



Originator:	Catherine Blanshard
Tel:	247 8330

Report of the Chief Libraries, Arts and Heritage Officer

Scrutiny Board (Culture & Leisure)

Date: 14 April 2008

Subject: Wheelchair Access to Leeds Grand Theatre

<p>Electoral wards affected:</p>	<p>Specific implications for:</p> <p>Ethnic minorities <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Women <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Disabled people <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Narrowing the gap <input type="checkbox"/></p>
---	---

1.0 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 To provide background information to Scrutiny Board in relation to access issues at the Leeds Grand Theatre.

2.0 Ms. Chambers' complaint

- 2.1 A request has been received by the Scrutiny Office from Ms. Chambers which identified access issues in relation to access at the Leeds Grand Theatre. Ms. Chambers was prompted to write as a result of the minute of Scrutiny Board of 16th April, 2007. The quote below, from the minutes records the discussion between the Board, the Architect and the Project Manager.

'Clarification of the proposals to enhance the disabled access with the possibility of using the vacant shop area and the need for the consultants to address the refurbishment of the dressing rooms to be an integral part of the project.

(The Board were advised that the theatre was DDA compliant, but that there remained the aspiration by the Leeds Grand Theatre to improve access arrangements when funds allowed and, that budget provision existed for works to be undertaken to improve the theatre's backstage areas, including the dressing rooms).'

The comments in brackets here refers to the Phase 1 works which made the Grand Theatre itself reasonably accessible. It should also be noted that the legislation does not allow for any particular aspect to be 'compliant' as described about, the legislation is based on reasonableness.

Ms Chambers complaint is that doing the work inside the Theatre is all well and good but if people cannot get to it due to access issues in another part of the property it is of little value. She was also concerned that the work to secure the adjacent unit was only described in the minute above as an aspiration

3.0 Background to previous Scrutiny Board discussions

3.1 Leeds Grand Theatre has been undergoing significant refurbishment since 2006. Phase I work focused on improvement to the stage area, a new fly tower, and system, etc., and only modest front of house works. A Scrutiny Board paper on 11 September, 2006, listed the main areas of work and included in that list the following:-

- work required to make the building more accessible under the Disability Discrimination Act

As a result of this work the theatre complex would be conserved, it would be fully accessible for the benefit of all but it would not be a full refurbishment of the Grand Theatre. Large areas of the theatre complex including much of the front of house decoration and the building's services would not be touched by the Phase I works.'

In summary in 2006 Scrutiny Board were advised that Phase 1 would carry out work within the Theatre to move towards satisfying the obligations and duties under Part III of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

On 15th January, 2007, Scrutiny Board received a report confirming that improved access had been achieved and introducing Phase II. The Board asked for a more detailed discussion of the plans for Phase II and the main architect from BDP and the Council's Project Officer attended with the plans on 16th April, 2007.

A further report was received by Scrutiny on 8th October, 2007, which again states that work undertaken in Phase I included improvements to make the Theatre more accessible to satisfy the obligations and duties under Part III of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

4.0 Current Position at the Leeds Grand Theatre

4.1 Phase 1 works installed a new lift within the Theatre, accessible toilets and improved circulation around the Theatre. This has improved access within the Theatre for a number of theatre goers. This was the first step in improving accessibility but was never the total solution for the site. The challenge has remained the main entrance and the Box Office

4.2 At the beginning of the project it was an aspiration to use the adjacent unit because it was tenanted and the Council did not have possession or the certainty of possession to incorporate it into the project. Provisional designs were produced however to investigate improving this part of the build with approximate costs (2 years ago) of £250k.

4.3 The unit is now vacant and once the Lease between Leeds City Council and Leeds Grand Theatre is signed the property will fall under the Grand Theatres control.

5.0 Resolving the Complaint

5.1 While Ms Chambers has raised this as a Scrutiny investigation action also needs to be taken by The Grand Theatre to resolve the issues she has raised and this is being dealt with using the Councils complaints procedure. The City Development Directorates Access team have already been out on site and have advised that the Box Office and its route through to the Theatre cannot be considered accessible by any modern design standard.

5.2 The following action plan is therefore being worked to

Date	Action
End April	Revisit the early designs (4.2) and recost
End April	Investigate the possibility of redesigning the current space to enable people with disabilities to access the theatre at time when the Box Office is most busy just before a performance. This to look at both long term and short term solutions. Cost this work. If any short term solutions can be identified that could be implemented immediately seek a meeting with the Chair of the Grand Theatre Board and the Chair of the Finance Sub group to gain approval.
May	Investigate likely funding sources including the Development Trust
26 th June	Gain agreement at the next Grand Theatre and Opera House Ltd Board for a way forward to include timescales.

Ms Chambers to be kept informed of progress

6.0 Recommendations

6.1 It is recommended that:

- Scrutiny Board (Culture and Leisure) support the proposed work plan to resolve the access issues at The Grand Theatre and that this should be dealt with as a complaint under the Council procedures.