

Protecting theatres for **everyone**



Our Ref.: RA/2576

4 January 2018

Mr Jonathan Keen
Planning and Growth
Thurrock Council
Civic Offices
Grays, RM17 6SL

Dear Mr Keen,

Old State Cinema, George Street, Grays Essex RM17 6LZ

Application Ref.: 17/01617/LBC and 17/01616/FUL

I write regarding the above applications for alterations and the change of use of the former State Cinema (use class D2) to a Public House (use class A4). Please see our remit and advice below.

Remit: The Theatres Trust is the national advisory public body for theatres. We were established through the Theatres Trust Act 1976 'to promote the better protection of theatres' and provide statutory planning advice on theatre buildings and theatre use in England through The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015, requiring the Trust to be consulted by local authorities on planning applications which include 'development involving any land on which there is a theatre'.

Background: The State is a 2,400 seat super cinema designed by FGM Chancellor and built in 1938 in the Art Deco style. The building has brick built buttressed walls, a partial steel frame and a concrete balcony. It has a flat stepped roof; the original foyers, ticket halls and bars are still in situ as is the original Compton theatre organ which is understood to be in a repairable state, and is a key and rare historic feature of this cinema. There were three small shop units (now boarded up) incorporated into the original design. It was constructed with a full stage and dressing room facilities to enable live performance, hence the interest of the Theatres Trust, though it was rarely used for that purpose. The State closed as an operational cinema in November 1989. The bar areas reopened for a short period in the early 1990's as a night club/wine bar, but has remained vacant since.

The State was originally listed Grade II in 1985, but was regraded to Grade II* in June 2000, following a re-appraisal of the original interior features which are still intact. It is understood to be one of only 8 'super cinemas' in England to be listed II*.

Comment: The Theatres Trust actively encourages theatre building owners and local authorities to rejuvenate and reuse former cultural buildings as a stimulus for wider town centre regeneration. The Trust therefore welcomes and supports this proposal to refurbish and restore the former State

Theatres Trust

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Chair Tim Eyles **Director** Jon Morgan

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The National Advisory Public Body for Theatres

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Cinema and to introduce a new and sustainable new use that will continue to allow public access to this significant building.

We are aware of the extensive pre-application discussions held with Historic England, the Cinema Theatre Association and the architects KDPA to develop this scheme, and are generally satisfied that the alterations proposed are needed to support the new use, while the historic and architectural integrity of the building is maintained. For example, the auditorium floor has been levelled, but in stepped down sections to reflect the existing raked floor, and the inclusion of a safety banister across the stage, designed to reflect other features in the cinema. These works, including the provision of additional WCs, are necessary and appear to have been design to minimise their impact on the existing historic building fabric.

Our main concern is with the Compton Organ and note from the report submitted, that while it is damaged and missing parts, it is repairable. Given the rarity of remaining cinema organs, and the importance of this 'super cinema' as a heritage asset, the Trust would strongly recommend the full restoration of the organ be conditioned as part of any consent issued.

Please contact us if we may be of further assistance.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ross Anthony', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ross Anthony
Planning Consultant