

Belgrade
Theatre
Coventry

CELEBRATING 60 YEARS
1958-2018

**Design and Access Statement
Inc Heritage Statement**

**Belgrade Theatre Refurbishment
Retractable Cover Proposal**



July 2019



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FORWARD

In the early 2000's the Belgrade Theatre identified the need for change and undertook the ambitious Capital Development Scheme that culminated in the 2007 opening of the B2 extension and refurbishment of the existing building. It saw these works not only as an opportunity to improve its position and function within the City of Coventry, but also as a catalyst for future change within its immediate area.

Over a decade later and that contextual change is close to fruition. The Theatre's physical context has developed with the building of Belgrade Plaza and the demographics within the City have evolved. The economic situation in which the Theatre operates has also required some rethinking as to how to ensure its own sustainability.

The Theatre therefore sees this as an opportune time to respond to these issues and be seen again as a leader in improving the public experience of the city.

In addition, since the original conception of the brief for this application in 2017, Coventry has won the title of UK City of Culture for 2021, and Belgrade Theatre was instrumental in help securing the city for the honour. The Theatre will take support the city to take centre stage and show the world all that Coventry has to offer so it is imperative that the Theatre has the facilities to help support this opportunity through Culture.

In November 2020, the Belgrade Theatre applied and received funding from the Arts Council's *Culture Recovery Fund: Grants Programme*. This fund offers financial support for cultural organisations that were financially stable before Covid-19, but were at imminent risk of failure, and the Belgrade Theatre is one such organisation.

This application follows the previous recent approvals of LB/2019/2252 Café Refurbishment and LB/2019/0185 Auditorium Refurbishment, and the current pending 2020/0622 for advertisement consent.

BACKGROUND

Since the completion of the 2007 B2 extension, the context the Theatre has found itself in has changed once again. The Theatre is in the process of completing its existing facilities for the next decade with its refurbishment of the original auditorium and new café, and continues to find challenges with the current COVID pandemic restrictions. Initial studies were undertaken to analyse the existing building, both externally and internally, considering their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The Theatre's Board Meetings strategic meeting on 05 June 2017 captured the initial strategic objectives and external influences which informed previous planning applications. However, the current COVID pandemic has caused a **significant impact** on the Theatre's survival. In addition to the previous outcomes of the strategic meeting, presented in the previous applications, the following actions are required for it's survival and safeguard;

Key Issues

- Attendance numbers are significantly reduced and in-turn reduction of income.
- The Theatre will expand its performances to external venues and spaces to increase revenues and opportunities. This will include the Belgrade Square as a main space.
- Introduce complimentary pop-up kiosks serving small refreshments, ticket sales, merchandising and other POS opportunities.
- Increase seating provision type to include external area of the square and ensure they can be used all year round.

External Influences

- Large scale redevelopment of surrounding area of city.
- Student Residences 650 Bed.
- Redevelopment of Coventry Telegraph Offices – 1950's Boutique Hotel and restaurant which will increase competition.
- Development of former Co-Op building completed.
- Further development of Belgrade Plaza – extension proposed to Premier Inn.

NEED

The Theatre has outlined the below objective to support this application;

The Theatre's recovery rests on COMMUNITIES FEELING ENGAGED AND ENCOURAGED TO GATHER and use our facilities, and increasing our RESILIENCE.

SO THAT WE ARE VIABLE AND SUSTAINABLE beyond 31 March 2021, we will be open, operating on a lower cost base. We will maximise income from all sources and progress our cultural activity to engage all our different audiences on line and in person - targeting DIVERSE communities often excluded and who are core to our City of Culture Programme.

We will

- *deliver participation, education and talent development PROGRAMMES,*
- *run a range of outdoor and indoor flexible low risk TEST EVENTS, streamed or delivered socially distanced,*
- *PRODUCE a Digi Panto on a Paid For Platform and screened in house coproduce our contracted 1st Quarter 2021 Project,*
- *BE COMMISSIONED to deliver programmes that combat low attainment, isolation, social exclusion, knife crime and poor mental health,*
- *improve RESILIENCE and audience SAFETY PERCEPTION and build income through INVESTING in outside amenities, internal adaptations, increased cleaning measures,*
- *SUPPORT THE THEATRE ECOLOGY by feeding local talent, engaging artists and offering auditoria and staff to companies for teching or filming,*
- *UPGRADE OUR DIGITAL infrastructure to enable quality digital streaming, on line engagement, build RESILIENCE and to improve anti Covid safety measures,*
- *REBUILD ALL TRADING, operating leaner models across all facilities indoors and outdoors,*
- *MAXIMISE income through flexibility and repurposing venues and resources, commercialisation, maximising the 2021 OPPORTUNITIES in our increased catering facility*

BRIEF

To help support the Theatre's urgent needs, Corstorphine + Wright were appointed to develop a proposal to introduce a covered area to the North Elevation fronting the Belgrade Square. Whilst the Theatre has a strong physical presence on the square, it lacks any physical or operational connection with the square.

The covered area would provide a seating area for food and beverages (F&B) general seating, with the provision also serving for pop-up performances in the square allowing audiences to continue to view the performances and being served.

The proposal will need to be sympathetic to the historical fabric and building design, currently Grade 2 listed.

PROPOSALS

Figure 1 Concept sketch of the external Belgrade Square

Entrance

The proposals for a canopy will be;

1. Retractable in order that it can be withdrawn from the public space when not in use, and every evening upon closure.
2. Operation would be similar to an awning.
3. Fixed on locations to the main column locations that frame the double height space in the foyer.
4. The retracted solutions will work with the windows frame transoms and mullions. The windows are not original and were replaced prior to the building's listed status.
5. The awning framing will be white to match the window frame.
6. Canvas will be white, with the potential for some theatre branding.



Accessibility

The café will be providing a new outdoor space what will be covered to allow all year round use and access.

The existing thresholds will remain and be unaffected.

HERITAGE STATEMENT

The buildings history and heritage is well documents, and a conservation management plan was produced prior the development of the B2 extension in 2006. A copy of this is available in the original application.



Figure 2 Original Theatre design with entrance

The report outlines that the original design proposals were developed over a number of years, from City Architect Donald Gibson's early 1950's design to the eventual redesigned by Author Ling in 1955. The redesign was due to the introduction of the main square, now known as Belgrade Square, and the elevation facing the square was redesigned with large windows, a porte-cochère at the main entrance.

The modified design meant that the theatre made a more imposing contribution to the urban landscape than would have been the case had its primary entrance been in the middle of a longer row of shops on Corporation Street, as originally designed.

Our proposal seeks to ensure the strong architectural language is not eroded. The double height windows and spaces will remain dominate by the canopy cover supports set out to the full width of the structural bays. Supports will be minimal in size, and coordinated with the window frame.

The selection of material and colour will align with the stonework and window frame colours to ensure continuity and reduced impact.



Figure 3 Theatre at night, 1958