

Our Ref.: RA/9004975

4 February 2016

For the attention of Ms Robin Sedgewick

Mr Gary Rice
Head of Development Management
London Borough of Southwark
PO Box 64529
London SE1P 5LX



Dear Mr Rice,

Skipton House, Elephant and Castle, London

Application Ref: 15/AP/5125

I write regarding the above application for construction of a mixed use development up to 29 storeys, including 3000sqm of multifunctional cultural space (Class D1/ D2/ Sui Generis) in the basement levels. The Trust supports the application. Please see our advice below.

Remit: The Theatres Trust is the national advisory public body for theatres. We champion the past, present and future of live theatre, by protecting the buildings and what goes on inside. We believe that current and future generations should have access to good quality theatre buildings where they can be inspired by, and enjoy, live theatre. 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 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'. This includes any existing building or part of a building constructed wholly or mainly for public performance, for example theatres, arts centres, ciné-varieties, purpose-built and converted buildings, new theatres, and important historic theatres in other uses or disused.

Remit: The Trust recognises the importance of investment and regeneration within town centres and takes a pro-active role in encouraging local authorities and the private sector to provide new cultural buildings to promote regeneration, place making, and social wellbeing. The Trust therefore welcomes the provision of a range of cultural facilities within the development.

The proposed cultural facilities comprise an entry foyer, box office and access to a stage lift at ground level, while the basement levels will contain a 500 seat performance space with balcony, three cinemas, a central atrium and circulation area, supporting retail concessions, and undesignated back of house space.

The Cultural Statement, based on market research from Bonnar Keenlyside, notes a 500 seat theatre was originally considered, however concludes theatre use alone would not be viable due to the capacity and the lack of a fly tower. Whilst a fly tower isn't necessary for certain types of theatre performance (the proposed 900 seat theatre at One Tower Bridge, the proposed 550 seat theatre above Tottenham Court Road Station, or the proposed 400 seat Collins Theatre in Islington do not include fly towers), the Trust supports the conclusion that a flexible mid-scale music hall that can also support a range of live performance, theatre, rehearsals, and recordings would be a successful and viable model in this location, based on current demand. Most cultural venues of this size rely on a range of income streams, including bars, restaurants and private hires, to support and offset their cultural offer.

We note a venue operator/ resident organisation (Cultural Statement, 10.4) will be selected to run and manage the performance venue and the obligations to manage the venue primarily for cultural purposes

Protecting theatres for everyone

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Trustees Nick Allott OBE, Richard Baldwin, Dara Ó Briain, Paddy Dillon, Ruth Eastwood, Oliver Goodwin,
Prof Gavin Henderson CBE, Jerry Katzman, Dame Penelope Keith DL, Judith Mellor OBE, Peter Roberts,
Simon Ruddick, Ann Skippers, Anna Stapleton

will be secured in the s.106 agreement. We support this measure. We also support the proposed s.106 requirement for the preparation of a Cultural Management Plan to detail the programme and minimum number of public facing performances. We also recommend one of the retail spaces on basement level 2, or another appropriate space, be demised to the performance venue to provide a bar, etc., as this will be necessary to support the operation of that venue, though we acknowledge this may be considered at a later detail design stage.

We understand the dimensions and confines of the performance space and cinemas will be finalised in this application (if permitted), as these will be fully isolated column free structures designed to prevent noise and vibration from other uses and the adjacent tube. However, the fit out of the auditorium and the back of house areas will be subject to a detailed design process at a later stage to reflect the specific needs of the venue operator/ resident organisation, once appointed. Performance venues are technically complex facilities and we recommend a theatre (or similar) consultant is engaged to help determine the technical and acoustic needs of such a venue (e.g. lighting bridges, supply points, etc.) and ensure these needs are incorporated in to the final fit out designs.

To ensure this occurs to a satisfactory level, we recommend a planning condition along the following lines:

Prior to the commencement of the fit out of the ground and basement level layouts relating to the cultural space, a detailed schedule of works and specification for the performance venue (including back and front of house facilities as well as an ancillary areas) together with technical and electrical installations, fixtures, fittings and seating shall be prepared in conjunction with the venue operator/ resident organisation and be approved in writing by the local authority.

The Trust also strongly recommends the s.106 provides clarification on who is responsible for the cost of the fit out and, if this is the responsibility of the developer, that funding to do so is secured in the agreement. Details should also be sought of the type of lease to be offered to the venue operator/ resident organisation e.g. pepper corn or commercial rates.

It should also be noted the Trust does not consider this venue to be an adequate replacement to the nearby Coronet Theatre. Any advice issued for the Coronet site should ensure a retained or replacement c.2000 seat theatre and live music venue is provided within that redevelopment to ensure there is not a reduction in the provision of local cultural offer. This is particularly in the context of the Elephant and Castle Opportunity Area experiencing a significant increase in population and related requirements for provision of access to a variety of cultural facilities and opportunities.

Please contact us if we may be of further assistance.

Yours sincerely,



Ross Anthony
Planning Adviser