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### **Reading Borough Council Local Plan Examination – Matters & Issues for Examination**

Thank you for consulting the Theatres Trust on the above document. Our comments are set out below.

#### **Statement:**

The Hexagon is a multi-purpose arts venue, with a maximum seated capacity of 1,200 (although 284 choir stalls have limited use) and a mixed seated/standing capacity of almost 1,700. We consider it to be architecturally significant, having been designed by Robert Matthew, Johnson-Marshall & Partners who were also responsible for other important buildings including the Grade I listed Royal Festival Hall. It was lauded at the time of construction due to its radical appearance. As alluded to by its name, it is hexagonal in shape with an independent clear-span roof structure of steel, precast and in-situ reinforced concrete. It is unlike any other theatre in Britain.

Nonetheless, we accept it has limitations as a theatre and sightlines are poor from some seats. It functions better as a concert hall, and this is reflected by its current programme which predominantly consists of live music and comedy.

We consider the optimum solution to be retention of the Hexagon as a concert venue, and for a new purpose-built theatre capable of accepting 'number one' touring shows to be constructed. This is because Reading lacks a fully-functioning theatre of such scale and such a venture can be viable alongside a concert venue as they would have contrasting offers. Fundamentally although our priority is to support a functioning theatre in Reading, we would also be reluctant to support loss of the Hexagon given the significance outlined.

In our Regulation 19 consultation response to the Borough Council of 26<sup>th</sup> January 2018, we made clear our support for the Hexagon by disagreeing it is in need of replacement. We do however concur with the Plan in that it is not suited to modern theatre requirements. Perhaps this could have been made clearer, and the text above should hopefully add some context and justification behind our position.

#### **Theatres Trust**

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The National Advisory Public Body for Theatres

The Theatres Trust Charitable Fund co-operates with Theatres Trust, has the same Trustees and is registered as a charity under number 274697

We would reiterate though that if the Hexagon is to cease as a performance venue, it is essential that a replacement of at least equal standard is provided and that there is no break in provision of live performance of that scale in Reading. We recommended in our previous response that applicants should work with the Trust, and we welcome that the Plan was amended to reflect this.

In specific response to the Q16 of the Matters & Issues for Examination, certainly the principle behind the position taken in terms of requiring replacement is but note there is an inconsistency. This is because the site allocation description requires a replacement theatre for Reading to be provided, whereas paragraph 5.4.17 states it must be within the same area.

Although slightly outside of the scope of this statement as a new matter, we are aware of proposals for a new theatre on an alternative site within Reading. If this were to be delivered as indicated within local press articles this would be something the Trust could be willing to support. On that basis, we would be willing to support an amendment to paragraph 5.4.17 that removes the requirement for replacement to be in the same area and make it consistent with the brief for Site CR12e. This would however be conditional upon any replacement, whether on an alternative site or not, being delivered and operational before development within Site CR12e can come forward. It would need to be stated as such within the modified Plan.

Please do not hesitate to contact the Trust should you wish to discuss these comments in greater detail. I am otherwise happy to discuss any points the Inspector may choose to raise at Examination.



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