

Design & Access and Historical Impact Statement

For

Proposed installation of a new safety curtain and counterweight cradles to replace the existing safety curtain system.

At

Palace Theatre, Manchester

97 Oxford Street,
Manchester
M1 6FT

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On behalf of:

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Contents

	Page
1 Introduction	3
2 Building Description	3
3 The buildings setting, its architectural/historic significance and impact upon the heritage asset	6
4 MJC Background and Experience	9
5 Design and Access Statement – Improvements in design and accessibility	10
6 Conclusion	11

Appendices

A Existing and proposed drawing numbers	12
B Existing photos and proposed visualisations	13

1 Introduction

The Design & Access and Historical Impact Statement has been prepared in support of a Listed Building Consent application for the proposed installation of a new safety curtain and counterweight cradles to replace the existing old safety curtain and cradles. Several past repairs have been installed, and it is now time to replace the whole system with new, to meet current safety standards and regulations, due to asbestos being present on the existing.

The applications will be submitted by MJ Consulting on behalf of the client.

The works will affect the existing internal Proscenium arched wall (stage side) and the stage area up to grid level.

2 Building Listing

Overview

Heritage Category: Listed Building

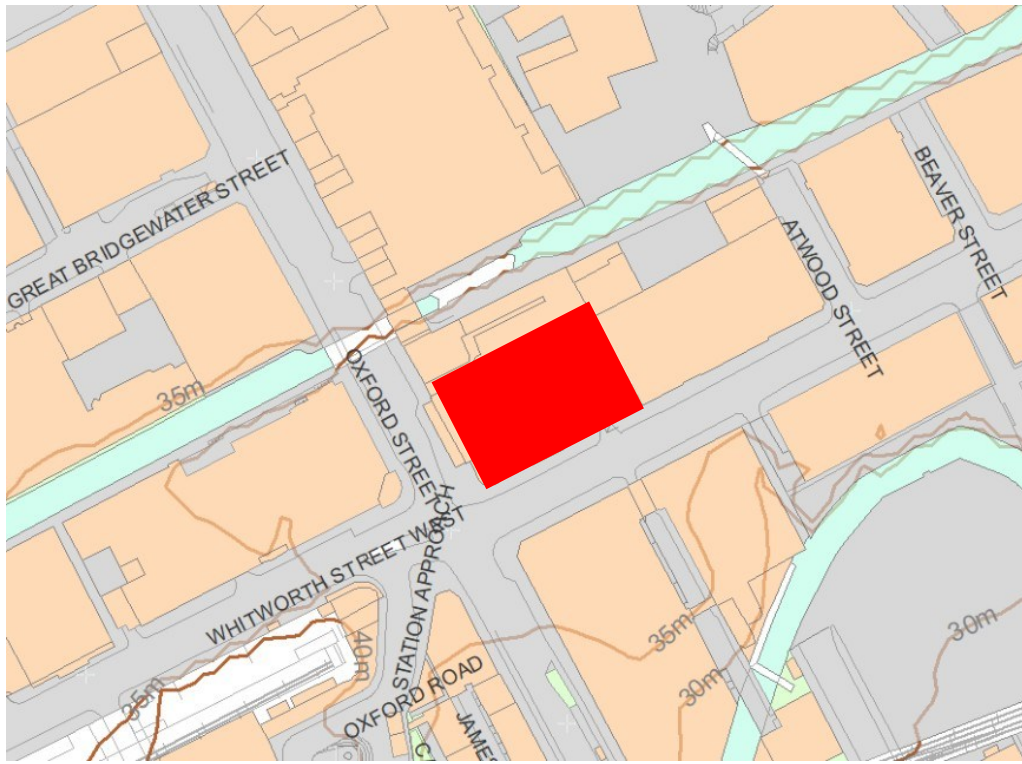
Grade: II

List Entry Number: 1271227

Date first listed: 08-Jun-1977

Statutory Address: The Palace Theatre, Oxford Street

Map



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The above map is for quick reference purposes only and may not be too scale.

Location

Statutory Address: The Palace Theatre, Oxford Street
The building or site itself may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

District: Manchester (Metropolitan Authority)

Parish: Non Civil Parish

National Grid Reference: SJ84106 97617

Details

SJ 8497 NW 698-1/32/269

MANCHESTER OXFORD STREET (East side) The Palace Theatre

08/06/77

GV

II

Theatre. 1891, by Alfred Darbyshire and F.Bennett Smith; altered 1913 by Bertie Crewe of London; re-fronted 1956. Probably iron-framed, clad with brick and now faced with buff glazed terracotta; slate roof. Rectangular plan. Three storeys and basement. The facade, in debased modern classical style, is of less interest than the INTERIOR: auditorium with two tiers of segmentally curved balconies (the Circle and the Grand Tier) with bowed ends, the fronts decorated with continuous series of cartouches, anthemions, etc, and two tiers of boxes carried by standing Atlantes, with tetrastyle architraves of giant fluted Ionic columns; and a circular dome in the ceiling with a hinged lighting panel. Circle promenade with Ionic columns and semi-columns, and elaborate pedimented architraves to the staircase doors.

Listing NGR: SJ8410697617

3 The Building setting, it's architectural/historic significance and impact on the heritage asset

The existing internal elevations which form a principal item within the Listing is the focal point of the works for the theatre. The proscenium arched wall, stage side, is the location for the existing safety curtain. The existing is to be replaced with a new safety curtain system.

The proposed works covered by this application focuses upon: -

- a) The installation of a new safety curtain and counterweight cradles, safety curtain hoist (Firefly), header pulleys and hauling steel wire ropes, to replace the existing safety curtain system which contains asbestos. The new safety curtain will have a fire rating Integrity of 1 hour, with new rubber and foam smoke seals top and bottom of the safety curtain. The new safety curtain will have an E-Glass Needlemat fire retardant lining to stage side, to meet current standards and regulations.
- b) A new pelmet hoist and frame are to be installed onto the existing grid, where the current header pulley is located. The existing pelmet fabric is to be cleaned and re-used.
- c) A new motor control cabinet adjacent to the safety curtain hoist is to be installed.

Existing historical, technical and architectural significance.

Historical:

The venue was constructed in 1891, altered in 1913 and re-fronted in 1956. The venue has a rich history and has hosted a variety of performances from ballet and variety shows to major touring musicals and operas. The theatre was designated a Grade II listed building in 1977. Today, it remains one of the largest and best equipped theatres

outside of London, continuing to host major productions and performances.

Technical:

The theatre features a well-designed stage and auditorium, ensuring excellent acoustics and sightlines, enhancing the overall audience experience. Renovations to the stage were carried out in the 1980's allowing it to host larger and more complex productions. The theatre is equipped with modern lighting and rigging systems, which are essential for creating dynamic and visually engaging performances. The seating capacity of 1,955 is one of the largest outside of London, making it a prime venue for all major touring musicals, operas and other larger-scale productions.

Architectural:

Original designed by Alfred Darbyshire, the theatre showcases a French-Neo-Grecian style. The design was later enhanced by renowned theatre Architect Frank Matcha in 1896.

The Interior was extensively renovated by Bertie Crewe in 1913, adopting a Greco-Roman style.

The façade of the theatre was covered in cream faience tiles in 1953 to give it a modern appearance. Despite these changes, the theatre retains many of its original architectural features, making it a blend of historical and modern elements.

The listed building status, awarded in 1977, helps preserve its architectural heritage and ensures that any future modifications respect its historical significance.

The proposed work of replacing the safety curtain with a new steel frame and modern fire rated cloth would have no detrimental impact on the architectural and historical character and appearance of the building, as a whole.

The auditorium face of the safety curtain is finished in predominantly blue, with a red border and gold detailing. 'Safety curtain' is written on the lower section of the curtain, in gold, and a white square is

positioned in the middle of the curtain, which is used for advertisement purposes. The intention would be to replicate the same colour scheme and gold detailing and wording, while maintaining the white square for the venue related advertisement.

The safety curtain is formed of a steel frame which is encapsulated in asbestos. The steel frame is hung from the grid above via steel wire ropes, which divert around pulley's to connect to the counterweights and the motor that raises and lowers the safety curtain.

All elements of the safety curtain are to be removed and replaced with a new system, including a new safety curtain framework, new fire rated cloth, new counterweight cradles, new steel wire rope, new diverter pulley's and a new motor. The existing drencher pipe is to be capped off and removed as this is no longer required. An assessment to ascertain the viability for removal of the drencher system has been prepared by RB Health and Safety Solutions. All Items being removed have no historical significance.

The works being proposed are necessary to de-risk the possibility of asbestos contamination within the venue, as the current cloth has deteriorated and is causing Issues when the curtain is raised and lowered.

The proposed work will improve the operability of the safety curtain, while maintaining the fire break between front of house and back of house, and as such, assist with preserving the historical, technical and architectural significant elements of the venue.

The proposals have no effect upon the wider environment surrounding the venue.

Please refer to Appendix A for the existing and proposed drawing references. Refer to Appendix B for photograph of the existing safety curtain (auditorium side) showing the existing colours and gold detailing.

4 MJC Background and Experience

MJC work nationwide within the theatre/music industry undertaking complex building surveying and structural works. They have significant experience of undertaking works in a way which is sympathetic to the historical significance of many of the buildings in which they operate whilst incorporating modern equipment and facilities essential for the ongoing operation of the buildings and the increasing demands put on those buildings, and from that protecting the revenue streams essential in the protection of the Historic Asset.

A full list of previous works and experience can be provided upon request.

5 Design and Access Statement/Improvements in design and accessibility

The purpose of the work is to replace the existing safety curtain which contains asbestos and has potential issues with contamination due to the safety curtain coming to the end of its serviceable life. It requires decommissioning, removal and disposal from site.

Component

The proscenium arched wall, stage side, is the location for the existing safety curtain. The existing is to be replaced with a new safety curtain and counterweight cradles. The new safety curtain will be made from steel panels with steel sheets cladded to either side and the fire-retardant lining (E-Glass Needle mat), placed on the stage side of the safety curtain. New wall-mounted steel channel guides fixed back to the proscenium wall using adjustable brackets, to extend from stage finished floor level, for the full range of travel. New smoke seals: top rubber seal connected to the safety curtain and bottom foam strip across entire length of the curtain. The new safety curtain will have a fire rating of 1 hour integrity.

A new safety curtain hoist (Firefly) and header pulleys. A new pelmet hoist and frame are to be installed onto the existing grid, where the current header pulley is located.

Accessibility

The designs have been developed in conjunction with detailed liaison with the theatre management team and client.

Materials, colour and design have been chosen to reflect the existing finishes for the theatre.

The asbestos contractor is to provide a scaffold tented structure to allow all asbestos to be safely removed from the existing safety curtain, before removal from site.

Temporary beams will be installed to slide the existing safety curtain away from the proscenium wall. A MEWP will be hired and placed on stage, to help with the procedure. The tented structure will be constructed around the existing safety curtain, in an upright position, to aid in accessing the asbestos for removal. The existing safety curtain will then be dismantled and removed from the site. The tented structure is to prevent any loose fibres, which may be dislodged from the asbestos, whilst the dismantling of the existing safety curtain is in progress.

All work will be confined to the stage side of the proscenium wall.

6 Conclusions

The purpose of the proposals is to:

- a) Provide the venue with a new 1 hour fire resistant safety curtain which meets current standards and regulations.
- b) Replace the existing safety curtain which contains asbestos and is at the end of its serviceable life.
- c) Ensure the continued future use of the venue.

We believe that the proposals will provide a solution to the future needs of the venue, whilst maintaining and enhancing the existing appearance of the building, whilst keeping the facilities and safety for the venue users and staff, as well as facilitating the enjoyment of this historic asset.

Appendix A: Existing and proposed drawing references

MJC25_01_016-001 Existing location plan
MJC25_01_016-002 Existing Stalls/Stage floor plan
MJC25_01_016-003 Existing Circle floor plan
MJC25_01_016-004 Existing Grand Tier floor plan
MJC25_01_016-005 Existing Grid plan
MJC25_01_016-006 Existing Proscenium wall elevation and section
MJC25_01_016-010 Existing Stalls/Stage floor plan TBR
MJC25_01_016-011 Existing Circle and Grid level floor plans TBR
MJC25_01_016-012 Existing Proscenium elevation and section TBR
MJC25_01_016-013 Proposed stalls/stage floor plan, elevation and section showing tented scaffold
MJC25_01_016-014 Proposed stage propping details
MJC25_01_016-020 Proposed Stalls/Stage floor plan
MJC25_01_016-021 Proposed Circle and Grid level floor plans
MJC25_01_016-022 Proposed Proscenium wall elevation and section
MJC25_01_016-023 Proposed bracket details - Option 1
MJC25_01_016-024 Proposed bracket details - Option 2

Appendix B: Existing photos



The existing photograph shows the Auditorium side of the safety curtain and the paintwork. The new safety curtain will be painted, colours/RAL no's to be confirmed by the client at a later date. New white square for projector purposes.



The existing photograph shows the drencher pipe, counterweight cradle and guidelines and the safety curtain from stage right gallery level.