Theatres fit for the **future**

Theatres Trust

Ref.: TC

3 November 2026

Planning Development Manager
Tameside MBC
P O Box 304
Ashton-under-Lyne
Tameside
OL6 0GA

By e-mail: planningmail@tameside.gov.uk

Application: 26/00775/FUL

Site: Former Metro Majestic Old Street Ashton-Under-Lyne OL6 7RU

Proposal: Change of use to mixed-use entertainment venue comprising cinema, restaurant and bar, theatre and live music venue, including ancillary food and beverage sales and bar use (sui generis) with associated external alterations including alteration to access ramp / steps, provision of canopies over two entrances, mechanical plant and extract and PV 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'.

Theatres Trust
22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL
Telephone 020 7836 8591 **Email** info@theatrestrust.org.uk **Website** theatrestrust.org.uk
X @TheatresTrust **Facebook** @theatres.trust **Instagram** @TheatresTrust

Chair Dave Moutrey OBE **CEO** Joshua McTaggart
Trustees Vicky Browning OBE, Anna Collins, James Dacre, Liam Evans-Ford, Stephanie Hall, Annie Hampson OBE, Louisa Harris, Mark Johnston, Adam Knight, Tracy Ann Oberman MBE, Lucy Osborne, Saratha Rajeswaran, Michèle Taylor MBE, Katie Town

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Comment:

Thank you for consulting Theatres Trust on this application for planning permission at the former Metro Majestic. It seeks change of use to a mixed use entertainment venue including theatre, along with internal and external alterations to facilitate that.

This building opened in 1920 as the Majestic Picture House. It was built as a cine-variety theatre with a stage and dressing rooms. It also had a ballroom and a tea room. It was renamed to the Gaumont in 1946, then the Odeon in 1962 and finally the Metro Majestic in 1981. It continued until closure in 2003 following the opening of a nearby multiplex. The foyer became a gaming centre until 2008, and the entire building has been vacant since then. Whilst not listed, this building is considered a non-designated heritage asset. Its exterior to the Delamere and Old Street elevations is of white faience tiles with decorative features. Internally the design was of Georgian style with oak panelling and coloured tapestries.

This building occupies a prominent town centre site and we are keen to see it brought back to active use. We therefore welcome the principle of these plans, particularly that they will bring it back to cultural and entertainment uses consistent with its form and original function. Policy JP-P3: Cultural Facilities of the Places for Everyone Joint Development Plan 2022 to 2039 (2024) supports cultural businesses and attractions including through protecting existing heritage, cultural and community venues, supporting the development of new cultural venues in town centres and places with good public transport connectivity and maximising opportunities for redundant heritage assets and the role they can play in economic and social well-being. Policy S8 of The Tameside Unitary Development Plan Written Statement (2004) permits leisure proposals within defined town centres subject to the conditions outlined in Policy S9. Policy HC4.1a of the NPPF (2026) gives substantial weight to the benefits of new facilities. On that basis local, regional and national policy supports change of use and delivery of this scheme.

Given this building is not listed the other matters subject to consideration within this application are the proposed external alterations. This consists of new signage, replacement entrance doors, replacement windows, ramping and balustrading to the entrance and installation of new and replacement air handling and services to the roof. We consider the design and treatment of those interventions to be sensitive to the character and significance of this building. We welcome the installation of PV panels to the roof which will improve the venue's energy efficiency and sustainability.

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Policy CC2.2 of the NPPF gives substantial weight to improving energy efficiency of existing buildings including through the installation of solar panels.

Whilst internal layouts sit outside of the scope of this application, we nonetheless have some operational comments to help inform the applicant and ensure the success of this venture.

It appears there is sufficient flexibility for the ground floor bar/café and 'retro arcade games', and the premium bar and VIP/private hire bar on the first floor, to be opened irrespective of whether the auditorium is in use. This will enable use of the building outside of performances/large events which will support viability and encourage greater use and engagement with the building.

The indicative capacity of the auditorium is 998. There is a lack of WC provision for that capacity, given that minimum levels set out in Technical Standards for Places of Entertainment ('yellow book'). The number of male urinals is exceeded (16 compared to 11) but the number of cubicles is two short. There may be an opportunity to reduce this deficit by installing an additional cubicle in place of the end urinals within the ground floor block (the presence of two unisex cubicles to the first floor provides further mitigation). There is a more acute shortage of female WCs. There should be eighteen whereas there are only ten (plus the two unisex units). If events are at full capacity there is risk of additional queueing which could impact spend and detract from the audience experience. Opportunities should be explored to increase provision.

Whilst the first floor is accessible following installation of a lift, which is welcomed, there should be an accessible WC at that level. We suggest there may an opportunity to provide this by re-purposing the proposed refuse/recycling room and shrinking or removing the bar store (there is an additional bar store at the opposite end). Best practice is that there is a range of wheelchair places within the auditorium. Whilst we acknowledge there will be limitations given this is an older building, if there is an opportunity to provide ramped access into the balcony through the indicative MEP area this should be taken. At the stalls level it must be ensured there are wheelchair and companion places.

The stage and back of house should also be made accessible. It appears this may be possible, but there should be an accessible dressing room made available at that level. The dressing/changing rooms are otherwise all at upper levels without lift access.

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Although we have raised some points for further consideration in terms of internal function, we are nonetheless supportive of this proposal. It will reintroduce theatre and live performance provision into Ashton-under-Lyne which in turn will enhance the vibrancy and mix of uses within the town centre. It has the potential to enhance the social and cultural well-being of local people, and bring this non-designated heritage asset back into active use.

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 representation in greater detail.



Tom Clarke MRTPI

National Planning Manager

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