

Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC/3829

17 December 2020

East Herts Council
Wallfields
Pegs Lane
Hertford
SG13 8EQ

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

Application: 3/20/2285/FUL

Site: Hertford Theatre The Wash Hertford Hertfordshire SG14 1PS

Proposal: Retention and refurbishment of the auditorium and back of house facilities, demolition of ancillary and supporting areas, and redevelopment to provide new performance, cinema and ancillary facilities. Provision of cycle parking and ancillary landscaping, public realm improvements and associated works.

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 at Hertford Theatre to facilitate its refurbishment and extension including provision of new cinema screens, external landscaping and public realm improvements. The Trust welcomes this scheme and we have been engaged extensively by the applicant, their design team and the Council throughout the pre-application phase as plans were developed. We visited the theatre in October 2019.

Hertford Theatre is a valued community and cultural asset which serves the town and its wider catchment. We consider this project will deliver significant benefits and enhancements not just for the theatre but for Hertford and its designated town centre by strengthening and diversifying its theatre provision through increased capacity, introduction of a smaller studio theatre and providing dedicated cinema which the town currently lacks. It will help retain custom within the local area and bring in additional visitors to the benefit of other businesses and town centre footfall. It will contribute towards delivery of the vision for East Herts set out in the East Herts

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, 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

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District Plan (2018), part 4 supporting the provision of new facilities to meet the cultural needs of the community and part 6 which safeguards the vitality and viability of the main towns which includes Hertford. Paragraph 92 of the NPPF (2019) seeks planning decisions to plan positively for community and cultural facilities such as this.

Further refinements have been made to the design and layout of the building since we were last consulted during Summer 2020. We consider the building's form to be more dynamic with brickwork detailing providing texture and interest to the façade. The poster boxes are an integral part of the building's design which is welcomed and while they are low in number considering the number of spaces this is mitigated by them being digital which will allow for a range of events being publicised simultaneously. Currently it is the building's form and volume which signifies it being a theatre and cinema whereas its signage is currently envisaged as being modest in scale. We commented on prominence at the previous stage and although this is improved overall there may be merit in further reviewing the volume and scale of signage to assist with wayfinding sense of arrival.

For the size of the venue and with an intention to enhance the role of the theatre as an all-day destination the ground floor café/bar appears to have limited space for seating although potentially this could be extended into the space behind and the room for hire which looks to be flexible. There is also a secondary café upstairs adjacent to the cinema screens which can serve the balcony level. We would advise that consideration should be given to mobile counters for busy performances especially when the cinemas are also at high capacity for which provision of plumbing/services could be beneficial. The setting of the café/bar besides the river will contribute to its potential to draw people into the building throughout the day and we would suggest it could be further optimised by provision of outdoor seating and access. Servicing and deliveries for the bar/café should also be considered as it appears these must be made through the foyer which on our visit was busy with children and young families.

We note there are accessible WCs at all levels which is welcomed. However with all other WCs being at ground floor level there will need to be good operational management to ensure that start/end times of shows in the theatres and cinemas as well as intervals are staggered.

Overall we are highly supportive of these proposals which we consider will meet project objectives of improving the overall viability and sustainability of the theatre as a community and cultural asset for local people. They will address current challenges for the theatre such as lack of back of house space and capacity. They will also enable a broader range and scale of productions as well as provide significantly enhanced availability of cinema. This will enhance the social and cultural well-being of local people. There will also be significant placemaking benefits for the town by enhancing riverside access along the Lea towards the castle gardens beyond.

Therefore we recommend the granting of planning permission.

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Please contact the Trust should you wish to discuss these comments in further detail and continue to engage with us should plans be further amended and refined.

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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