

EQUITY

Equity response – Reforms to the statutory consultee system – Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

January 2026

About

1. Equity is the largest creative industries trade union with 50,000 members united in the fight for fair terms and conditions across the performing arts and entertainment. Our members are actors, singers, dancers, designers, directors, models, stage managers, stunt performers, choreographers, circus performers, puppeteers, comedians, voice artists, supporting artists and variety performers. They work on stage, on TV and film sets, on the catwalk, in film studios, in recording studios, in night clubs and in circus tents.

8. *In light of the proposed mitigations, do you support the removal of Theatres Trust as a statutory consultee?*

- Oppose

9. *Are there impacts of the removal of Theatres Trust as a statutory consultee, or the proposed mitigations, that you think the government should take into account in making a final decision?*

2. Equity opposes the removal of Theatres Trust as a statutory consultee. Removal of Theatres Trust's statutory consultee status will have a limited impact on improving housebuilding and instead will remove a key cornerstone of the support that theatres across the UK rely on.
3. We support the government's aim of building more affordable housing, however, do not agree that removing Theatres Trust from the statutory consultees system will contribute to this aim. As highlighted in the consultation, the applications that Theatres Trust are consulted on have a limited impact on housebuilding. Theatres Trust have similarly highlighted that just a fraction of the applications that they are consulted on relate to housing. Between 2022 to 2024 just 7% of the responses that Theatres Trust gave to planning applications related to housing developments, with just one of these resulting in an outright objection impacting 7 proposed residential units.¹
4. Rather than blocking or slowing housebuilding, Theatres Trust have specialist expertise that other statutory consultees do not have. This enables them to provide advice that supports the viability of development in cohesion with the requirements of theatre building. For instance, advising on appropriate soundproofing measures for new housing developments adjacent to theatres to ensure that noise is minimised.
5. As the department acknowledges, theatres have high community value and contribute to building thriving, cohesive communities. The removal of Theatres Trust as a statutory consultee puts theatres at risk, particularly if they do not have listed status. Non-traditional theatres or non-formal theatre spaces play a crucial role in supporting the creative pipeline which can see a small-scale production grow to national and international

¹ Theatres Trust briefing, Reforms to the Statutory Consultee System

success. For example, Punchdrunk, an award-winning immersive theatre company, had their early work supported by smaller venues including Bethnal Green Working Men's Club (BGWMC) and have gone on to own their own venues and enjoy national and international success, a byproduct of which is generation of economic returns for local economies. We know that for every £1 spent on a theatre ticket, an additional £1.40 is spent in surrounding businesses, generating £1.94 billion in added value to local economies each year.² Similarly, the same venue, BGWMC, was the site of regular club nights which formed the foundation of Europe's largest LGBTQ+ music festival, Mighty Hoopla, which takes place in Lambeth and forms one part of a host of events that generate significant economic returns for the local area.³

6. In addition to their role in supporting the growth of economically successful events and companies, small and non-traditional venues are vitally important stages for many creative workers such as drag artists, comedians, singers and others who make their careers in these venues. Often these venues are at the forefront of supporting work that might not get platformed by larger or more traditional venues, with venues such as BGWMC supporting LGBTQ+ acts and giving a platform and space for people from marginalised backgrounds to perform and watch performances.
7. Without the support of Theatres Trust and its status as a statutory consultee, these non-traditional venues are at risk of having no voice when planning applications threaten their viability. Removing Theatres Trust as a statutory consultee leaves the planning system without inbuilt protection for theatres that do not have listed status, tipping the balance of consulted interests away from the creative industries, one of the government's priority growth sectors.⁴ For an example of how Theatres Trust's support and status as a statutory consultee has been instrumental in supporting such venues, please see the below case study concerning BGWMC.
8. The mitigations proposed by the department in the consultation do not go far enough to ensure that theatres will be assured of adequate consideration in the planning process. The proposals are lacking in detail and do not contain sufficient assurances for Theatres Trust to know how a notification system would work or know whether this would be a suitable alternative to their role as a statutory consultee. Equity would welcome a review of Theatres Trust's role within the system, but in the good faith understanding that a review prioritised the needs of theatres as well as the needs of housebuilding. This current proposal appears to consider neither given the department's own admission that removing Theatres Trust as a statutory consultee will have limited impact. There are considerations to be made, such as extending Theatres Trust's oversight to include developments on land that neighbours a theatre and would have an impact on the operation of the theatre. One such current proposal by Brighton Hove & Sussex Sixth Form

² [SOLTUKT-State-Of-British-Theatre.pdf](#), May 2025, p. 16.

³ [Lambeth Council, 'Parks in Lambeth', Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2025](#)

⁴ [Creative Industries Sector Plan, 2025](#)

College (BHASVIC) for a new sports facility backing onto Brighton Open Air Theatre would likely result in the theatre not being able to function as it currently does due to anticipated noise. Theatres Trust are not a statutory consultee in this instance due to the sports facility not being on theatre land.

Case Study: Bethnal Green Working Men's Club (BGWMC)

9. In July 2024, the owners of BGWMC indicated their intention to sell the building. They expressed a desire to sell to the highest bidder on the market and gave two months' notice to vacate to the existing cultural business tenants.
10. BGWMC was granted 'Asset of Community Value' status, giving the community a right to enter a bid and a 6-month window in which to raise funds, but crucially not preventing a sale. Under this status, there is no obligation for the community bid to be accepted, leaving the community vulnerable to being outbid by commercial interests.
11. Equity, as part of 'Friends of Bethnal Green Working Men's Club' approached Theatres Trust for support. The Trust visited the venue to understand its historic use and how this could be interpreted under planning legislation, concluding that it should be considered a theatre. From this advice, Equity was able to submit an application for a Certificate of Lawful Development to establish the building's use as a Cabaret Theatre. This means that Theatres Trust will be a statutory consultee in any application seeking to develop on the land that BGWMC is on.
12. Theatres Trust's expert advice meant that a small community cultural organisation could seek advice on how to navigate the significant power imbalance between themselves and prospective commercial interests. The trust's specialist knowledge about the requirements of theatre venues has also meant that prospective buyers are now aware of the venue's use as a theatre, avoiding an all too often seen scenario in which developers acquire cultural venues for development without understanding the planning restrictions such buildings face leading to the venues lying empty for years.
13. Removing Theatres Trust as a statutory consultee means the removal of this expert knowledge as a standard in the planning system, weakening a significant part of the ecosystem which supports effective and efficient development.

Contact

For more information about this submission, please contact Equity's Policy and Public Affairs Assistant, Amelia Pratt (apratt@equity.org.uk)