

Theatres fit for the **future**



Ref.: TC/2162

27 September 2024

Alice Pitts
Planning
Dover District Council
White Cliffs Business Park
Dover
CT16 3PJ

By e-mail: DevelopmentManagement@dover.gov.uk

Application: 24/00817

Site: The Regent Beach Street Deal CT14 7BP

Proposal: Erection of 2 screen cinema with restaurant, cafe and multi-function space. Erection of 9 no. dwellings with associated landscaping (existing public toilet block, indoor bus shelter and existing cinema building to be demolished)

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 **Twitter** @TheatresTrust

Facebook @theatres.trust **Instagram** @TheatresTrust

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

The Theatres Trust is the national advisory public body for theatres. The Theatres Trust Charitable Fund supports the work of The Theatres Trust, has the same Trustees and is registered as a charity under number 274697

Comment:

Thank you for consulting Theatres Trust on this application for planning permission at the Regent in Deal. It seeks to redevelop the site to provide a two-screen cinema with café and function space along with a new residential development.

The Regent opened in 1928 as the Pavilion Theatre. It operated a theatre for a relatively short time before being re-designed internally and converted into a cinema which opened in 1933. This closed thirty years later in 1963 when the respective cinema and bingo operations of the Regent and the Royal Cinema swapped. In common with other such conversions this consisted of lightweight interventions which could be reversible, in particular the insertion of a false ceiling which concealed the original plaster ceiling. Bingo ceased in 2009 and the Regent has been vacant since that time. Various plans for a return to cinema use have been announced, most recently a planning application in 2018. There remains public desire to see cinema use return; Deal is currently without a cinema.

The existing building would be demolished, and the replacement will provide a new cinema building to the front of the site of considerably less depth with a replica front elevation. Behind this utilising the rear part of the land occupied by the Regent along with a car park and neighbouring structure will be new homes.

Whilst not listed, the Regent can be considered a non-designated heritage asset. We understand that it is in poor condition internally and the principle of internal alteration has been accepted through the previous consent. Nonetheless its front elevation makes a positive contribution to local character and townscape. If it is the case that this demonstrably cannot be retained we could support a replica reconstruction. However, we would suggest that this should be carefully conditioned to prevent demolition of the existing building until a contract is in place for progression of the replacement development. The reason for such a condition would be to protect against the unnecessary loss of the existing building and the site being vacant for a prolonged period, after which there may be total loss of social and cultural uses and local heritage. Such a condition has been implemented elsewhere. We would also advocate adaptive re-use of the existing building rather than total demolition as this generally constitutes a more environmentally sustainable option.

We supported the previous scheme because it re-used the scale and volume of the original building along with what we considered to be a sensitive extension to provide

Theatres Trust

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL

Telephone 020 7836 8591 **Email** info@theatrestrust.org.uk **Website** theatrestrust.org.uk **Twitter** @TheatresTrust

Facebook @theatres.trust **Instagram** @TheatresTrust

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

The Theatres Trust is the national advisory public body for theatres. The Theatres Trust Charitable Fund supports the work of The Theatres Trust, has the same Trustees and is registered as a charity under number 274697

a meaningful cinema offer with complementary café/bar and external seating and landscaping. This kept the building within a cultural and social function.

In contrast, this scheme represents a diminished cultural offer. The two cinema screens will be of low capacity; as an example the smallest of three screens within a recently completed cinema development in Hertford, which is a town of similar size to Deal and also previously without a cinema, is greater than that of the largest screen in this proposal. The Inquiry decision concerning the former Saville Theatre/Odeon Cinema in London Borough of Camden (APP/X5210/W/19/3243781) has relevance in this respect. That was also built as a theatre and converted to cinema with the proposed redevelopment offering a smaller cinema in both capacity and floorspace/volume. One of the main issues was loss of cultural and leisure provision without evidence, but also separately that diminution of cinema/cultural eroded significance in heritage terms. Paragraph 209 of the NPPF (2023) manages applications that affect non-designated heritage assets, requiring a balanced judgement as to scale of harm or loss and the significance of the asset. We contend that this building has high local communal value as well as historic and aesthetic value.

This building was previously in bingo use which is considered a social and cultural use. Therefore Policy PM6.2 of the emerging Dover District Local Plan (Regulation 19 Submission version) is triggered. Having passed through Examination without apparent modification significant weight should be afforded to this policy. To demonstrate a smaller cinema offer with reduced floorspace is acceptable the applicant should demonstrate there is no longer need for current or alternative community use or prospect of demand arising. This has not been provided, and community campaigns suggest realistic demand for a more meaningful offer exists. Alternatively, part d. of that policy manages alternative facilities including on the same site. The proposed offer is clearly not equivalent to existing in quantity. It therefore fails the tests of this policy. Furthermore, paragraph 97 of the NPPF also guards against the unnecessary loss of facilities.

We therefore object to the application in its current form.

Even should sufficient evidence come forward that addresses our concerns regarding cultural provision, we make no comment on the housing element of this scheme or on the principle of residential use at this location.

Theatres Trust

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL

Telephone 020 7836 8591 **Email** info@theatrestrust.org.uk **Website** theatrestrust.org.uk **Twitter** @TheatresTrust

Facebook @theatres.trust **Instagram** @TheatresTrust

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

Theatres fit for the **future**



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

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Clarke".

Tom Clarke MRTPI

National Planning Adviser

Theatres Trust

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL

Telephone 020 7836 8591 **Email** info@theatrestrust.org.uk **Website** theatrestrust.org.uk **Twitter** @TheatresTrust

Facebook @theatres.trust **Instagram** @TheatresTrust

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

The Theatres Trust is the national advisory public body for theatres. The Theatres Trust Charitable Fund supports the work of The Theatres Trust, has the same Trustees and is registered as a charity under number 274697