

Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC/2872

10 July 2019

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Communities and Place
Derby City Council
The Council House
Corporation Street
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By e-mail: developmentcontrol@derby.gov.uk

Application: 19/00898/FUL

Site: Assembly Rooms Market Place Derby DE1 3AH

Proposal: Refurbishment works comprising of front extensions at ground floor level to the Market Place elevation and the change of use of the existing Tourist Information Centre to create new retail (Use Class A1) and restaurant (Use Class A3), together with other external alterations including cladding to the exterior of the multi-storey car park and new plant to the car park roof

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:

The Trust was not directly consulted regarding this application despite it falling within our remit as described above. The Council has however engaged the Trust during the pre-application stage, and the Trust provided advice to inform earlier feasibility studies.

We welcome efforts to refurbish the Assembly Rooms and to bring it back to use as a large-scale performance venue and cultural/event space for Derby, which the city has been without since the closure of the venue in 2014 due to fire damage. We consider there to be great need for such a facility and considerable social, cultural, economic and placemaking benefits to be gained. As

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, Ann Skippers, Anna Stapleton

The National Advisory Public Body for Theatres

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noted within our comments to the Council earlier this year, there will be spend leaving the local community due to audiences travelling to venues in other areas and this loss to the city and its businesses is being further compounded by missing out on visitors. As town centres come under increasing pressure it is recognised that cultural facilities have an important role to play in increasing footfall and minimising vacancies.

Although we are generally supportive of these proposals there are elements which cause us some concern. Our comments on different components of the Assembly Rooms are set out below.

Ground floor

The extended entrance area and lobby with more prominent signage and show advertising should help allow a better sense of arrival. The conversion of the Tourist Information Centre to create additional retail/restaurant space along with new glazing to existing restaurant units and outdoor seating will further add activity and vibrancy to the setting of the Assembly Rooms. We would though encourage careful management of seating, signage and umbrellas to ensure visibility and legibility to the Assembly Rooms is maintained. We would encourage that appropriate wayfinding signage is provided to guide visitors around the building.

Mezzanine level

We would suggest that the large suite could be opened up to enable a grander entrance and better visibility. We consider there to be insufficient bar serving space to the level above, for which the opening of this room could help alleviate. There would be merit in investigating the possibility of removing steps within this room so it is level and fully accessible to users with wheelchairs. We would also suggest there may be some benefit in utilising the space above the entrance lobby as an enclosed terrace which could enhance the value of the room for hires. To the rear we note the loading bay is to be extended although there are few details about this space other than that it can handle two large vehicles. There should be a servicing strategy in place to ensure this area is properly managed and that surrounding properties maintain appropriate access.

Civic level

Although general toilet provision remains unchanged we are pleased that new accessible changing rooms, WCs and showers are being provided to both the Great Hall and Darwin Hall. However, it appears the stage is inaccessible to performers with wheelchairs. For audiences there is a level change to the bar and 'calm zone' which makes it inaccessible to wheelchair users; the servery is also too small to effectively serve the theatre's capacity. We would suggest that mobile bars are set up elsewhere within the lounge; ancillary income streams will be vital to the overall viability and sustainability of the venue. We assume the 'Rest Room' is an accessible WC although this is not clear; if it is not we recommend this is reconsidered so that wheelchair users do not have to travel to other floors. Furthermore the lift to the east of the building opens into the multi-use area; we recognise the lift needs to be entered from that side at lower levels but that it exits into the circulation space. This will allow the multi-use area to be utilised independently of the Darwin Hall. Access along the length of the circulation corridor appears to be blocked and if this is the case we suggest this should be opened up.

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Balcony level

This level is largely unchanged, although it appears there are no wheelchair seating positions at this level. This makes the availability of sufficient spaces in as wide a variety of locations as possible at Civic level within the Main Hall more important.

Policy CP14 of the Derby City Local Plan Part 1: Core Strategy (2017) commits the Council to elevating Derby's identity and reputation as a cultural and leisure destination, increasing visitor numbers and increasing participation in cultural and leisure activities. This objective would be achieved through this proposal. Paragraph 92 of the NPPF (2019) seeks decisions to plan positively for community facilities including cultural buildings. We support this proposal but we would urge the issues we have identified, particularly those relating to accessibility, to be resolved to enable us to recommend the granting of planning permission.

We would welcome further engagement with the Council on this proposal and would encourage that we are contacted if we may be of further assistance in relation to these comments.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "T. Clarke". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Tom Clarke MRTPI
National Planning Adviser

Theatres Trust

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