

Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC/446

7 June 2019

Mr Kim Bennet
Dover District Council
White Cliffs Business Park,
Dover
CT16 3PJ

By e-mail: developmentcontrol@dover.gov.uk

Application: 18/01169

Site: 12 King Street Deal CT14 6HX

Proposal: Erection of a building incorporating 3no retail units (Use Class A1) and 16no self-contained flats(existing building to be demolished). Revisions in respect of reduction in numbers of units

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 site was originally an Oddfellows Hall for the Palmerston Lodge, but after two years in 1892 was converted to a theatre and from 1910 was known as Theatre Royal. The building was remodelled internally in 1934 and was also used for cinema. It closed in 1961 and was used for bingo for two years before reverting to a dedicated cinema in 1963, finally closing in 1981 after which it was converted to an amusement arcade at stalls level and a snooker hall at circle level.

From our perspective there are two main issues arising from this application; the loss of community and social use (in relation to the snooker club) and the loss of the building as a non-designated heritage asset.

In terms of loss of social and community use, the applicant has stated that the snooker club has long been in decline and is no longer viable. Further information has been provided to

Theatres Trust

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL

T 020 7836 8591 **E** info@theatrestrust.org.uk **W** theatrestrust.org.uk

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, Ann Skippers, Anna Stapleton

The National Advisory Public Body for Theatres

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substantiate this but is not in the public domain for further scrutiny. Paragraph 92 of the NPPF (2019) guards against the unnecessary loss of valued facilities and services, therefore the Council must be satisfied that information submitted is robust to support the principle of change of use.

Externally the building retains much of its theatre character and is a distinctive and positive contributor to the townscape within King Street and the wider Middle Street Conservation Area. While it is not statutorily listed given its age and local significance it is appropriate to consider it as a non-designated heritage asset. Therefore it is regrettable the applicant is seeking complete loss of this asset. A statement from surveyors has been included outlining that remodelling the existing building is likely not viable. However, there seems a bias towards residential use with no real appraisal of other options which could better retain or enhance the existing building. We would suggest that other options should be explored. For example, coming back to our comments above regarding sufficient justification for the loss of a community facility the applicant's assessment of need and alternative options is just in the context of potential locations for snooker/pool halls. Instead community facilities in the broader sense as reflected within the NPPF should be considered which are more readily suited to this building such as a community arts centre or event and function space.

We note that the applicant's Design & Access Statement and Heritage Statement conflicts with information we have on record about the history of this building. Although we understand sub-stage machinery has been removed, we believe the building to be in good condition with some original features as well as features from the remodelling of 1934 having been retained. Should the Council be minded to approve this application, we would urge that as a condition of development the submission of a programme of recording and analysis is required and for the resulting report and photographic documentation to meet the satisfaction of the Council and Theatres Trust.

While we do not fully object to this proposal given that the site has not been in theatre use for some considerable time, neither would we support it until we are better satisfied that all reasonable options for retention have been explored and that lack of need for community use is robustly justified. We do however urge the inclusion of a recording condition as discussed above.

Please contact the Trust should you wish to discuss this response further.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "T Clarke". The signature is written in black ink on a white background.

Tom Clarke MRTPI
National Planning Adviser