirmed they would need an approx. 275no seats.

Pick-up arranged between Miles Leven and the Ambassadors. When collecting the seats from the storage location, the Ambassadors confirmed that they could provide the amount of seats required by The Sandpit Theatre, but that this would leave no remaining reusable seats since the rest were in need of substantial repair or beyond repair due to the poor condition of the seats themselves (caused by age and usage).

Next steps:

The Sandpit Theatre will get back with photos once they seats have been reassembled in-situ to demonstrate that the Ambassadors Theatre has undertaken the necessary steps to ensure the seats have been sustainably salvaged securing their future use, whilst also supporting another venue in need.

4. Existing seats - Conclusion

The seats that were removed from the Ambassadors Theatre were non-original and non-historic seating and new seats were approved to replace these, alongside the retention of the small number of original seats. Therefore, there would have been no prospect of re-using the non-original seats at the Ambassadors Theatre and they were subsequently stored off site.

Off-site storage is incredibly expensive and neither appropriate nor viable for a theatre to maintain. The Applicant sought to find opportunities for the re-use of the seats so as to avoid disposal. The most sustainable option was to offer the seating to other theatres and venues, extending the lifetime of the seats, ensuring future use, and supporting other venues in need of seating.

The Sandpit Theatre is a multi-purpose arts venue based on the campus of a school, providing a facility accessible to all and with a particular focus on productions by young people, community groups and professional touring companies. Like many other venues across the country, the Sandpit lost vital income during the COVID-19 pandemic and is slowly recovering from that period. The auditorium requires renovation and refurbishment and the receipt of the seating frees up funds to spend elsewhere in the venue.

The non-original seating have been sustainably salvaged, refurbished and repurposed for an alternative venue to extend their life and avoid disposal. Alongside, the re-use and salvage of other historic elements of the theatre (as described in this strategy), the Applicant has met the requirements of the condition.

4. Existing seats

Article published on the ABTT website (<https://www.abtt.org.uk/west-end-theatre-seats-giveaway/>)

West End theatre gives away seats for FREE

17 November 2022

The Ambassadors Theatre, one of the Ambassador Theatre Group's venues in London's West End, has approximately 350 auditorium seats to give away as part of a major refurbishment project taking place at the theatre.



While the dark timber frame is generally in good condition, the chairs have not been upholstered for some time and the blue fabric does show signs of wear. The chairs are not free-standing and will need to be mounted together and fixed to the floor. The side panels as seen in the pictures are not included.

The seats are currently in storage. Depending on demand, it may be possible to divide the chairs up into smaller lots of 20 to 50 units. Collection dates will be arranged by mutual agreement and should preferably take place before 22 December 2022.

Please register your interest with the Ambassador Theatre's Group's Property Information Coordinator **Verena Thim:** VerenaThim@theambassadors.com

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