

## **ROMILEY FORUM THEATRE**

### **Report of Assistant Director Estate & Asset Management**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To provide Members with an update on the current condition and ongoing closure of Romiley Forum Theatre.

#### **2. REINFORCED AUTOCLAVED AERATED CONCRETE (RAAC)**

- 2.1 RAAC is a lightweight, 'bubbly' form of concrete commonly used in construction between the 1950s and mid-1990s. It is predominantly found as precast panels in roofs (commonly flat roofs, sometimes pitched) and occasionally in floors and walls.
- 2.2 The material was invented in Sweden and became widely used due to its lightweight and thermal properties.
- 2.3 The material was originally manufactured with a 30-year life span.
- 2.4 In August 2023, a change in Government guidance was issued following the sudden failure of RAAC panels in an education setting.
- 2.5 The guidance stated that any areas that contained RAAC should cease to be used until an expert had inspected them. There was particular concern where the panels had been subject to water leaks or extra weight had been applied to the structure.

#### **2. BACKGROUND ROMILY FORUM**

- 2.1 Romiley Forum was constructed in the early 1970s, opening in 1972.
- 2.2 The Forum consists of retail accommodation on the ground floor, with residential flats and the Forum Theatre located on the upper floors.
- 2.3 The freehold of the site is owned by SMBC and there is a long leasehold granted to private owners who, in turn, have granted leases back to SMBC for the Theatre and the Flats. There are also leases in place for the retail properties and the Community Centre.
- 2.4 The Theatre is operated by NK Theatre Arts (NKTA) who were granted a lease from SMBC in 2003 for 30 years.
- 2.3 In 2017, the SMBC undertook a project to refurbish parts of the building. The roof structure was identified as being constructed from a product called Siporex (RAAC) Roof Panels.
- 2.4 This work included removal of Asbestos, fire alarm upgrades and fire safety work, flat roof replacements and redecoration. The roof over the main theatre space was not included and still retains its felt roof covering from the original construction.

- 2.4 As part of this work, the ceiling within the Foyer was removed and it was found that several roof panels had deflected and, in some cases, the concrete had fallen away. Propping works took place and additional steel support was applied to the affected areas. No other remedial works took place within the building.
- 2.5 Since 2017, no further roof works have been undertaken on the building by the Council.
- 2.6 During the works, the RAAC advice in place at the time was to assess its condition and take appropriate remedial action. Where issues were identified, appropriate additional supports were put in place.
- 2.7 The risk associated with immediate collapse did not emerge until new DfE guidance was issued to all education settings and responsible bodies in August 2023.

### **3. REVISED GUIDANCE - AUGUST 2023**

- 3.1 Given the change in Government guidance in August 2023, a review of the SMBC Corporate Estate took place, and given the pre-existing knowledge of an RAAC product being used at Romiley Forum, an urgent inspection took place. The inspection confirmed the presence of RAAC.
- 3.2 NKTA decided to close the theatre following the completion of the initial survey undertaken by third-party structural engineers and discussions with SMBC in their role as landlord.
- 3.3 Given the presence of RAAC within the theatre building, a wider review of the complex was completed to ascertain if RAAC is present in other areas. It was confirmed that no other RAAC is present in the buildings.
- 3.4 SMBC commissioned a full structural investigation of the roof deck, and any associated structures to ascertain if any immediate safety works were required. The report was shared with NKTA and discussions with the structural engineers representing both SMBC and NKTA confirmed that the building should not reopen without remedial works.
- 3.5 SMBC and NKTA commissioned further studies to review the condition of the RAAC panels and look at options and costs for remedial works.

### **4. CURRENT POSITION**

- 4.1 RAAC has been identified in both the main auditorium roof and the lower section that sits above the community centre and foyer of the theatre.
- 4.2 The works undertaken in 2017 addressed some of the issues in the lower roof and delivered a new roof covering. This has reduced the risk in this area, but further remedial works are still required to allow safe occupation.
- 4.3 The upper roof over the main auditorium has not had any remedial works undertaken, there is also evidence of water ingress and additional weight has been added since

its construction. The solar panels were added before any change in guidance, but in light of the emerging risks these are considered to be an additional risk factor.

- 4.4 SMBC and NKTA have been in constant dialogue to work together towards a solution for all stakeholders. The condition of the RAAC in the roof requires detailed examination before remedial works can be fully costed and implemented.
- 4.5 NKTA are working with their stakeholders to deliver as much of their normal program as possible. They have engaged with touring companies, local groups and parents and are delivering elements of their program from local schools.
- 4.6 NKTA and SMBC are working on a sustainable plan to support the survival of NKTA for the period of closure.
- 4.7 SMBC have been exploring temporary locations for the delivery of performances including the Town Hall, other theatres within the borough and the use of temporary structures.
- 4.8 NKTA and SMBC are collaborating with their respective structural engineers to design and approve a scheme of works that will address the immediate safety concerns within the structure and allow further panel-by-panel inspections to be undertaken.
- 4.9 These inspections will allow a scheme of works to be developed that will allow the partial reopening of the site as soon as possible.
- 4.10 SMBC are approaching central government bodies to request funding for the repairs in line with the approach taken to Schools and Colleges. Approaches have also been made to other organisations facing the same challenges so a joined-up approach can be taken.
- 4.11 NKTA and SMBC will work together to fund a package of works that allows the safe reopening of the site and secures the long-term future of the Theatre and Community Centre.

## **5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 5.1 The Area Committee is requested to note the update report.
- 5.2 The Area Committee is requested to note the ongoing work between NKTA and SMBC
- 5.3 The Area Committee is requested to note the next steps.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

There are no background papers to this report.

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