

Protecting theatres
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Ref.: TC/1701

1 November 2023

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By e-mail: consultsandreps@calderdale.gov.uk

Application: 23/00922/FUL

Site: The Hippodrome Theatre Halifax Road Todmorden Calderdale OL14 5BB

Proposal: Demolition of existing cinema projection tower and construction of a three storey extension and internal alterations

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:

Thank you consulting Theatres Trust on this application for planning permission at the Todmorden Hippodrome Theatre. It seeks to construct an extension to the building to provide enhanced front of house facilities including new studio/rehearsal space utilising funding from the Todmorden Town Deal. We engaged with the

Theatres Trust

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL

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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

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applicant at pre-application stage and expressed our in-principle support for the project.

The Hippodrome was built in 1908. Its auditorium had a capacity of around 1,500 seats across the stalls, pit and balcony levels. Originally built as a live theatre, it introduced films to its programme in 1911 and by 1917 was almost entirely operating as a cinema. The cinema closed in 1956 at which point it was taken on by a local group, the Todmorden Operatic Society who operated it with the Todmorden Players. These groups merged in 1986 and in 1987 they purchased the building. Internally the auditorium is decorated in an Edwardian Baroque style with decorative plasterwork. Externally the theatre is built in red brick with a set of five pilasters giving the appearance of curtains; it is unusual in that its main entrance was located to the side of the auditorium. When it started showing films an extension was built to the rear of the auditorium to house a projection room. A further extension to the eastern side was added in 1915 to create a shop unit, and more recently this has been used as a bar operated by the theatre. Over time new openings have provided access between the different areas. With the exception of the former pit, which has been partitioned to create a bar and foyer, the auditorium remains quite complete from its original construction. The Hippodrome does not have statutory listing but can be considered to be a non-designated heritage asset and is within the Todmorden Conservation Area.

The Hippodrome continues to be owned and operated by its members. It is a registered charity and is staffed by volunteers. They have carried out necessary restorations and other works over the years to ensure the theatre remains operational. Its programme consists of the groups own amateur productions with some external shows, other events and occasional film screenings. Venues such as this are particularly important for the social and cultural well-being of local people, providing opportunities for participation and engagement in the arts and to help develop skills. Paragraph 93 of the NPPF (2023) seeks planning decisions to plan positively for these types of facilities.

The proposed extension will provide additional space and facilities to the upper levels; at ground floor level the overall footprint is unchanged but there will be internal alterations to provide a new layout. To each of the mezzanine and first floor levels will be a new flexible studio/rehearsal spaces; at mezzanine level this is accompanied by an external terrace. Both levels will have lift access and appear to have accessible WCs (although only one is confirmed as such on the proposed plan – for best practice both should be accessible). The mezzanine level will also have an

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archive space. These new spaces will improve the theatre's function and flexibility. They provide an opportunity to better facilitate its own needs for example having a range of separate spaces for rehearsals or different activities and also to enhance its social and cultural offer. They will also enhance the social and cultural offer as well as improve scope for income generation because these could also be utilised for small-scale performances and screenings, functions and other external hires. Overall we consider the design and scale of this extension to be sensitive to the historic character of the original building.

At ground floor level the altered layout provides a larger foyer area which will be a more coherent single space. The main entrance will be served by an enhanced and permanent external ramp, a benefit of a wider pavement arising from the proposed removal of a parking bay. There will be an uplift in WC provision; as is common with older theatres the Hippodrome currently lacks sufficient numbers to meet current standard and the expectations of audiences so this increase is welcomed. Whilst not something we object to we would query the design rationale behind the WC blocks being at an angle; this approach appears to make the layout of the ticket office and adjacent store/bin store more awkward.

We welcome these plans and consider that they successfully address the project objectives, and importantly would enhance the function and flexibility of the Hippodrome. We consider that this development would contribute to the aims of Policy HW3 of the Calderdale Local Plan (2023) which seeks to create and safeguard opportunities for fulfilling and active lifestyles, as well as Policy RT6.III which seeks new development for cultural provision to ensure local participation and audience development is enhanced. Part IV. of the same policy also permits cultural and leisure proposals in town centres which do not have significant impacts on local amenity and active frontage is established or retained. We consider this proposal to accord with those principles.

We are therefore supportive of the granting of planning permission.

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

Tom Clarke MRTPI

National Planning Adviser

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