

Ref.: TC/1432

10 September 2025

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

**Application:** 25/01677/FULLN

**Site:** 62 Chantry Way Andover Hampshire SP10 1LU

**Proposal:** Erection of a building to accommodate a new theatre and associated uses. Demolition of part of the facade and entrance of the Chantry Centre and creation of a new facade and entrance to the Chantry Centre. Landscaping works, highways works, public realm improvements and other associated works

## **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)

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**Chair** Dave Moutrey OBE

**CEO** Joshua McTaggart

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

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## Comment:

This application has been brought to the attention of Theatres Trust because it is seeking to construct a new theatre to replace the existing The Lights venue. We have been engaged on these plans at pre-application stage by the applicant.

The existing The Lights venue is an important theatre and arts centre which is valued by local people. It was previously part of Cricklade Tertiary College which closed in 2004. Following refurbishment it reopened in 2006 as its own entity. The Lights has a varied programme including professional touring and local amateur theatre, comedy, live music and other events such as conferences and functions. It has two primary performance spaces – an ‘arena’ which is flexible in format with a capacity of up to 350 standing or 200 seated, and an ‘auditorium’ which has raked seating and a capacity of 249. Further to this are dance studios, meeting and function rooms. Paragraph 98 of the NPPF (2024) seeks planning decisions to plan positively for facilities such as this.

Although The Lights is a busy and popular venue, its programme and potential is constrained by its limited capacity. It also has other limitations, for example accessibility is sub-optimal and its technical capabilities need upgrading. Although it has two spaces it is challenging to programme them simultaneously due to bleed of sound and lack of front of house space. Its location is slightly peripheral to the core town centre meaning benefit for local businesses and footfall arising from linked trips is reduced. A previous feasibility report has identified that Andover could support a larger theatre.

There is a Town Centre Masterplan for Andover (2020), with an improved Lights Theatre being one of the main visions for change. It features within the specific Chantry Centre Masterplan within that document, with a more central location for a new 400-seat theatre. The identified site is the location of this proposed development, and development of a new theatre contributes towards delivery of the Masterplan’s broader objectives.

This proposal seeks to more than double existing attendance and the number of events held, from 25,000 to 55,000 and 170 to 370 respectively. This will be achieved through again providing two main venues, but with increased capacities compared to the current spaces. There will be a main theatre with a capacity of 400 and a flexible venue with retractable seating which can accommodate up to 477 people. There will also be three studios, a conference space, meeting rooms, an all day café and a bar. This will provide good flexibility, meeting the needs of different

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groups. The increased capacity will make the new venue more attractive to promoters.

Alongside this will be broader landscaping and public realm works, helping to improve the wider environment. Together these should provide substantial placemaking and economic benefits for Andover, bringing more people into the town centre which will support and encourage other businesses. We are supportive of these plans.

We have some comments relating to function and operation which might be considered as this scheme develops, to help further support this venue's future success and to optimise its cultural and social value.

## Front of house

We welcome that there will be a Changing Places facility, which will help support the venue's inclusivity. It is also positive that there will be accessibility throughout the venue with a variety of seating types in main auditorium including a wider row, some higher seats and seats with removeable arms to aid transfer from wheelchairs.

Presently, the Park Bar is envisaged as a facility to support performances and special events with mention of opening in good weather. However, its location and outlook with a external terrace means that it could be attractive as a further all-day venue with regular opening which could provide an alternative offer to the main bar. We suggest this option is explored further. There are no salespoints for drinks or snacks at first floor level, we suggest provision of pop-up bars to provide better convenience for audiences and ease pressure on downstairs points particularly where events are at high capacity.

There will need to be appropriate wayfinding and management of audiences where both of the main spaces are in use simultaneously.

## Back of house

It appears the service yard will also be utilised by surrounding retail units. This may require careful management to ensure time-sensitive get-ins and get-outs will not be blocked by other vehicles.

There appears to be a general lack of storage space, and whilst this is frequently a challenge within theatre buildings there are further considerations in this instance

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because the venue is also seeking to host different functions such as conferences. Areas will need to be identified sufficient for the packing away of tables, seating and other equipment when not in use. On a related point it may be beneficial to provide buggy storage to support children's events and workshops.

## Sustainability

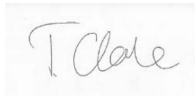
We welcome that this development is seeking to hit BREEAM very good or excellent, and that it is utilising sustainable energy and heating. This will help mitigate the impact of demolition or substantial rebuilding of the current venue which has substantial embodied carbon and reduce ongoing operating costs.

The matters we have raised above largely relate to internal function and are not material to the overall principle and appropriateness of this development.

We welcome these plans and the enhancement and strengthening it will generate for Andover's theatre and live performance offer, and for broader placemaking and economic development objectives in line with the aspirations of Andover's Town Centre Masterplan.

We therefore support the granting of planning permission.

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



Tom Clarke MRTPI

National Planning Adviser

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