

Ref.: TC/98

26 May 2020

Alistair Day
Planning, Building Control & Licensing
Colchester Borough Council
Town Hall,
Colchester,
Essex,
CO1 1FR

By e-mail: planning.services@colchester.gov.uk

Applications: 200910

Site: Odeon Cinema, Odeon Cinema, Crouch Street, Colchester CO3 3ES

Proposals: Demolition of former Cinema buildings and the re-construction of the Foyer Building and the erection of a new apartment block in place of the auditorium to provide 55no. apartments, 2no. Retail Units (A1) and 32no. basement car parking spaces.

Remit:

The Theatres Trust is the national advisory public body for theatres. We were established through the Theatres Trust Act 1978 'to promote the better protection of theatres' and provide statutory planning advice on theatre buildings and theatre use in Scotland through The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (Scotland) Regulation 2013, 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 seeks demolition of the former Odeon/Regal. In its place would be a new residential development with a reconstructed foyer and two residential units. There is an existing permission for a residential development with retention of the Crouch Street façade.

The building originally opened as the Regal in 1931 and was designed by renowned cinema and theatre architect Cecil Massey. Although it predominantly operated as a cinema it was equipped with full stage facilities, dressing rooms and orchestra pit. The auditorium was decorated in a Mediterranean style. In its early years it had an extensive theatre programme including regular pantomimes which was typical of a cine-variety theatre. Its capacity was 1,446 which reduced to 1,200 in 1962. It was sub-divided in 1974 followed by further division in 1987 and 1991. It closed in 2002 when Odeon moved to a nearby site on Head Street and has been vacant since that time.

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

Although it is not statutorily listed architecturally it is unique in Essex with an impressive principal façade in a Spanish-American style, as well as being an important survivor of Massey's provincial work. It is on the Council's adopted List of Local Architectural or Historic Interest. Notwithstanding its vacant and deteriorating state it is also an important positive contributor to the Colchester Town Centre Conservation Area and is recognised by the Conservation Area Character Appraisal as one of the more interesting buildings in Crouch Street.

As the site was built as a cinema with theatre provision, and that cinema remains the building's lawful use, our general position as supported by national and local policy is that it should be demonstrated the site is surplus to requirements for continued community or cultural use before other uses are considered. We are aware of local interest in the building being retained for cultural use. While evidence of continuing need does not appear to have been tested within the previous application (and we note that Cinema Theatre Association did not object to the change of use) we accept there is an existing permission and therefore while retention and restoration of the site for community or cultural use would be desirable and loss of parts of the building regrettable the primary factor in this application is the total loss of the site as an undesignated heritage asset. In that context it is also pertinent to note since the previous submission Colchester has gained a further cinema within the town centre with a further permission on an out-of-town site and works on expanding provision at the Mercury Theatre are advanced. The Arts Centre nearby has a varied programme of comedy, music and other performance which could be undermined by additional provision at this site.

On the basis of total loss of the original building we object to this proposal. We would note the merits of retention were prominently stated within the conclusion of the previous application's report which heavily influenced the recommendation to approve. Although not statutorily listed, the frontage of this building is nonetheless an important and significant asset not just within the immediate context of Crouch Street but regionally and even nationally given its association with Massey and being a survivor of his provincial work. While we appreciate the applicant's objective of delivering a scheme which offers an acceptable commercial return, that should not come to the detriment of the scheme's public benefits and loss of heritage.

Furthermore, retention generally represents a more environmentally sustainable option than demolition and re-construction. This must be considered alongside any cost and efficiency arguments supporting the new build option because embodied carbon and the impact of extraction, manufacture, delivery, recycling and landfill of new and demolished materials should be taken into account. Generally retention and refurbishment is a more sustainable, lower carbon option. While we welcome that some elements would be re-used – for example metalwork to the windows – we do not consider this to mitigate the overall impact of loss.

Therefore in conclusion we recommend the refusal of planning permission.

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

Protecting theatres for **everyone**



In the event this application is permitted we would strongly recommend the extension of existing recording conditions to fully document and photographically record the remaining fabric, fixtures and areas of significance of the current building and for such a report to be submitted to the Cinema Theatre Association and Theatres Trust for approval.

Please contact us if we may be of further assistance or should you wish to discuss this representation in greater detail.

Tom Clarke MRTPI
National Planning Adviser

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