

Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC/1880

22 August 2019

Doug Coleman
Housing & Regeneration
Medway Council
Gun Wharf
Dock Road
Chatham ME4 4TR

By e-mail: planning.representations@medway.gov.uk

Application: MC/19/1749 & MC/19/1750

Site: Theatre Royal 102 High Street Chatham Medway ME4 4BY

Proposal: Conversion of existing restaurant including the first floor and the rear areas to form two 1-bedroom and two 2-bedroom self-contained flats with associated parking; and

Listed building consent for conversion of existing restaurant including the first floor and the rear areas to form two 1-bedroom and two 2-bedroom self-contained flats with associated parking

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 come to the attention of the Trust because it involves development at what remains of the Grade II listed Theatre Royal Chatham. Much of the building including the auditorium and stage house were previously demolished, with just the foyer and front of house areas being retained and converted to a restaurant. The Trust was supportive of retention and restoration of this area, citing its positive contribution to the streetscape and potential to rejuvenate that part of the town centre. As such we would be cautious of any proposal which compromises those principles.

Therefore, and on the basis of information supplied, we **object** to this proposal.

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

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

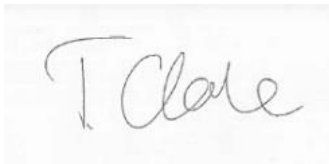
There is inconsistency between the proposal description and the application form and Design and Access Statement; the latter references four flats and a coffee parlour and three flats and a coffee bar, the application states there will be 580sqm of A1 floorspace but the application describes just four flats and no café. The Design & Access Statement later indicates this to be a residential-only scheme, but there are no proposed floorplans supplied by which to confirm what the layout will be. The absence of proposed plans also prevents any analysis as to how the proposal might alter or impact any features of significance or historic fabric. Neither is there a Heritage Statement, and the Design & Access Statement contains a number of errors. We consider therefore that the applicant has failed to accord with paragraph 189 of the NPPF (2019).

We believe from an internet search that the restaurant was still in operation until as late as March 2019, with the application form stating 28th March as the date on which the previous use ceased. Given there were only four months between closure and the submission of this application we would question whether any serious attempt has been made to let the property to an alternative operator or for other compatible retail/leisure uses. For a heritage asset, particularly one within a designated town centre, we would suggest the need to maintain an active frontage and keep remaining internal features of significance accessible to the public should be a priority. Emerging Policy RTC4 of the Medway Council Local Plan 2012-2035 requires active frontage at ground floor level.

There is no evidence that the proposal forms the optimal use for this heritage asset or that any harm is outweighed by the benefit of bringing the site back to use (paragraph 195 of the NPPF, 2019). Neither would residential use resulting in the loss of a commercial unit at this location within the Core Retail Area be considered to contribute towards the vitality and viability of the area as required by Policy R1 of the Medway Local Plan (2003).

In conclusion, in the absence of relevant information which would allow proper assessment as to the impact of this proposal and on the basis of it seeming to undermine a heritage asset and the vitality and viability of a Core Retail Area **we recommend that planning permission and listed building consent is refused.**

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

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "T Clarke". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Tom Clarke MRTPI
National Planning Adviser