



Health and Safety Team
Westminster City Hall
64 Victoria Street
London SW1E 6QP

March 2014

To whom it may concern

Re: Suspended ceilings - further guidance to theatre owners and other places of entertainment

In January 2014 the City Council circulated some interim guidance regarding the management of suspended ceilings. The investigation of the partial collapse of the suspended ceiling at the Apollo Theatre in Shaftesbury Avenue is in progress and we now have a better understanding of the failure mode of the ceiling. A key element of the interim advice was for theatres to understand the form of construction of their individual ceilings and how the constituent parts are joined together and ultimately supported from the main structure. We are now in a position to share some of the relevant information about the Apollo Theatre ceiling.

The fibrous plaster ceiling at the Apollo is supported by an arrangement of timbers using a composite of plaster of Paris and hessian wadding ties. The timbers themselves are connected to one another and the building structure above. Several of these connections are made using a composite of plaster of Paris and hessian wadding ties. It is clear that failed wadding ties have been found to be implicated in the ceiling collapse at the Apollo Theatre. It appears that the failure of these ties has been progressive and led to the sudden collapse of part of the ceiling.

As a result, we recommend that in addition to what was stated in the interim guidance the wadding ties of all suspended ornate ceilings are thoroughly inspected from above as a matter of urgency by a competent historic plaster specialist and a structural engineer. In cases where it is not possible to see the ceiling construction completely, special arrangements to facilitate access should be made and where necessary remote inspection methods (CCTV etc.) should be considered.

Please note that the recommended inspection of the wadding ties is in addition to the requirement of your Premises Licence Condition to obtain a ceiling certificate.



Repairs to ceilings in listed theatres may require listed building consent depending on the method and extent of work proposed.

Contact centralplanningteam@westminster.gov.uk (for theatres in W1) or southplanningteam@Westminster.gov.uk (for theatres in SW1 and WC2) for advice.

If you have any queries in regards to above advice please do not hesitate to contact Westminster Health and Safety Team on 0207 641 1063 or by email healthandsafety@westminster.gov.uk