

TTT Ref: 103 and 105

Mr Stewart Currie
Team Leader
Planning Service
Department of Regeneration
City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council
Bradford Area 2, 3rd Floor
Jacobs Well
Bradford BD1 5RW

27 November 2008

Dear Mr Currie,

Odeon Cinema, Prince's Way, Bradford BD1 2BS
Application Refs: 08/06391/FUL and 06392/CAC

Thank you for consulting The Theatres Trust on the above conservation area consent and planning permission to demolish the former *Odeon Cinema* and redevelop the site. The Trust **objects to both applications**. Please see our detailed advice below.

Remit: The Theatres Trust is The National Advisory Public Body for Theatres. The Town & Country Planning (General Development Procedure) Order 1995, Article 10, Para (v) requires the Trust to be consulted on planning applications which include '*development involving any land on which there is a theatre.*' It was established by The Theatres Trust Act 1976 '*to promote the better protection of theatres.*' This applies to all theatre buildings, old and new, in current use, in other uses, or disused. It also includes buildings or structures that have been converted to theatre, circus buildings and performing art centres. Our main objective is to safeguard theatre use, or the potential for such use, but we also provide expert advice on design, conservation, property and planning matters to theatre operators, local authorities and official bodies.

Advice/comment: The *Odeon Cinema* in Bradford was built as the *New Victoria* super cinema and was constructed with a large stage and dressing rooms and featured ciné-variety acts. It also had a ballroom, tea lounge and restaurant. It was elaborately and lavishly finished in the Italian Renaissance style and had a semi-atmospheric auditorium. The auditorium had a huge 70 ft diameter dome, a three-cove proscenium arch, arched grille work, enriched freezes and balcony fronts decorated with cherubs and festoons. Externally it was constructed with two impressive corner towers and the building was finished in brick with faience dressings. It was designed for Provincial Cinematograph Theatres (PCT) to form a group with the *Alhambra Theatre* which was the leading national chain in the 1930s, owning 96 cinemas. By the time of opening it had been taken over by Gaumont British Cinemas who acquired the whole circuit. In the 1930s the building was used for variety showing film and stage presentations, and throughout the 1940s, 50s and 60s it hosted many live acts including the Rolling Stones. However, in 1969 the auditorium was subdivided into two screens and in 1988 the ballroom converted into a third screen. The cinema closed in 2000.

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The Theatres Trust has had the *Odeon Cinema* on its casework files for many years and is particularly aware of its important cultural history for the town and streetscape value. In August 2008 we reviewed our *Theatre Buildings at Risk* register (TBAR) and the *Odeon Cinema* was included within our top ten as it is threatened with demolition. We were therefore disappointed by the referred plans which include the total loss of this historic cultural and community building within the City and the local cultural quarter.

Since its closure in 2000 there has been continuous local concern about the loss of the building for cultural, theatrical and community benefit. While the Trust appreciates the need to regenerate Bradford City, this should not be at the expense of potential cultural or community uses. It is important that the needs of local and regional communities are accommodated within any scheme of redevelopment. Bradford Odeon Rescue Group (BORG) has been actively working with local people and within the region to re-establish a community venue as part of Bradford's cultural heritage, in recognition of the leisure needs of the area's expanding population and also of visitors and tourists to the City. It wishes to refurbish and extend the *Odeon* to attract professional and amateur productions, dance, music and entertainment of all types and for all ages. The building would support educational projects, conferences, exhibitions and many kinds of community events as well as provide a valuable social meeting place.

Although the planning application includes a Leisure Demand Study, no Needs and Impact Assessment for the potential loss of this building for community or cultural uses within the area has been included. Planning Policy Statement 6 (PPS6): Planning for Town Centres published March 2005, at Chapter 1, The Government's Objectives, paragraph 1.3, page 5, states '*The Government's key objective for town centres is to promote their vitality and viability by: promoting and enhancing existing centres, by focusing development in such centres and encouraging a wide range of services in a good environment, accessible to all.*' Paragraph 1.4, bullet point 1, expands by saying a key objective is '*enhancing consumer choice by making provision for a range of shopping, leisure and local services, which allow genuine choice to meet the needs of the entire community, and particularly socially-excluded groups*'. At paragraph 2.22, page 11, Promoting high-quality design and making efficient use of land, the Statement points out '*A diversity of uses in centres makes an important contribution to their vitality and viability. Different but complementary uses during the day and in the evening can reinforce each other making the town centre more attractive to local residents, shoppers and visitors.*' The Theatres Trust fails to see how demolition and redevelopment of the *Odeon Cinema* site for office, hotel and restaurant use will achieve the Government's key objectives as set out in PPS6.

The Theatres Trust strongly advises that Bradford City Council should ensure that the *Odeon* is surplus to cultural and community requirements before considering demolition. Furthermore, the Council should be seeking financial compensation from the developers towards other theatrical venues in the City (such as the *Priestley*) or alternative cultural or community facilities as part of the new scheme, should demolition be approved.

In architectural, historic and streetscape terms, we note the Heritage Statement (dated 30 September 2008 and submitted as part of the planning application) by Spawforths. It suggests in its conclusion that '*the Odeon is not characteristic of the wider conservation area as it is a relatively later insertion into it*' and that while the building is prominent in the conservation area, '*it makes little positive contribution*'. Spawforths further suggest that alterations have eroded its '*historic form*'. However, we consider the building retains much local merit and that its current unkempt appearance is due mainly to a lack of maintenance, and that it should be repaired and enhanced as part of the streetscene. We consider it has value in that it represents a building of its time and its simpler *Moderne* domed design gives the street interest, particularly with the juxtaposed *Alhambra Theatre*.

Furthermore, we note that the City Centre Conservation Area Assessment (October 2005) celebrates the diverse character of the City, and therefore disagrees with the applicant's Heritage Statement that the *Odeon* contributes very little. The City Centre Conservation Area Assessment points to the architectural merits (at page 21) of the building and states '*The solid frontage of the building, set immediately to the rear of the footway, provides strong definition to the streetscape and helps tunnel vistas along Princes Way towards Godwin Street*'. It goes on to state that '*The twin domes are its most interesting feature and do make a positive contribution to the streetscape*'. The *Odeon* was originally constructed as a cultural building and as a result contributes to the diverse character of the area.

The *Odeon* is capable of being adapted for other uses and could be incorporated into the heart of a redevelopment scheme.

While it is unlikely that it could ever return to theatre or cinema use as Bradford is well served by the *Alhambra*, *St Georges Hall* and the *Priestley*, as well as the National Media Museum, nevertheless with some imagination it could convert to alternative uses which would retain the architectural and townscape interest. Examples of such conversions include the *Pyramid Cinema*, Sale (listed Grade II) converted to a health club which includes a swimming pool sunk into the auditorium, the *Tunbridge Wells Opera House* (listed Grade II) has been converted to pub use and many theatres such as *Camden Palace* (listed Grade II) and *Theatre Royal* (listed Grade II), Wigan, have been altered for nightclub use. In Scotland the *Regal Theatre* in Broughty Ferry (listed Grade B) is a car showroom, the *Empress Electric Theatre*, Manchester (listed Grade II) is a paint spray workshop, the former *New Gallery*, Regent Street, converted by PCT as its headquarters in 1925 (listed Grade II) has been converted for a Habitat store and the *Finsbury Park Astoria* (listed Grade II*) has been converted for church use. In addition, the *London Hippodrome* (listed Grade II), Leicester Square, has permission for the full restoration of the Frank Matcham interior for Casino use.

The most recent case (2006) for the restoration and development of a large 3000-seat cinema is the former *Granada* at Clapham Junction (listed Grade II*). This scheme, currently under construction, includes the restoration of the auditorium for media/church use and the erection of 60 flats over the roof. We can see no reason why the *Odeon* could not benefit from imaginative redevelopment and so form the heart of the regeneration scheme as part of the cultural quarter. A mixed-use scheme incorporating (at the very least) the restoration of the twin towers and the auditorium with development over and around would surely be preferable. The building once had more signage and canopies, and could therefore form part of a future Area Action Plan, Town Scheme or Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI).

We would also draw your attention to *Heritage Works-The use of historic buildings in regeneration, A toolkit for good practice (2005)* and *Constructive Conservation in Practice (October 2008)* both produced by English Heritage, which illustrate many successful examples of heritage buildings integrated into urban regeneration schemes. These schemes have created popular urban quarters with character and have transformed the built environment and the public realm for the people living there. We are surprised that the retention and regeneration of the *Odeon Cinema* and site is not something that the Council's Heritage Champion should be promoting.


Planning Policy Guidance 15 (PPG15) Planning and the Historic Environment, in particular paragraph 1.1 states '*The physical survivals of our past are to be valued and protected for their own sake, as a central part of our cultural heritage and our sense of national identity. They are an irreplaceable record which contributes, through formal education and in many other ways, to our understanding of both the present and the past. Their presence adds to the quality of our lives by enhancing the familiar and cherished local scene and sustaining the sense of local distinctiveness*

which is so important an aspect of the character and appearance of our towns, villages and countryside. The historic environment is also of immense importance for leisure and recreation.' The incremental loss of historic buildings within conservation areas should be of concern to the Council particularly as in this case where the building has a more unusual cultural history. In addition PPG 15 goes on to state at paragraph 4.27, 'The general presumption should be in favour of retaining buildings which make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of a conservation area. The Secretary of State expects that proposals to demolish such buildings should be assessed against the same broad criteria as proposals to demolish listed buildings'.

In terms of the new build (planning application ref: 08/06391/FUL) we **object** to the proposed scheme because we consider that the *Odeon* building should be incorporated into any redevelopment. Furthermore, we object because of the adverse scale and bulk of the proposal which harms the Conservation Area and the setting of the *Alhambra Theatre*. We also object to the scheme as no financial compensation has been proposed either towards other theatrical venues in the City or alternative theatrical facilities.

Summary: The Trust objects to the application for the demolition on the basis that a potentially valuable cultural facility will be lost and is capable of being repaired as part of any regeneration scheme. The benefits of incorporating the *Odeon* into the possible regeneration of the area with a community or a cultural use would in the long-term be more beneficial as its focus for the cultural quarter. Furthermore, no Needs and Impact Assessment has been submitted as part of the application and there is no financial sum set aside to develop an existing or new facility. This is in conflict with Planning Policy Statement 6 (PPS6): Planning for Town Centres. The replacement scheme harms the Conservation Area because of its adverse size, scale and bulk. We urge the Council to **refuse both applications**.

I should be grateful if you would send The Theatres Trust a copy of the committee report and let us know if the Council is minded to approve the application. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can be of further assistance.



Mark J Price
Planning and Architecture Adviser

cc Trevor Mitchell, Team Leader and Historic Buildings Inspector, English Heritage
Richard Gray, Cinema Theatre Association
Jon Wright, The Twentieth Century Society
Anthony Mann, Chair, Bradford Civic Society
Bradford Odeon Rescue Group