

Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC/1488

11 November 2021

Development & Environment
Post point 15
North Somerset Council
Town Hall
Weston-super-Mare
BS23 1UJ

By e-mail: planningsupport@n-somerset.gov.uk

Application: 21/P/2897/LBC

Site: Curzon Cinema Old Church Road Clevedon North Somerset BS21 6NN

Proposal: Proposed internal alterations to include fire and safety improvements to enable the reinstatement of the historic balcony at the Curzon Cinema.

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 on this application for listed building consent at the Grade II listed Curzon. It is seeking reinstatement for public use of its balcony.

The Curzon opened in 1922 as a cine-variety theatre incorporating an earlier cinema which was constructed in 1912. It is unusual for a British theatre or cinema in that it was decorated by pressed metal plates as is common in North America and this is a key factor in the building's significance as noted within Historic England's listing description. The original auditorium is believed to be intact aside from box fronts and the organ. The false ceiling removed under the previous application had concealed original features such as the balcony. Although originally predominantly operated as a cinema it had stage facilities, dressing rooms, a fly gallery and grid, the latter still survives. It currently holds some live events including comedy, live music and limited theatre.

The Curzon remains a valued community, cultural and historic asset for Clevedon, operated by a charitable trust. This is demonstrated by positive public response to the Curzon's fundraising

Theatres Trust

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Interim Chair Paddy Dillon Director Jon Morgan

Trustees Richard Baldwin, Paul Cartwright, 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

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campaign for these works. Paragraph 93 of the NPPF (2021) seeks planning decisions to plan positively for venues such as this.

With the balcony being out of use for audiences, and currently used for storage, the Curzon's capacity is reduced compared to its full potential. This will impact its income and viability for larger and more popular screenings and events. In heritage terms it will also be detrimental to the character and significance of the auditorium now that its full volume has been revealed. Therefore we are supportive of the Curzon's efforts to reinstate this space.

In order to bring the the balcony back to use some alterations are proposed. Partly this is out of necessity because elements of the balcony no longer meet modern safety requirements. Partly changes are being introduced to its original form in order to provide enhanced audience comfort and facilities, which will be beneficial for income generation to support this heritage asset. This includes some new 'premium' seating with enhanced comfort, although it should be acknowledged that much of the historic seating has been removed. A private bar area is proposed for the second floor gallery foyer which could be utilised to host a wider range of functions and maximise the social and community role of the Curzon, diversifying its sources of income. There will also be the installation of modern sound equipment and fire protection.

The balcony railing for example is currently too low to meet modern safety standards. This will need to be raised. On a similar basis there will also need to be the introduction of handrails to stairways and other safety improvements to enable the balcony to meet relevant requirements. This includes alterations to the levels of steps and flooring (which also has the benefit of improving sight-lines) and the introduction of low-level lighting.

These changes are necessary to ensure the balcony can be successfully returned to use, and broadly they are removable and reversible. Although they will result in some harm to the historic form and appearance of the balcony they can generally be considered minor alterations which are offset by the much greater heritage and public benefit of restoring public use of the balcony and reinstating the historic layout of the auditorium.

Therefore in conclusion we welcome this project and are supportive of the granting of listed building consent.

Please do not hesitate to contact us should you wish to discuss these comments in further detail.

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

Tom Clarke MRTPI
National Planning Adviser

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