

**PRESS RELEASE 7 January 2020**

## **Don't give up on Theatre at Risk Dudley Hippodrome says Theatres Trust**

### **National advisory public body for theatres calls on Dudley Council to reconsider decision about Dudley Hippodrome**

Yesterday the Cabinet of Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council granted an extension to the Dudley Driverless Vehicle Consortium to develop a proposal which we understand will include the demolition of the Dudley Hippodrome building.

This group of large commercial and professional organisations was given a year and council officer support to develop a viable business plan, which it has failed to deliver by the deadline. This is particularly concerning as the community group who were previously in occupation of the theatre had its five year lease terminated after just one year due to non-delivery of the same. The council actively impeded the community group by submitting an application to demolish the theatre building when the community group took occupation, undermining any hope of the group securing external funding. It seems unreasonable that a voluntary community group working with no support was not extended the same opportunity given to professional organisations to develop their business plan.

A late-1930s purpose-built variety theatre, the Hippodrome is Dudley's only remaining lyric theatre and has been on the Theatres Trust Theatres at Risk Register since 2010. It became a bingo hall in 1964 but was well maintained and the interior still has a theatrical 'feel'. Later alterations within the auditorium are fully reversible and it would be possible to return the theatre to use for live performance. When handed the lease of the building, the community group had appointed architects to look at visioning proposals for the Hippodrome as a cultural hub for the community. Exciting early stage concept proposals by Panter Hudspith had included a large extension on the right side of the building to house a new entrance, cafe and box office, as well as a first floor bar and restaurant for the reopened theatre.

There is still an active group trying to save this theatre who with the same level of support and amount of time offered to the driverless car consortium may be able to develop a viable plan for a busy community hub. We have written to the council many times to encourage discussions around other potential uses for the Hippodrome site. While councillors speak of the need for ambition and are investigating the potential of a new entertainment venue in Dudley, they refuse to consider a pre-existing and prominent building that could serve this purpose and would have less environmental impact than building a new venue.

With a partnership between local people, the council and other stakeholders Dudley Hippodrome could be a wonderful cultural hub for the community. This is why the recent decision by Dudley Council is so disappointing and neglects Dudley's history and the public support for saving this building.

The Hippodrome presents an opportunity for Dudley and we call on the council to consider it as an option in its plans for a new entertainment venue.

## Contact

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**Theatres Trust** is the national advisory public body for theatres. We believe that current and future generations should have access to good quality theatre buildings where they can be inspired by, and enjoy, live performance.

We champion the future of live performance by protecting and supporting excellent theatre buildings which meet the needs of their communities.

We do this by providing advice on the design, planning, development and sustainability of theatres, campaigning on behalf of theatres old and new and offering financial assistance through grants

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