

Protecting theatres for everyone



Ref.: TC/3679

15 November 2022

Rebecca Taylor
County Hall
Durham
County Durham
DH1 5UL

By e-mail: planning@durham.gov.uk

Application: DM/22/03136/LB

Site: The Witham 3 Horsemarket Barnard Castle DL12 8LY

Proposal: Installation of external lighting and two vertical banners on the principal elevation.

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 for listed building consent has come to the attention of the Trust because it is seeking the addition of external lighting and vertical banner signage at The Witham.

The Witham is an arts centre which is charitably run and provides a programme of theatre, live music, comedy and cinema along with gallery and studio spaces and a café. It is an important cultural and social facility for the town and its surrounding communities. It is also a Grade II listed heritage asset within the former Witham Testimonial Hall and Dispensary, built in 1845 and extended at the rear to incorporate a New Mechanics' Hall. Paragraph 93 of the NPPF (2021) seeks planning decisions to plan positively for facilities such as this.

The applicant within their supporting statement has cited the venue's lack of visibility. We would concur with this; the building currently has minimal signage consisting of a small plaque and noticeboard either side of the main entrance. It has minimal prominence and activation for what is such an important building and town centre use particularly given that the town receives a number of visitors. We consider there is opportunity to sensitively implement additional signage to help increase awareness and visibility of the Witham and its offer. This could generate additional visitors which in turn would help contribute towards the venue's financial sustainability.

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

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and its cultural offer.

The approach taken in terms of installing vertical banners and lighting is reflective of interventions at other similar venues and heritage assets. We consider this would meet the applicant's objectives whilst conserving the special interest of this asset. With reference to paragraph 202 of the NPPF, the less than substantial harm of this proposal is mitigated by the public benefits we have cited. These will be fixed into the masonry and should they be removed in future a planning condition can be utilised to ensure any harm is made good.

The application form also references replacement of the Witham's main entrance door for a glazed replacement. Again this is something we could support in principle, but there is no further information provided and it has been omitted from the application description so it is assumed this is not being taken forward at the current time.

In conclusion we support the granting of listed building consent for the works outlined.

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

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "T Clarke". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Tom Clarke MRTPI
National Planning Adviser

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