

Protecting theatres for **everyone**



Ref.: TC

03 February 2021

Mr Stephen Gandolfi
Scarborough Borough Council
Town Hall
St Nicholas Street
Scarborough
North Yorkshire
YO11 2HG

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

Application: 20/02747/FL & 20/02748/LB

Site: Yorkshire Coast College Westwood Annexe Valley Bridge Parade Scarborough North Yorkshire YO11 2PL

Proposal: Conversion of former educational building to 32.no residential apartments, demolition of former ceramics workshop, erection of a 3 storey block of 18.no apartments, and associated parking and landscaping; &

Internal and external works (to include removal of internal theatre structure) for the conversion of former educational building to 32 residential apartments. Demolition of former ceramic workshop

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 and listed building consent at the Grade II listed former Westwood School. We have been notified because the site contains a theatre of significance due to its 'in-the-round' design and association with Sir Alan Ayckbourn and Stephen Joseph. The applicant is seeking to convert the building to residential use including removal of the theatre and to construct an additional residential block providing fifty homes overall.

Theatre in the round contains a central stage surrounded by the audience. It was common historically as seen particularly in ancient theatres of Greece and Italy but did not re-emerge at

Theatres Trust

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Chair Tim Eyles **Director** Jon Morgan

Trustees Richard Baldwin, Paul Cartwright, Paddy Dillon, Annie Hampson, Richard Johnston, Gary Kemp, 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

any scale until the later part of the twentieth century. Increasing examples appeared across the USA but it was Stephen Joseph who developed in the round in the UK to try to revitalise the industry and attract younger audiences, first in 1955 at Scarborough's Public Library and then at a disused cinema in Hartshill, Stoke-on-Trent seven years later. Both ventures were a success, although Stephen Joseph died of cancer at just 46 in 1967 and did not see its progression. In 1976 the Scarborough venue moved to this site which was intended as a temporary base but due to difficulty in finding and funding a permanent site it remained until the opening of the Stephen Joseph Theatre within Scarborough's former Odeon twenty years later. The Hartshill theatre had moved in 1986 to a permanent home, also within a former cinema, in Newcastle-under-Lyne. Although other theatres in the round have emerged around the UK it remains an uncommon format.

This site has significance as a surviving early theatre in the round in the town in which it was developed in the UK and its association with Stephen Joseph as a pioneer of the format. Furthermore, the theatre's artistic director was the renowned playwright Sir Alan Ayckbourn. Much of his work was debuted at this theatre and many productions went on to the West End and Broadway. Therefore it also has immense cultural significance. The listing description for this site was updated in early 2020 following consultation with the Trust by Historic England.

As such, we consider the total loss of this theatre to constitute substantial harm. We do not agree with the applicant's Heritage Impact Assessment that it creates only a minor negative impact. Furthermore the report refers only to historical association with Ayckbourn in assessing significance which ignores the theatre's format and layout the importance of which we have outlined above. Paragraph 193 of the NPPF (2019) affords great weight to the conservation regardless of level of harm. Paragraph 194 goes on to require clear and convincing justification. We do not consider such justification to have been provided.

We consider there to be alternative options for this site which would deliver a residential-led scheme whilst preserving the theatre and its significance. One option could be to utilise the space as a communal facility for residents, possibly with scope for public access, functions and some performance. This would be reflective of proposals being brought forward at the Leas Pavilion in Folkestone, Kent. Another example is the Chetwynd Centre in Stafford which is another former school where there is a proposal for residential conversion and use of the former hall as an arts centre. We would urge the applicant to engage positively with the Council, the Trust and Historic England to find a suitable way forward.

The Trust has no objection to conversion and development of the wider site for residential use and are keen to see the building brought back into use. However we strongly object to the removal of the theatre and conversion of that part of the site for which there is presently inadequate justification and therefore object to the overall scheme as currently proposed. Our recommendation is to refuse planning permission and listed building consent.

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If the Council is minded to grant permission for this development and/or it is to go before Committee for a decision, please notify the Trust. We would as a minimum urge insertion of a recording condition.

Please contact us if we may be of further assistance or should you wish to discuss these comments further. As outlined above we are keen to engage positively and would welcome further engagement should plans be revised.

Tom Clarke MRTPI
National Planning Adviser

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