

# Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC

25 May 2022

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**Application Reference:** FUL/2022/0103

**Site:** Carlton Cinema, Senhouse Street, Maryport, CA15 6BS

**Proposal:** Refurbishment, redecoration and conversion of cinema including the demolition of 28 Senhouse Street to create small extension

## 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 refurbishment and extension of the former Carlton Cinema and its change of use to an arts centre which will include theatre provision.

The Carlton first opened in 1934 following an auditorium being added to the rear of a former bank which had been built in the 1830s. This closed in 1962 after which the building was utilised for bingo, a typical conversion of cinemas and theatres at that time. It became vacant following the bingo hall closing in 1993 and remained vacant until 2009 when it was converted to a ceramics factory, gift shop and café. This closed in 2013 and the building has again been vacant since that time. The building is an undesignated heritage asset within the Maryport Conservation Area.

Plans show there to have been division within the auditorium which will be removed to re-establish a larger single space for use as a theatre and flexible events space. The neighbouring site will be demolished with a replacement building linked to provide a foyer and bar/cafe. Upper levels will contain a number of studios/workshops plus exhibition space and a recording studio. This will provide a flexible and mixed-use arts venue to meet the needs of different groups in the

## Theatres Trust

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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

town and bring a large and prominent site back to active use. In turn this should generate additional footfall which will support and encourage other businesses. This is welcomed, particularly as there is no current theatre provision in Maryport. Paragraph 93 of the NPPF (2021) seeks planning decisions to plan positively for provision of community facilities and to support the improvement of social and cultural wellbeing. Policy S26 of the Allerdale Local Plan (Part 1) also supports proposals for such facilities. Policy DM7 further encourages uses which enhance the evening economy. The benefits of development such as this for town centres are reflected in supporting paragraph 357.

The number of WCs provided within the block directly serving the theatre space is lower than the minimum set out in Technical Standards for Places of Entertainment (Table 21) when operating at upper levels of indicative audience capacities, particularly if other parts of the building are being used. There is an additional WC on each of the first and second floors directly above which could potentially also be utilised, along with a WC within the foyer and cafe area, although the operator should consider appropriate wayfinding and assistance at peak periods such as intervals to minimise queueing and congestion. There appears to be an error on the proposed ground floor plan as a doorway to the WCs is indicated but no opening is shown.

It is to be assumed that a demountable stage can be assembled as there is nothing shown on plans. It should be ensured that wheelchair places are made available, and that adequate sightlines can be achieved. There is just one specific dressing room shown, we note the applicant's aspiration for the space to be used by local school and youth groups amongst others. For reasons of safeguarding there should be additional dressing rooms provided to allow for segregation, this could be achieved through utilisation of the rehearsal space and/or workshops on upper levels but this would need to be managed.

Operationally there should also be a strategy for directing and assisting users if the theatre space is in use, for example if wheelchair users and those with reduced mobility need to access upper levels it appears they can only do so by exiting through the main entrance/foyer and travelling around the building to the rear entrance. It appears the WCs at upper levels may be accessible but the plans do not confirm this, for best practice these should be made accessible if practical to do so.

We welcome this scheme and the ambition to create a hub for the arts in Maryport. It is positive to see the value of cultural activity recognised in supporting the town centre and Future High Streets Fund being utilised for this purpose. We have seen similar proposals recently in smaller towns around the UK and are aware of further proposals likely to come forward in the near future. Although we have raised points for further consideration in terms of internal function and operation this is done so recognising that adaption and re-use of existing buildings will inevitably see constraints and limitations that may prevent best practice being achieved. We look forward to seeing this scheme progress, and are supportive of the granting of planning permission.

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

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Tom Clarke MRTPI  
National Planning Adviser

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