

Fire Escape Routes during building of Studio Project.

Background

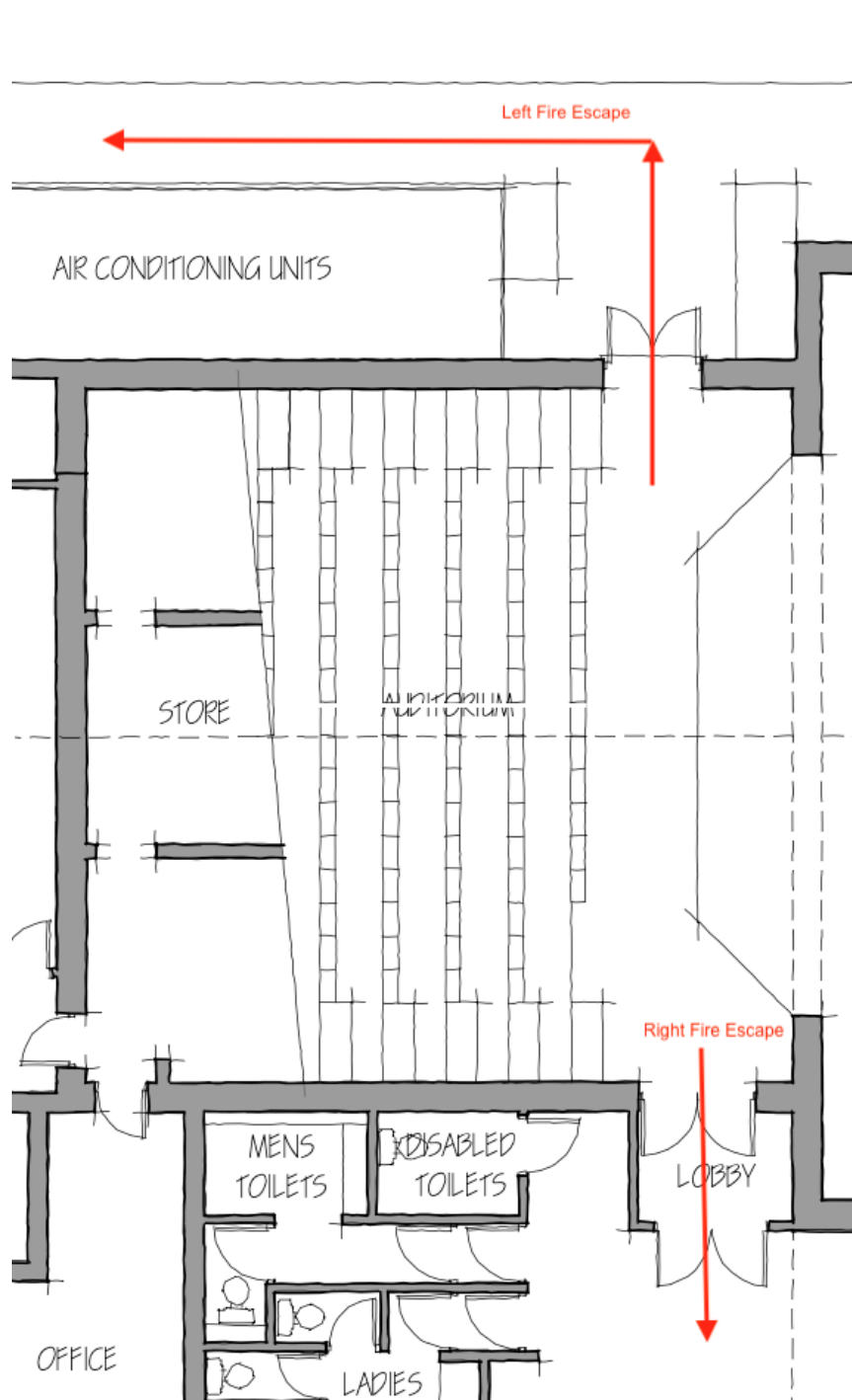
Wokingham Theatre is an amateur organisation that put on 8 main theatre shows per season each running for 2 weeks. Between each show there is a 4 or 5 week gap during which time the set for the next show is built and the cast and crew rehearse for the play.

It is essential that the theatre stays open during the proposed building work in order to maintain income and audience numbers.

The main issue around the theatre staying open concerns the fire escape routes. While there is no need to maintain the fire escape routes in the 4/5 weeks between shows, during the 2 weeks when the show is performed and the theatre is open to the public, we must have all fire escapes operational.

Fire Escape Routes and Proposed Solution.

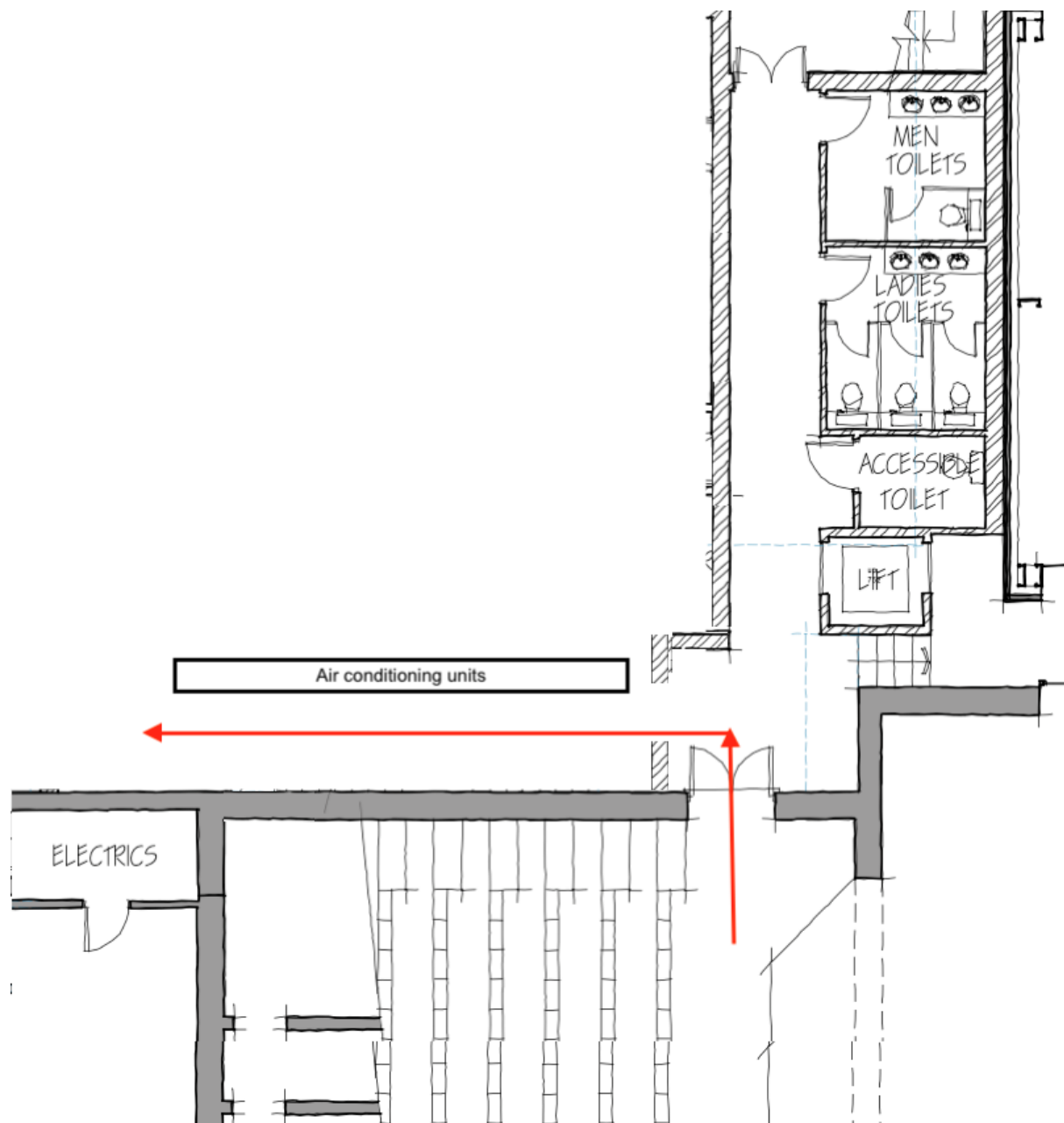
The diagram below shows the current main fire exits routes from the auditorium:



The building project only affects the **Left Fire Exit route**.

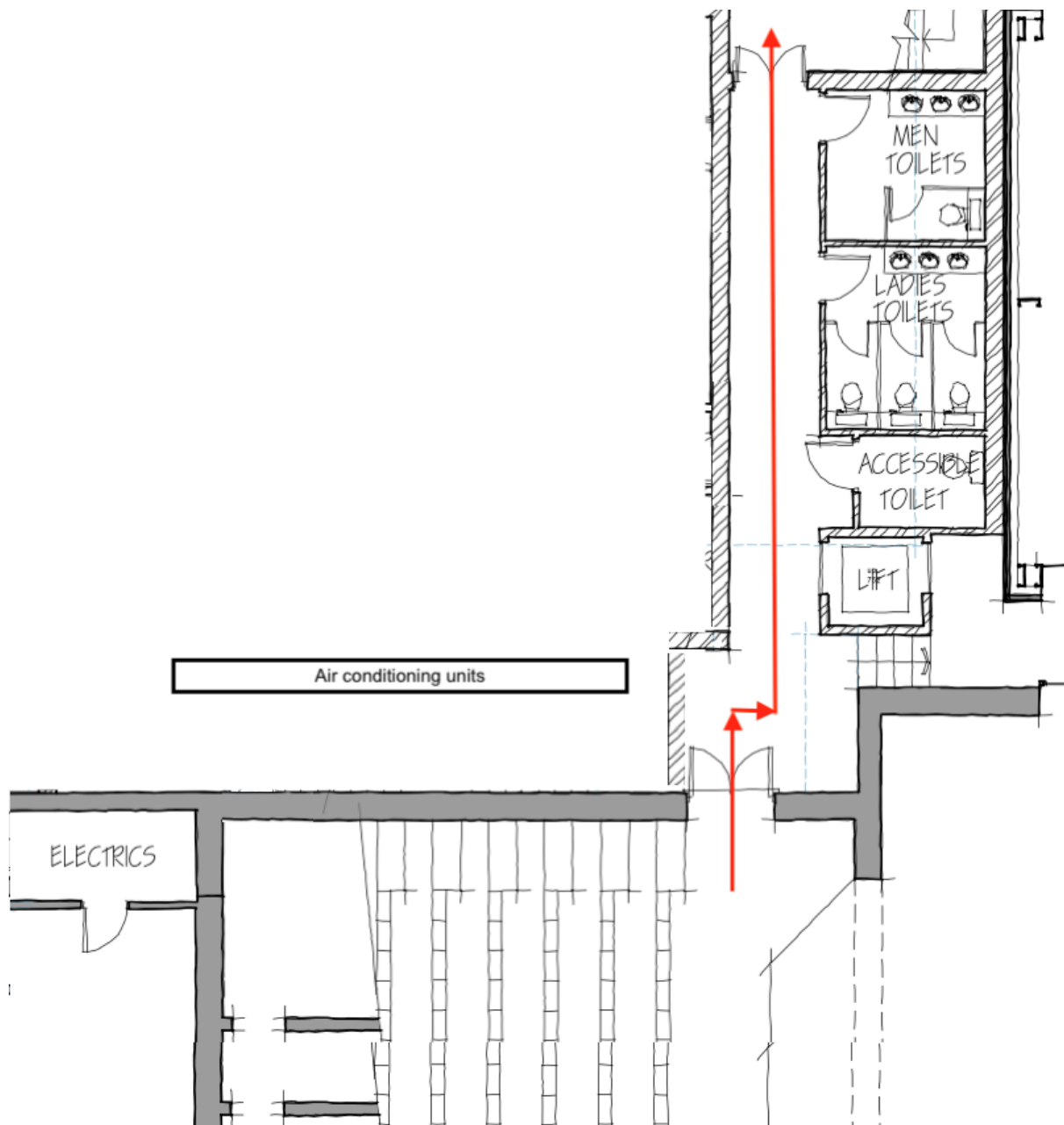
In order to maintain the availability of the left fire escape route we proposed splitting the development into 2 phases.

Phase 1 consists of building the 'toilet block' and while this is being built there is a minor change to the left fire exit route so the audience would turn sharp left and pass between the auditorium outer wall and the air conditioning units as shown in the diagram below:



Once phase 1 construction is near to completion, then in one of the 4/5 week gaps between shows, the toilet block would be completed up to 1st fit (with some 2nd fit for lighting so the main corridor had lighting and emergency lights).

At that point the emergency exit route would be change to run straight along the main corridor in the toilet block and then out through the exit doors as shown in the diagram below:



Having established the alternate fire escape route through the 'toilet block'; then the air conditioning would be relocated to the area over the toilet block and then work could start on the phase 2 development.

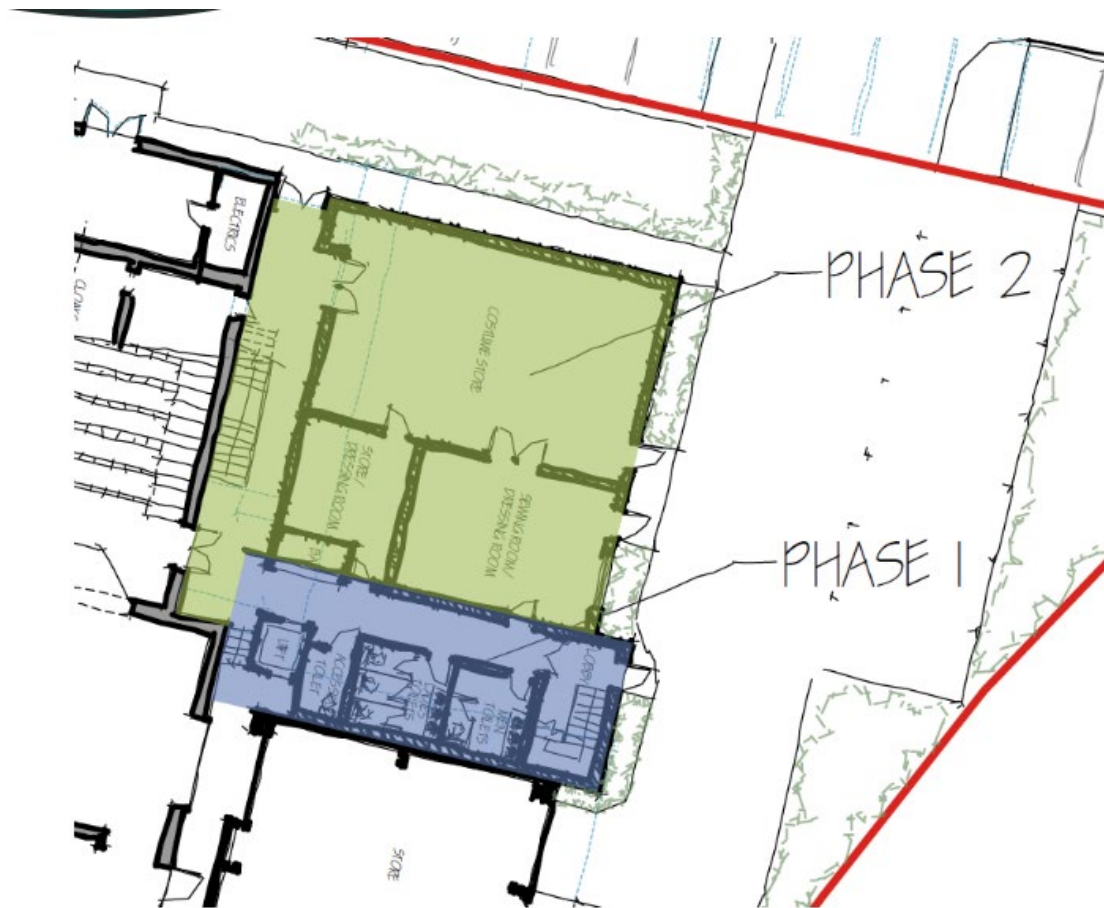
This allows us to maintain the left hand fire exit route and so keep the theatre open throughout the whole of the building project.

Planning Application

Wokingham Theatre submitted a planning application to build a studio theatre alongside the existing theatre building. In the planning statement that went with the application there was a description of the 2 phased development to maintain fire exit routes from the auditorium. The relevant parts are shown below:

4.3 Use and Amount:

The proposed use is for the creation of a costume store, sewing room/dressing room, store and toilets to the ground floor, and a studio theatre/rehearsal room, store, tech box and open air space for air con units to the first floor. **The proposal has been split into Phase 1 and Phase 2 as illustrated below:**



4.4 The development has been phased to ensure that the main fire exits for the auditorium can continue to be used as well as the retention of the air con units, ensuring that the theatre can remain open throughout the build process.

Planning Condition Clauses

The issue we have is with clauses 6 & 7 in the planning consent which *may* prevent us from using the 'toilet block' as a fire exit route while development was still on-going. The 2 clauses are reproduced below:

6. Landscaping - Prior to the first use of the approved extensions, full details of both hard and soft landscape proposals shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. These details shall include, as appropriate, proposed finished floor levels or contours, means of enclosure, car parking layouts, other vehicle and pedestrian access and circulation areas, hard surfacing materials and minor artefacts and structure (e.g. furniture, play equipment, refuse or other storage units, signs, lighting, external

services, etc). Soft landscaping details shall include planting plan, specification (including cultivation and other operations associated with plant and grass establishment), schedules of plants, noting species, planting sizes and proposed numbers/densities where appropriate, and implementation timetable.

All hard and soft landscape works shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details prior to the occupation of any part of the development or in accordance with a timetable approved in writing by the local planning authority.

Any trees or plants which, within a period of five years after planting, are removed, die or become seriously damaged or defective, shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of species, size and number as originally approved and permanently retained.

Reason: In the interests of visual amenity. Relevant policy: Core Strategy policy CP3 and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan policies CC03 and TB21 (and TB06 for garden development).

7. Parking to be provided - No part of any building(s) hereby permitted shall be occupied or used until the vehicle parking space has been provided in accordance with the approved plans. The vehicle parking space shall be permanently maintained and remain available for the parking of vehicles at all times.

Reason: To ensure adequate on-site parking provision in the interests of highway safety, convenience and amenity. Relevant policy: Core Strategy policies CP3 & CP6 and Managing Development Delivery Local Plan policy CC07.

For clause 6 if the “**prior to the occupation of any part of the development**” is enforced then we would not be able to use the toilet block as a fire exit and so would not be able to undertake the development. However, could we work with the planning authority around the “**or in accordance with a timetable approved in writing by the local planning authority**” to have a timetable that specified we could use the toilet block only as a fire escape and then completed the remaining part of the landscaping prior to occupation of the whole block?

Clause 7 has a similar effect however could we satisfy this condition if, before starting the building work, we moved the gated entrance as shown in the plans and laid down suitable hardcore so the area could be used for car parking?