

Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC/2788

14 May 2020

Arleta Miszewska

By e-mail: dev.consultation@nfdc.gov.uk

Application: 20/10336

Site: ESSO SPORT & RECREATION CLUB, 179-181 LONG LANE, HOLBURY, FAWLEY SO45 2PA

Proposal: New changing room pavilion; demolish the existing club building; landscaping

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:

Thank you for consulting Theatres Trust regarding this application for planning permission to provide a new changing room pavilion and demolish the existing building which includes the Waterside Theatre.

The Waterside Theatre has unique history having been built by Esso as part of the Esso Recreational Club to provide a cinema and theatre for the local community. It opened in 1950 although it is of 1930s appearance with Art Deco-style foyer. It was equipped with a stage and full-height fly tower along with cinema screen and projection room and a flat-floor to allow for dances and other functions. It had a capacity of 500 seats which was reduced to 300 in the late 1990s following alteration with its cinema function ceasing (it was also known as the Esso Cinema and Waterside Cinema). In more recent years the theatre was used by local amateur groups – including the Waterside Theatre Company and Waterside Musical Society – for performances and rehearsals alongside use by other groups, companies and individuals for classes, events and functions.

The theatre closed in 2017 following the winding up of the community organisation that operated it. This left the groups cited above without a home – we had contact at that time from Waterside Theatre Company who advised that while the building needed some maintenance it was otherwise a valued facility providing not just fully-functioning flying facilities, lighting rigs, dressing rooms and a bar. Unfortunately without a suitable home that group was forced to close in 2018.

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, David Ian, Richard Johnston, Gary Kemp, Simon Ricketts, Truda Spruyt

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

We understand the Waterside Musical Society have also struggled to find alternative provision. The way in which the theatre was used prior to its closure and the difficulties faced by its previous users demonstrates its value as a community, cultural and social asset. Given its unusual history and distinctive character as a theatre building we consider it would be worthy of local heritage listing if the Council maintained such a register, but nonetheless can be considered an undesignated heritage asset. Therefore we object to its loss and consider its retention and adaption to better meet the needs of the applicant would be the optimal solution.

Plans show the existing club buildings which include the theatre are to be demolished and replaced by landscaping, community garden and revised parking layout. A new pavilion will be built deeper into the site between the football pitch and tennis court. On the basis of the value of the Waterside Theatre cited above and its function which would be lost for local people, we suggest alternative options for example adapting parts of the building (such as the dressing rooms) or extending it to provide the changing rooms, showers and accessible facilities needed are explored.

Furthermore, retention generally represents a more environmentally sustainable option than demolition and re-provision. This must be considered alongside any cost and energy efficiency arguments of the new build pavilion because that tends to take into account operation only rather than embodied carbon and the impact of extraction, manufacture, delivery, recycling and landfill of new and demolished materials. Generally retention and refurbishment is a more sustainable, lower carbon option.

Paragraph 92 of the NPPF (2019) seeks planning decisions to plan positively for community facilities including cultural buildings and to guard against unnecessary loss. Policy 8.iii of the Local Plan Review 2016-2036 Part One: Planning Strategy Submission Version (2018) has a presumption against development which involves the loss of social or community services unless the building is redundant or will be provided in another way. Paragraph 125 of the Inspector's Final Report (2020) confirms this policy is justified, effective and consistent with national policy and therefore should carry significant weight in decision making. We consider demolition of the Waterside Theatre constitutes unnecessary loss in contravention of NPPF paragraph 92. Evidence of need for the facility by local groups suggests it is not redundant and while the replacement pavilion still constitutes a community and social facility it does not re-provide the existing cultural function; therefore the policy also conflicts with local policy. We also consider paragraph 197 of the NPPF is relevant because the Waterside Theatre is a non-designated heritage asset.

In conclusion we consider this proposal to conflict with local and national policy and would result in the unnecessary loss of a valued community, cultural and social facility which has the potential to be revitalised to meet the needs of the applicant and the wider community. Therefore we recommend the refusal of planning permission.

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Please contact us if we may be of further assistance or should you wish to discuss these comments in greater detail. We would be keen to work positively with the applicant and the Council to find a positive way forward for this site.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "T Clarke".

Tom Clarke MRTPI
National Planning Adviser

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