

# Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC

23 March 2022

Mr Andrew Lainton  
St. Helens Council  
Wesley House,  
Corporation Street,  
St Helens,  
WA10 1HF

By e-mail: [planning@sthelens.gov.uk](mailto:planning@sthelens.gov.uk)

**Application:** P/2022/0193/FUL

**Site:** First Floor 8 Church Street St Helens WA10 1BD

**Proposal:** Change of use from a shop to a multi-use venue including: Theatre, Nightclub, Public house, Wine bar or drinking establishment with expanded food provision, venue for live music performance, Cinema, Concert hall, Bingo hall and Dance hall.

## **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 come to the attention of the Trust because it is seeking change of use to a multi-purpose venue which includes theatre and live performance.

The site is a large retail unit which has been vacant since the closure of That's Entertainment's physical stores in 2018. Such units have been challenging to re-let, and this has seen a number of sub-divisions and conversions to other uses across the country including a number of leisure schemes. Arts and cultural facilities are being increasingly recognised as important anchors which help activate centres and generate footfall, as well as supporting and encouraging other businesses. There have been other recent examples of theatre and live performance use within former retail and other similar town centre units such as banks and restaurants. Therefore we are supportive of this scheme in principle.

We note the award of Towns Fund for St Helens includes a focus on the arts and culture. The Spatial Vision of the St Helens Local Plan 2020-2035 Submission version, which now carries

## **Theatres Trust**

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL  
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**Chair** Dave Moutrey **Director** Jon Morgan

**Trustees** Paul Cartwright, James Dacre, Suba Das, Stephanie Hall, Annie Hampson, Richard Johnston, Gary Kemp, Lucy Osborne, 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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substantial weight, seeks to strengthen the borough's cultural and leisure offer. Part 6.d of Policy LPA03 supports the provision of such facilities with part 8 of Policy LPA04 supporting creation and expansion. This change of use would contribute towards those objectives.

If the applicant progresses the theatre and performance element of this scheme they should consider how the venue would complement the town's existing provision at The Citadel and St Helens Theatre Royal and ensure the design and function of the space is conducive to the needs of its intended programme and users. We would encourage them to engage with the Trust on their plans as we are a source of free advice for theatre schemes.

To conclude, we are supportive of the granting of planning permission for this change of use as it will afford the applicant some certainty to progress their plans and attempt to arrest the longer-term vacancy of this prominent unit within St Helens' town centre.

Please contact us should you wish to discuss these comments further.

Tom Clarke MRTPI  
National Planning Adviser

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