

Protecting theatres for **everyone**



Ref.: TC/9006194

17 August 2018

Mr. M. Alford
Planning, Policy & Development Control Team
Staffordshire County Council
2 Staffordshire Place
Stafford
ST16 2DH

By e-mail: planning@staffordbc.gov.uk

Applications: 18/28965/FUL

Site: Stone Town Council Car Park Crown Street Stone ST15 8QN

Proposals: Proposed public house and studio theatre including use of wharfingers cottage; parking; exterior works

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'.

Comment:

This application has been brought to the attention of the Trust as it includes the creation of a new theatre.

We welcome this development which will provide a new theatre for Stone alongside a new public house, helping to activate the canalside and provide a positive use for vacant land occupying a prominent site within the designated Stone Town Centre boundary. Both the theatre and public house are uses recognised by the NPPF (2018) as being beneficial to the sustainability of communities, for which policies and decisions should plan positively.

The principle of this development would appear policy compliant and contributes towards the objectives of the Plan for Stafford Borough 2011-2031 (2014). Policy Stone 1 – Stone Town, Stone Town Centre part a. encourages development and expansion of the town centre to provide a vibrant place where people can meet, eat and spend leisure time in a safe and pleasant environment. Part v. seeks to improve the range and diversity of cultural and community services and facilities in the town. Policy E8 recognises Stone's role as a visitor

Theatres Trust

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Chair Tim Eyles **Director** Jon Morgan

Trustees Richard Baldwin, David Blyth, Pam Bone, Paul Cartwright, Paddy Dillon, Ruth Eastwood, David Ian, Richard Johnston, Gary Kemp, Dara Ó Briain, Simon Ricketts, Peter Roberts, Ann Skippers, Anna Stapleton

The National Advisory Public Body for Theatres

The Theatres Trust Charitable Fund co-operates with Theatres Trust, has the same Trustees and is registered as a charity under number 274697

destination, key service centre and market town with a vibrant evening economy, to which this proposal would be in conformity. Part b. of Policy E8 also promotes a diversity of uses including entertainment and cultural activities.

Although we support this development, we would urge the applicant and the theatre operator to take into account our comments set out below to ensure the long-term sustainability and operational effectiveness of the theatre, maximising its ability to attract the type of shows and performers outlined within the application documentation. Crucially, suggested amendments to the design and layout would also help the space function effectively as an asset for local community groups.

The plans for the theatre show two changing spaces, but the changing space south of the entrance hall also appears to be the only means of access to the stage and backstage therefore it would be expected that people would regularly pass through. This would severely limit its usability, particularly in the event of the theatre hosting productions involving children. A suggested solution is that space to the rear of the stage is given to one or even two changing rooms, with the existing changing spaces being utilised for storage and the proposed stores used as a studio for rehearsals. This would also potentially allow the rehearsal studio to be used simultaneously with the main theatre, which might allow for regular hires thus improving the theatre's income.

We would suggest that the seating layout within the theatre ought to be reviewed and refined as we believe that the indicative layout will result in poor sight-lines to some positions. The theatre must also ensure it complies with Part M of the Building Regulations in terms of providing sufficient wheelchair spaces as these currently aren't shown on the plans.

It should also be ensured that there is appropriate acoustic control to the theatre, not just to prevent leakage of sound from performances but to prevent noise into the auditorium from what could potentially be a busy pub and bar particularly at weekends.

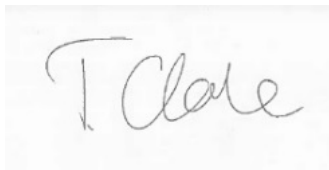
The supporting documents indicate that the pub and theatre are to be independently operated, but clearly there are elements of the development that are shared and potential opportunities for cross-funding and mutual benefit. We would suggest clear and unambiguous agreement between the two parties as to how facilities such as the function space will be managed and who is responsible for building maintenance and staffing. We would suggest that given its nature a peppercorn rent might be appropriate for the theatre, if this has not already been agreed. We would encourage Stone Revellers to engage a theatre consultant to advise on their business plan, if they have not already done so, to ensure the theatre is viable and sustainable including factoring in the potential impact of leakage of spend from their own bar towards the pub.

Looking at the wider site, plans show there to be three independent residential units which are labelled on the Site Layout Plan as 'staff flats'. It would be helpful for supporting documentation to set out the actual role and function of these, what relationship (if any) they have with the

theatre and whether the intention is to let these on a commercial basis as they do not appear to be referenced elsewhere other than as 'key worker' accommodation on the application form. It would seem unusual to have two independent units associated with ancillary landlord accommodation when there is one which lends itself more naturally to such function attached to the pub. We do not necessarily object to these and visitor accommodation/holiday lets could be considered to be compatible with the use of the site. However, we would caution against conventional housing in this location due to potential conflict with the theatre and pub which could undermine their use. Although neither uses on the site are as yet established, paragraph 182 of the NPPF is reflective of the challenges faced by cultural facilities and other noise-generating uses where their activities are curtailed due to complaints from neighbours.

In conclusion, we support this proposal which we consider would greatly benefit Stone and contribute towards the cultural well-being of local people. We **recommend the granting of planning permission**, but would strongly suggest that amendments are made to the final design and layout in line with our suggestions and that operational matters are clearly defined so as to ensure the theatre is viable and sustainable for the long term.

Please contact us if we may be of further assistance or if you wish to discuss these comments further.



Tom Clarke MRTPI
National Planning Adviser

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