

Protecting theatres  
for **everyone**



Ref.: TC/3637

4 April 2023

David O'Connor  
The Planning Department  
Cannock Chase Council  
Beecroft Road  
Cannock  
WS11 1BG

By e-mail: [developmentcontrol@cannockchasedc.gov.uk](mailto:developmentcontrol@cannockchasedc.gov.uk)

**Application:** CH/23/0131

**Site:** Land bound by Ringway, Church Street and Market Hall Street, Cannock Town centre, WS11 1EB

**Proposal:** Outline planning permission with all matters reserved for regeneration of town centre including mixed use leisure and cultural hub, refurbishment of Prince of Wales Theatre, upto 750sqm of new cafe/bar/restaurant premises within the theatre, new cafe building (upto 325sqm), managed workspace (upto 1300sqm), replacement retail unit (upto 1858sqm), new office accommodation (upto 3170sqm), extra care / retirement accommodation (upto 70 dwellings), bicycle hub and associated public realm improvements.

### **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'.

### **Theatres Trust**

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL

**Telephone** 020 7836 8591 **Email** [info@theatrestrust.org.uk](mailto:info@theatrestrust.org.uk) **Website** [theatrestrust.org.uk](http://theatrestrust.org.uk) **Twitter** @TheatresTrust

**Facebook** @theatres.trust **Instagram** @TheatresTrust

**Chair** Dave Moutrey OBE

**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

**Comment:**

This application for outline planning permission has come to the attention of the Trust through press reports. It is within our interest and remit because it includes development at the Prince of Wales Theatre.

The Prince of Wales Theatre was previously the Prince of Wales Centre and is part of a large town centre complex built in the 1960s and 1970s. It sits between the Market Hall which is now vacant and a large car park which was closed due to structural concerns. It is owned by the Council and currently operated by a charitable leisure trust. The theatre has a seated capacity of around 427 and is also used for other functions and events such as wrestling and the town's beer festival. Its live performance programme includes theatre, comedy and live music. Along with touring shows it also supports productions by local groups. It is a valued cultural facility for Cannock and its surrounding catchment. Paragraph 93 of the NPPF (2021) seeks planning decisions to plan positively for facilities of this nature.

The Council has been in receipt of funding to support town centre regeneration through the Levelling Up Fund. One of the strands of this project is to provide a new cultural hub with a two-screen cinema, a bar and restaurant and refurbishment of the theatre. The Trust welcomes this principle of investment and improvement in the theatre and cultural provision in the area.

The wider project will also see the replacement of the neighbouring market hall and car park with a mixed use development along with public realm improvements. The theatre's location is quite severed from the core town centre/shopping centre and footfall, exacerbated further by closure of the market. Opportunities to enhance its facilities and offer are also constrained by its current footprint and inability to expand. Therefore again in principle these plans are welcomed subject to the actual mix of incoming uses and their design and location.

At this stage the application is in outline and concepts have been presented. These comments are accordingly high level. One proposal in terms of cultural leisure development is for the theatre and cinema to be linked, subject to viability. The principle of co-location would be supported as there are other examples of this and it may provide opportunity for creation of a vibrant mixed-use arts facility with greater flexibility. The project team may wish to look at the Storyhouse in Chester and the Hertford Theatre; the latter is a current Council scheme of similar scale. Additionally the bar/café/restaurant as part of the theatre as shown in visuals would improve vibrancy and bring more people into the building at different times of day, increasing

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## Protecting theatres for everyone



engagement with the theatre and helping to generate additional income to support the core arts function. This is also an approach being taken by several other local authorities and venues.

The current landscaping and public realm proposals would make the area of the theatre much more attractive to visit and dwell within.

At present the plan for the neighbouring sites (other than cultural uses) is for other commercial town centre development to the south and an extra care/retirement development to the north. The former as currently envisaged would not raise any objections. We would however urge caution on the latter because neighbouring noise-generating uses such as theatres and sensitive residential uses are often not compatible. This is because of the risk of noise and disturbance impacting living standards, and in turn the risk of harm or loss of venues should they become constrained by new restrictions arising from complaints. There have been high-profile examples of this which resulted in the introduction of the 'agent of change' principle into the NPPF. This will need to be properly considered as the project progresses towards detailed application stage. It would similarly apply should other residential uses get introduced into the proposed commercial/retail element.

As a statutory consultee and national advisory public body for theatres we would strongly recommend that the project team engage with us as plans are developed. We can provide advice on their proposals for the theatre, and highlight at an early stage any challenges which would otherwise risk us being unable to support the granting of permission. This will help ensure the future theatre remains viable and sustainable.

In principle however we are supportive of this project and support the granting of outline planning permission.

Please contact us if we may be of further assistance or should you wish to discuss this representation in greater detail.

Tom Clarke MRTPI  
National Planning Adviser

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