

# Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC/2013

24 August 2022

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Planning and Building Control  
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**Application:** 22/0426/FUL

**Site:** Hippodrome New Market Street Colne Lancashire BB8 9BJ

**Proposal:** Full: (Major): Erection of single storey flat roof extension and two storey pitched roof extensions to the rear of the former Derby Arms, erection of a single storey linking extension between the former Derby Arms and the existing Hippodrome Theatre building, alteration to window at former Derby Arms to create an accessible entrance on New Market Street.

## **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 for planning permission has come to the attention of the Trust through press reports and receipt of an automatically generated key-word notification from Public Access. We have not been formally notified by the Council despite this falling within our statutory remit as outlined above. We recently submitted comments in relation to a planning application at Little Theatre for which we were also not consulted. Please ensure the Council notifies Theatres Trust of any further applications in relation to theatre buildings within the borough.

This application is seeking an extension to the Hippodrome primarily through amalgamation with the neighbouring building, the former Derby Arms, along with associated works. The main objectives and outcomes of these works are to provide better access both front and back of

## **Theatres Trust**

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**Chair** Dave Moutrey **Director** Jon Morgan

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house, additional front of house bar/foyer/lounge space, additional WCs, new facilities to diversify the theatre's function and additional back of house space.

The Hippodrome was designed by R. S. Pilling and opened in 1914 as a cine-variety theatre with a capacity of 980. It is a non-designated heritage asset and is located within the Albert Road Conservation Area. In its earlier years live stage shows dominated but in 1931 after sound was installed this reversed and it was predominantly used as a cinema. Capacity was subsequently reduced to 860 but it closed in 1965 after which it was converted to bingo use like many cinemas and theatres at that time. In the late 1970s three local amateur groups sought to purchase it for a return to theatre use and largely carried out the works themselves. Due to its poor condition and level of alteration, refurbishment and repair needed this was not completed until late 1986. The rear of the stalls was subdivided to create a bar which brought capacity down to around 627. Internally some historic features have been retained including its hemp-based flying system, vaulted ceiling panelled in wood and fibrous plaster circle fronts along with light fittings which were rescued from the Palace Hippodrome in Nelson. In 2005 the dressing room block was rebuilt and acquired stables adjacent to the theatre to create workshop and storage space. This was followed by purchase of the neighbouring vacant pub in 2015, subject to this application.

The Hippodrome has a mixed programme of productions by its own and other local groups along with touring shows, live music, comedy and other events such as its annual crafts and gifts fair. It is charitably run and is an important cultural and social asset, providing opportunities for local people to participate and engage in the arts, meet other people and develop their skills. Paragraph 93 of the NPPF seeks planning decisions to plan positively for facilities of this nature.

Much of these works are taking place within the area of the former Derby Arms along with some extension between the stable block and existing back of house. There is relatively little change within the existing theatre other than new openings and some repurposing of existing spaces.

Improved accessibility is a particular objective and benefit of this scheme. We believe from plans that until now level access has been through an escape directly into the auditorium whereas through these proposals all users can access the building through a new entrance at the corner of the pub which enters into the box office, lobby and bar area. Three lifts are being provided; one within the existing pub area, one within a small extension being added to the south-east corner of the pub and the other within the stage area. The lift within the existing pub would appear to be predominantly for the use of audiences and other public visitors enabling full access to the new multi-function room/studio on the first floor and the meeting rooms to the second floor. Lift access to the basement will make employed and/or volunteer staff roles accessible to wheelchair users and those with reduced mobility. We would however note that on the plans the space between box office and the office behind looks tight, this should be reviewed and if necessary slightly altered to ensure the box office is DDA compliant for staff/volunteers. The back of house lift will make the stage and dressing rooms accessible for performers, supporting crew and other visitors. Overall these interventions will enhance the inclusiveness of the theatre and in turn optimise its role as a cultural and social asset for the community.

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We suggest that further consideration might be given to the layout of the basement level and how lift access to that level is managed because otherwise there seems no control of audiences and the public accessing back of house functions. If the archive is a public area, visitors would have to pass through the bar store to reach it. The second lift directly accesses the archive but then lands in the staff/servicing area on the ground floor and at first floor level there is further opportunity for conflict because the accessible WC is within the same space. One solution may be to swap around the archive and bar store so that the goods lift is fully separated from public areas (a further doorway could be added between the access lift and accessible WC at first floor level) and this would also provide a direct journey between the bar store and delivery area to the rear for better efficiency. If the archive is not meant for public access there may not be a need for both lifts to serve the basement level which could reduce costs and make management easier.

The back of house works to the stables area provide an additional dressing room along with a stage store. This will enable the theatre to more comfortably handle shows with larger casts and potentially make it more attractive to some additional touring shows. It would also improve separation for safeguarding purposes where there are performances with children and young people. It appears that performers and staff requiring an accessible WC would have to use a facility also available to the public; if there is an opportunity to provide a specific back of house accessible WC either as part of this scheme or a later project we would encourage this. Whilst there is no specific dressing room for wheelchair users indicated we assume the large ground floor dressing room area is used for that purpose.

The provision of additional public facilities at upper levels of the pub are also to be welcomed. These consist of studio/multi-function room with adjacent lounge and bar/kitchen to the first floor and a series of rooms to the second floor. This will help improve the flexibility and function of the Hippodrome, enabling different parts of the building to be used concurrently and for smaller-scale events and functions to be facilitated. This will help diversify the theatre's income potential and expand its community, cultural and social provision.

From a design perspective there is little material change in terms of the appearance of the theatre and pub's principal elevations to New Market Street, or to setting within the conservation area, the main one being the creation of a new main entrance to the corner of the pub which we consider to be sensitively integrated. We consider the rear extensions to be of appropriate scale. Internally there will be loss of fabric to create an opening to the former pub but with reference to NPPF paragraph 203 on non-designated heritage assets this will not have particular impact on significance and enables the substantial public benefits of the scheme to be realised.

We know that this project has been an ambition of the applicant for some time and their efforts to develop and enhance the Hippodrome and make it more inclusive are to be welcomed and supported, as is the Council's use of Levelling-Up Fund receipts to support cultural activity in the district. As well as the positive role the theatre has on the social and cultural well-being of local people, it is also an asset which brings footfall into the town centre which supports other businesses and jobs. Policy WRK 5 of the Pendle Local Plan Part 1: Core Strategy (2015)

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supports provision of improved facilities for leisure and culture and this proposal can be considered to accord with the conditions of that policy.

Although this development will result in the permanent change of use of the pub there are clear public benefits arising from the Hippodrome being able to develop and expand its facilities and particularly to improve its accessibility. A bar along with lounge is being located within the pub area which to some degree reinstates intended use and function. The theatre is itself under the umbrella of community uses defined within the NPPF. The pub's external appearance and character is being maintained. Since closure in 2014 there have been three new micropubs open directly adjacent, therefore along with improvement of the theatre this constitutes an uplift and diversification of cultural and social uses within the immediate area. We consider this meets the requirements of Saved Policy 32.3.2 of the Replacement Pendle Local Plan (2009) which otherwise resists the loss of existing facilities, and reflects the criteria of alternative community use and appropriate alternative being available within Policy SUP 1.

In conclusion we welcome these plans and support the granting of planning permission.

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

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

Tom Clarke MRTPI  
National Planning Adviser

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