

Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC/9006222

28 September 2018

Development Management
Cheshire East Council
PO Box 606
Municipal Buildings
Crewe
Cheshire
CW1 9HP

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

Applications: 18/4422M

Site: The Rex Cinema, The Rex Buildings, 23, Alderley Road & First Floor 17-21 Alderley Road, Wilmslow, SK9 1HY

Proposals:

Change of use from A1-Shop to D2-Assembly & Leisure (cinema)

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 Trust's attention. Built as a cinema in 1936, the Rex also hosted many theatre productions before closing in 1996. Therefore it can be considered to fall within our remit as a statutory consultee.

The Trust welcomes this proposal to revert the Rex back to cinema use (D2). Retail (A1) use ceased following the previous occupant falling into administration. Saved Policy WTC4 of the Macclesfield Borough Local Plan permits change of use from A1 to other town centre uses (cinemas are defined by the NPPF (2018) as main town centre uses) where it would not cumulatively lead to a loss of vitality or viability of the shopping area. Draft Policy RET7 of the Site Allocations and Development Policies document (2018) is broadly reflective of this position.

There has been a rapid shift in the retail market and the nature of town centres over recent

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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

years which makes diversification essential to ensure that town centres remain viable. Indeed the Cheshire East Retail Study Update (2016, WYG) shows negative growth for comparison retail floorspace in the borough until 2025 with a relatively modest increase only coming in 2025-2030. Even then, given the scale of change in the retail market such projections for growth should be treated with caution and the revised NPPF now requires assessment for only for a ten year period. Regardless, Policy RET2.2 states additional floorspace will be principally met in Central Crewe, Central Macclesfield and Site LPS 47 which further justifies that loss of retail space at this location would be appropriate and not come at the detriment to the overall function of the town centre.

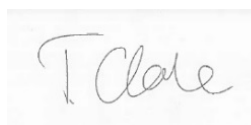
We consider the cinema would contribute towards Strategic Priority 1 (part 2) and bring tremendous benefit to the diversity, attractiveness and vitality of the designated town centre (Key Service Centre) in Wilmslow as well as improve the cultural well-being of local people. It will broaden Wilmslow's evening and night-time offer in line with Policy EG5.6 of the Local Plan Strategy 2010-2030 (2017) which supports proposals which help develop the evening and night-time economy in Key Service Centres. Cinemas also operate during the day which ensures a wide range of businesses can benefit from the additional footfall it will create.

In terms of internal designs and layouts, the submitted plans have been scanned and are at different scales which makes them difficult to properly assess and understand. Much of the text is unreadable. We understand the constraints in allowing disabled access through the main entrance which makes it important that the route through to the lift at the rear, and the lift and rear entry itself, is made as welcoming as possible. We would question whether disabled access could be made available to Cinema 1, it appears from the plans as though there is potential to extend the lift up to the second floor facilitated by the entry door being brought closer to the top of the stairs. There would seem to be potential to convert the seats immediately adjacent to the door in row H to wheelchair spaces.

We would also strongly recommend that the operator ensures the screens are sufficiently insulated so as to avoid leakage of noise and vibrations to neighbouring units.

Fundamentally, the Rex is a prominent building within Wilmslow which greatly contributes towards local character and townscape. Its return to active use, especially one that reinstates its original function, must be prioritised and supported. We consider the change of use to be policy compliant and in principle **recommend the granting of planning permission**, although we are keen for all reasonable efforts for disabled access to be made available to Cinema 1.

Please contact us if we may be of further assistance.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "T Clarke". The signature is written in a cursive style and is contained within a light grey rectangular box.

Tom Clarke
National Planning Adviser