

Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC

25 November 2020

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Worcester City Council
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High Street
Worcester
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By e-mail: planning@worcester.gov.uk

Application: 20/00649/FUL

Site: Lowesmoor Wharf Lowesmoor Worcester

Proposal: Demolition of buildings and structures, reuse and regeneration of buildings and redevelopment of land at Lowesmoor Wharf to provide mixed use development within seven buildings (Block A comprising up to 6 storeys, Block B comprising up to 9 storeys, Block C comprising up to 7 storeys, Block D comprising up to 7 storeys, Block E comprising up to 7 storeys, Block F comprising up to 12 storeys, Block G re-use and conversion of existing buildings, Block P: re-use and ground floor extension of existing building) floorspace to comprise 271 residential apartments (Class C3), 845 sq m retail floorspace (Class E), 789 sq m café and restaurant floorspace (Class E), 3,553 sq m office floorspace (Class E), 431 sq m community floorspace (Class E), 358 sq m ancillary and plant floorspace together with new pedestrian and vehicular accesses and car parking, new public space, hard and soft landscaping and associated site infrastructure.

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 been brought to the attention of the Trust by the The Georgian Group, The Victorian Society and by two separate local residents. These parties have contacted us because the site contains a mid-late nineteenth century music hall which would be demolished.

Theatres Trust

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL

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Chair Tim Eyles **Director** Jon Morgan

Trustees Richard Baldwin, David Blyth, Pam Bone, Paul Cartwright, Paddy Dillon, Annie Hampson, Richard Johnston, Gary Kemp, Simon Ricketts, Jane Spiers, Truda Spruyt, Katie Town

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

The part of the wider site within this application of interest to us is known as the Vesta Tilley Centre, named after one of the most internationally famous and iconic performers of her generation who was born and grew up in the city. In terms of the Trust's statutory remit it is the presence of the music hall which opened in 1869 as the New Worcester Concert Hall which is of interest. There are very few surviving music halls of that era left in the UK. Its association with Vesta Tilley also provides cultural significance; she is believed to have performed there during her childhood. The music hall was later used as a Salvation Army Citadel.

There is some reference to and appraisal of the former music hall within the applicant's Heritage Statement. It analyses the building as not having listable quality. Whilst internal photographs referred to us suggest any decorative character and detailing has been lost, it nonetheless appears to retain what was likely its original plan form with stage and gallery although there do not appear to be existing plans available with the application documents to assess this further. Externally however it was built with an unusual narrow tapered end, giving the building a ship-like footprint reflecting its location and association with the neighbouring canal and wharf, with a classical facade. It makes a strong contribution to local streetscape and the character of the Conservation Area. At the least the music hall is worthy of inclusion on the Council's Local List of Heritage Assets. The appraisal rates historic interest as low; the building's association with Vesta Tilley alone gives it somewhat higher historic interest. Therefore we would suggest this element of the Heritage Statement is flawed and merits further scrutiny and review.

We appreciate there are wider concerns with this development as a whole given its footprint and scale, but largely these fall outside of our remit and specific interest notwithstanding issues of setting. Nonetheless, with regard to the Vesta Tilley Centre, it is at least of local significance and therefore as a non-designated heritage asset significant weight should be placed on resisting its total loss in the absence of more compelling analysis and justification in order to accord with paragraph 197 of the NPPF (2019).

We would also note that the existing facility likely provides a hall function with performance form and character. The proposed community floorspace within the new development is very different. Paragraph 92 of the NPPF seeks planning decisions to plan positively for community facilities including guarding against unnecessary loss. Therefore some consideration should also be afforded to determining whether the new facility provides sufficient replacement for the loss of the Citadel.

Therefore in conclusion, on the basis of loss of a non-designated heritage asset (with some potential for statutory designation) which is of significant local interest and strongly contributes to local character without sufficient justification, we object to the granting of planning permission for this development.

If the Council is minded to grant permission for this scheme, we recommend insertion of a condition which seeks a detailed programme of recording of the former music hall and any historic features or fabric which may remain.

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Please contact us should you wish to discuss this representation further.



Tom Clarke MRTPI
National Planning Adviser

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