



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

22 February 1982

Dear Mr. Eddington,

Thank you for your letter of 3 February about the situation that may face the West End theatres following the retirement of Lord Grade.

I know that Paul Channon, as Minister for the Arts, is watching the situation carefully. At present it is too early to say whether the change in ownership of certain theatres will have significant consequences. While it would be very difficult, and undesirable, to seek to forestall commercial freedom of action by legislation, there are other safeguards. In particular it is a statutory requirement that any change of use in the case of a theatre has to be referred for comment to the Theatres Trust, headed by Lord Goodman, which is empowered to advise the planning authority. The Theatres Trust has already been effective in a number of cases, and I believe that it would make every effort to prevent the situation which you describe from materialising.

The first line of defence is of course the planning authority, and I have every reason to believe that the Westminster City Council is committed to safeguarding a flourishing commercial West End theatre. Their recent decision on the Fortune Theatre is evidence of that. I understand that the Council's District Plan envisages the preservation of theatre-land in its present form, and that they are

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consulting all those who are likely to be interested. It might be a good idea if you were to make representations to them.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Shelton

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Paul Eddington, Esq.