

Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC/2382

09 September 2022

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Applications: 22/01712/FUL

Site: The Picture House 12 Station Road Castleford WF10 1DL

Proposals: CONVERSION OF FORMER PICTURE HOUSE TO 3 NO. COMMERCIAL UNITS (CLASS E) AND 25 NO. APARTMENTS INCLUDING NEW SHOPFRONTS AND WINDOW AND DOOR OPENINGS AND ASSOCIATED SERVICES

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 to convert the Picture House into a residential-led scheme with three retail units at ground floor level and associated new openings and external alterations.

The Picture House opened in 1921 as a cinema that was equipped with stage facilities for live performances. The capacity was around 1,200. It had a separate ballroom and café which would have been within the element fronting Station Road. The auditorium is set behind and is of different architectural style. The Picture House was located next door to the now-demolished Queen's Theatre which also had 1,200 seats and this likely would have been an important centre for social activity within the town. It operated until 1962 after which like many venues during that era it converted to bingo use. It was later converted to a pub. In early 2017 it was badly damaged by a fire and has been vacant since that time.

Theatres Trust

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL
T 020 7836 8591 E info@theatrestrust.org.uk W theatrestrust.org.uk

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

We understand that internally the Picture House was heavily altered although plans suggest that at first floor level within the auditorium block the circle is still legible. Externally it is of high architectural and decorative merit and significance with tiled murals and Picture House lettering. It is an important contributor to local townscape and we consider this a non-designated heritage asset. There would be great merit in its local listing if the Council maintained such a register.

Whilst not opposed to alternative uses in principle given the apparent alteration and condition of this building, the Council should be satisfied there is no realistic need or prospect of the Picture House being returned to a cultural or community use more sensitive and compatible with the building's form and significance. We would note the previous use was as a pub which is itself considered a community facility. Policy CS 5 of the Core Strategy (2009) seeks to prevent the loss of facilities and services. The applicant has provided little substantiation of efforts to market the site for existing or other uses.

The proposed floorplans show a number of residential units would offer poor living conditions for future occupants with little or no natural light and poor ventilation. This is reflective of deep footprint buildings such as this not being readily conducive to residential conversion. This scheme would also see the loss of arguably the building's most sensitive features in the murals and Picture House signage to provide new openings. These should be retained not just for their architectural and townscape value but to provide a link to this locally important building's history and function.

We recommend that if change of use to residential is deemed acceptable in principle through demonstrable evidence other potentially viable uses are not practical or required, there is a re-design of this scheme to place greater weight on NPPF paragraph 203 and ensure sensitive features of the southern and western elevations in particular are conserved. Appropriate living conditions will also need to be achieved. We further recommend that a programme of historic building recording is carried out given the possible presence of historic fabric and plan form.

Therefore we currently object to the granting of planning permission.

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



Tom Clarke MRTPI
National Planning Adviser

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