

Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC

23 April 2020

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Coventry City Council
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Earl Street
Coventry
CV1 5RR

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

Applications: FUL/2020/0542

Site: 22 Hertford Street Coventry CV1 1LF

Proposal: Application for proposed change of use from Sui Generis (Retail, Office and Storage) to D2 (Events Space).

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 is proposing use of this site for a 1,250-1,500 capacity event space featuring live performance. It will serve as the new home for Coventry Empire who currently operate in the former Paris Cinema/Riley's Pool & Snooker Club on Far Gosford Street.

The site was purpose-built as a cinema opening as the ABC in 1973 within a new shopping precinct complex. It replaced the Empire Theatre which was demolished to clear the area for the new development. The Empire's history as a theatre extended back to 1856 and it had been a significant venue with three tiers of seating and over 1,500 seats. It was re-equipped for dedicated cinema use after World War 2, having sustained some war damage. Therefore the principle of an events venue is to be welcomed as it reverts the building back to a cultural purpose as originally intended, and specifically the original 'Empire' name would return.

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, Truda Spruyt, 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

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Policy CC1 of the City Centre Area Action Plan (2007) seeks to ensure Coventry is “a truly world class city centre”, leading in design, sustainability and culture”. This proposal helps contribute towards the cultural element of that aim, particularly in light of Coventry’s status as City of Culture in 2021, meeting the stated objectives of enhancing the city’s leisure offer and developing a vibrant and attractive night time economy (also promoted by Policy R2 parts b. and l. respectively of the Coventry City Council Local Plan (2017)). Paragraph 92 of the NPPF (2019) seeks planning decisions to plan positively for cultural buildings.

Although this is in effect a re-provision of an existing facility, relocation enables an increased capacity of between 350-600 which will help support and attract a broader range of shows and functions. Its more central location will also improve overall accessibility and help enhance the overall vitality of the designated City Centre. The site was most recently in A1 retail use, but with the nature of retail fast changing the diversification of town centres is becoming increasingly important. Cultural venues are integral in bringing people into centres which helps maintain and improve footfall and supports other businesses.

It is appreciated this application is for change of use, however we would note from the plans provided that there do not appear to be any backstage WC/shower facilities indicated for performers so this may need some further consideration. We welcome however that there appears to be level access for performers with wheelchairs and all dressing rooms appear sufficient to allow wheelchair access. Overall, the layout of the venue appears to provide good flexibility including the potential for a smaller performance space.

In conclusion we are supportive of this proposal and **recommend the granting of planning permission.**

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, slightly slanted style.

Tom Clarke MRTPI
National Planning Adviser

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