

Outer London Commission Consultation

The Theatres Trust is The National Advisory Public Body for Theatres. The Town & Country Planning (General Development Procedure) Order 1995, Article 10, Para (v) requires the Trust to be consulted on planning applications which include 'development involving any land on which there is a theatre.' It was established by The Theatres Trust Act 1976 'to promote the better protection of theatres'. This applies to all buildings that were either built as theatres or are used for theatre presentations, in current use, in other uses, or disused.

Due to the specific nature of the Trust's remit we are concerned with the protection and promotion of theatres and therefore anticipate matters relating to cultural facilities.

(B) Quality of Life

(12) The provision of local social infrastructure

London is THE city for theatres. Theatres are an important community asset especially for town centres in the outer London Boroughs. They make a major contribution to the vitality of local town centres and London as a whole, especially the evening economy, and are significant elements of any urban town's cultural infrastructure. People attend these arts venues in large numbers for a wide range of arts and entertainment activities, both as paying members of the audience and also as participants in amateur, community and educational arts activities such as dramatic societies, choirs and youth theatre.

It is important that local town centres should not become 'dead' when their shops and offices close for the night. Evening and night-time activities are a fundamental part of the urban renaissance because they ensure the vitality of an area beyond normal working hours. A balance needs to be found between the main function of an urban centre as a shopping and employment destination, the available amenities for the residential population and the opportunities for local people to enjoy an evening out. The challenge therefore should be to build on existing strengths of local cultural venues and broaden the appeal of the local town centre to a wider range of ages and social groups such as families and older people who may prefer not to travel to the West End for an evening out.

The importance of outer London theatres was reinforced when Arts Council England announced in February 2007 that it is to focus around £700,000 of venue development funding on theatres in outer London during the next three years. It is distributing £230,000 a year until 2010 to six venues; The Broadway Barking, Croydon Clocktower, Drama Centre Redbridge, Jackson's Lane and Stratford Circus will each receive £40,000 per year, while Millfield Arts Centre in Enfield has been granted £30,000 annually. The venue development fund was established following ACE's Theatre Review in 2001 and the fund has refocused specifically to support venues in outer London in order to address what ACE calls 'historic under-investment' and to respond to changing demographics in these areas (Outer London theatres suffer from their proximity to the

West End as outer London theatres are often not big or rich enough to attract big-name performers and can end up relying on tribute shows).

Theatres are places where skills can be acquired. They act as 'seed beds', especially for young people where, as well as acquiring the skills involved in creating and performing drama, they will also be able to acquire skills in working with others, problem solving and communication, making them more self-confident and preparing them to deal with a range of different situations and other people to becoming part of a creative production team within the cultural and creative industries.

(13) Factors that give a sense of place and community ownership

Theatrical venues form a prized part of any community and their significance (both architecturally and culturally) has a local dimension in that they are popular places where families go and therefore are a focal point for cultural activity in the community. As such they immediately connect with the current debate around place-making and sustainable communities. People care about their local environment because it gives greater depth to places and theatres in particular provide a basis for personal sense of place and belonging. We would refer you to the Communities and Local Government (CLG): Guidance On Building A Local Sense Of Belonging published in January 2009.

Often outer London theatres play a very important role in London and in society as a whole by taking risks to push the boundaries of live performance and engaging audiences by entertaining and stretching the imagination which is an important way of developing new talent and new ideas that feed into our culture, reinventing and reinvigorating us. As well as the better known venues such as the Fairfield Halls in Croydon outer London theatres can be perched above a pub, tucked under a railway bridge, packed into a disused warehouse, built around a butcher's shop or suspended above a shopping centre but are nonetheless important in their own right within their community.

Whilst the West End receives an enormous amount of attention from the public and the press as well as support from tourism bodies and third party ticket sellers, the outer London theatres receive only a fraction of that support despite the fact that they in turn provide a focus for cultural and economic activity in their urban settings.

Protection of theatre use contributes to the Government's programme of creating sustainable communities. They are the cultural anchors of communities, offering opportunities for local residents, businesses and visitors to be entertained, informed, challenged and educated and we believe that theatres are therefore essential in the creation of sustainable communities. They provide places where people interact not only with the themes and spirit of the performance, but with each other, encouraging diversity, reflecting local life and helping to forge communities' cultural identity and cohesion.

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