

Ref.: TC/3679

30 September 2024

Wendy Dawson  
County Hall  
Durham  
County Durham  
DH1 5UL

By e-mail: [planning@durham.gov.uk](mailto:planning@durham.gov.uk)

**Application:** DM/24/02182/FPA & DM/24/01658/LB

**Site:** The Witham 3 Horsemarket Barnard Castle DL12 8LY

**Proposal:** Installation of 3 No. Digital display screens, internal reconfiguration, external store extension, garden pergola, music hall floodlighting, replacement entrance door and installation of solar panels

**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 Theatres Trust because it is seeking to undertake a number of alterations at The Witham.

The Witham is an arts centre which is charitably run and provides a programme of

**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

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**Chair** Dave Moutrey OBE

**Director** Jon Morgan

**Trustees** Vicky Browning OBE, Anna Collins, James Dacre, Suba Das, Liam Evans-Ford, Stephanie Hall, Annie Hampson, Tracy Ann Oberman, Lucy Osborne, Saratha Rajeswaran, Truda Spruyt, Michèle Taylor MBE, Katie Town

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theatre, live music, comedy and cinema along with gallery and studio spaces and a café. It is an important cultural and social facility for Barnard Castle and its surrounding catchment. It is a Grade II listed heritage asset, operating within the former Witham Testimonial Hall and Dispensary which was built in 1845 and extended at the rear to incorporate a former mechanics hall. Paragraph 97 of the NPPF (2023) seeks planning decisions to plan positively for facilities such as this.

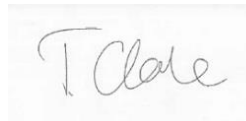
Replacement of the front entrance doors for glazed doors was referenced within documents for a previous scheme at the Witham in 2022, although it was omitted from the application. At that time we expressed our in-principle support. It is included this time, with the doors to be automated. This will improve visibility into the building which will make it more welcoming and encourage further visitors which will be of benefit to the venue, but importantly it will also improve accessibility. With reference to paragraph 208 of the NPPF this constitutes a public benefit. Digital display screens will also be located either side of the front elevation. These will help promote upcoming events and are a common feature of performance and other cultural venues, including many which have statutory listing. We similarly support their addition.

We welcome the installation of PV panels to the roof. Paragraph 164 of the NPPF gives significant weight to supporting energy efficiency and low-carbon improvements including through installation of panels. This will help enhance the Witham's environmental sustainability and reduce its operating costs and is a reversible change.

There will also be works within the venue's external garden area. Whilst this does not directly impact on its performance function, improving its wider facilities does enhance its social and community role.

We therefore support the granting of planning permission and listed building consent.

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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