

Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC

15 July 2022

Planning department
Preston City Council
Town Hall
Lancaster Road
Preston
PR1 2RL

By e-mail: devcon@preston.gov.uk

Application: 06/2022/0663

Site: Former Odeon Cinema, 150-154, Church Street, Preston, PR1 3BU

Proposal: Demolition of the existing buildings and restoration of the site

Remit:

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 through press reports. It is seeking the demolition of the remaining parts of the former New Victoria Theatre/Odeon.

The building opened as the New Victoria Theatre in 1928, designed by renowned cinema architect W. E. Trent, whose works included the Apollo Victoria Theatre. It utilised an unfinished cinema and turned what was to be the 900-seat auditorium into an unusually large crush hall. A 2,110 seat cinema and theatre was built behind with a full stage. It was renamed the Gaumont in 1963 and subsequently the Circle extended to provide a 1,229 seat screen with a smaller second screen in the former café. It changed name again to the Odeon. The stalls became a dance hall. In 1992 it closed but the stalls reopened as a nightclub with the upper levels unused. In May 2022 the building was hit by two intentional fires, the first damaging the former Circle and the second destroying the whole auditorium. This area was demolished, leaving just the foyer remaining.

The remaining foyer block has an attractive front façade which positively contributes to local character and townscape. It can be considered an undesigned heritage asset. The Council

Theatres Trust

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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

does not appear to hold a local heritage list for the city area, but were it to bring one forward we could consider the frontage of this building to meet the current stated selection criteria. Whilst the plans are not completely clear, it appears that much of the old foyer and crush hall remains which is still a substantial element of the building. If access is practical we would suggest there to be merit in carrying out investigation and recording of any remaining historic features and fabric which might remain.

This proposal seeks complete loss through demolition for which there is no proper justification or evidence provided. Furthermore the application is for demolition only with no replacement proposal currently forthcoming other than the site to be restored to hardstanding. Paragraph 204 of the NPPF (2021) states local authorities should not permit loss without taking reasonable steps to ensure new development will proceed. Paragraph 199 additionally gives great weight to the conservation of heritage assets. On that basis this proposal should be refused.

Paragraph 194 of the NPPF requires applicants to describe the significance of heritage assets affected by development including contribution to their setting. There is no such appraisal. Whilst the auditorium has already been fire-damaged and demolished along with any historic features that may have remained there is compelling merit in retaining at least the front façade of this building. This must be explored further and alternative options for this site put forward before a decision is made on any irreversible demolition works.

Therefore we object to these proposals and urge the refusal of planning permission.

Please contact us if we may be of further assistance or should you wish to discuss these comments further.



Tom Clarke MRTPI
National Planning Adviser