

Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC/446

14 December 2022

Nicola Kingsford
Planning Section
Dover District Council
White Cliffs Business Park
Dover
CT16 3PJ

By e-mail: developmentcontrol@dover.gov.uk

Application: 22/01345

Site: 12 King Street Deal CT14 6HX

Proposal: Erection of a four storey building incorporating 3no. retail units (Use Class E) and 16no. self-contained flats (existing building to be demolished)

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. We submitted comments in relation to the previous application at this site in 2019 which was subsequently permitted.

This site was originally an Oddfellows Hall for the Palmerston Lodge, but after two years it was converted in 1892 to a theatre and from 1910 it became known as Theatre Royal. The building was remodelled internally in 1934 cinema use was also introduced. It closed in 1961 and was used for bingo for two years before reverting to a dedicated cinema in 1963, finally closing in 1981. After that it was converted to an amusement arcade at stalls level and a snooker hall at circle level. The arcade closed in 2017 and we believe the snooker hall closed later. Although the auditorium has been divided and the stage and historic machinery removed we understand there to be historic features remaining dating from the remodelling of 1934 and the building is in generally good condition.

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

This proposal is similar to the previous scheme, which will see demolition of the existing building and replacement with a new residential-led development containing ground floor commercial units. Our previous comments focussed on two main issues, the loss of a community and social use and the loss of the building as a non-designated heritage asset.

The applicant had already supplied evidence to support change of use from a community and social use which we had deferred to the Council to judge acceptability. Paragraph 3.4 of the previous report to Planning Committee stated that officers were satisfied the case had been made in this regard. We acknowledge existing theatre provision in the town at the Astor as well as the cited proposal to reinstate cinema use at the Regent, an application we had supported (although this is yet to be implemented). Therefore we make no objection on this basis, although would still strongly encourage consideration of alternative options (which could include commercial uses) that would be compatible with this building's existing function and built form; it is likely that the sub-division was lightweight and could be easily be reversed to reinstate a single larger volume.

It is regrettable there would be complete loss of this building, which is a non-designated heritage asset. Aside from impacts on heritage, demolition and construction is a significantly less sustainable option than re-use and adaption. This is increasingly being recognised as demonstrated by the recent high-profile call-in by the Secretary of State of the M&S Marble Arch redevelopment; paragraph 154.b of the NPPF (2021) seeks new development to be planned in ways which help to reduce emissions including through design. This building is recognisable as a cinema/theatre and we contend, in conflict with the applicant's Heritage Statement, that it makes a positive contribution to local townscape within the Middle Street Conservation Area. There is limited information to show that an alternative use for the existing building would not be viable. Nonetheless we recognise that the principle of loss has previously been accepted.

Should permission for this development again be approved, we urge retention of the previous condition 12 which requires a photographic and written record of the building to be undertaken and approved prior to demolition works taking place. Given the specialist knowledge and experience of Theatres Trust as a national advisory body we suggest the Council consults with us and obtains our satisfaction prior to discharge.

We would prefer to see a more sensitive and environmentally sustainable proposal come forward for this building and believe that alternative community/cultural/social or commercial uses could potentially be viable. Overall however, given the previous permission, we raise no objection subject to inclusion of a recording condition as cited above.

Please contact the Trust should you wish to discuss this response further.



Tom Clarke MRTPI
National Planning Adviser

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