

Ref.: TC/2004

24 February 2025

Planning Service
Development Management
Town Hall
King William Street
Blackburn
BB1 7DY

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

Application: 10/24/1130

Site: Blackburn Empire Theatre Aqueduct Road Ewood Blackburn BB2 4HT

Proposal: Change of use of existing vacant storage area into dance studio with new reception office and entrance

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 through a news story, because it refers to development at Blackburn Empire. It is proposed that an existing area for storage is converted into a new dance studio with associated reception and

Theatres Trust

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL

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

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

external openings.

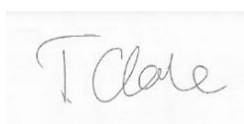
The Empire originally opened as a cine-variety theatre in 1910 and was called the Empire Electric Theatre. It went through several name changes over the decades as it changed hands. In the early days it had a combination of films and live shows but by the time it closed in 1972 only films were shown. It was quickly reopened by an Asian community group showing Bollywood films but closed again by 1978.

Fundraising then took place to raise the money to purchase the building for use as a theatre and arts centre, aiming to meet the needs of local amateur groups as well as hosting some professional touring shows. This was successful but it was not until 2002 that after further fundraising, restoration and development works that the vision was finally realised. The Empire is now a valued cultural asset for Blackburn and its surrounding catchment with a varied programme. Paragraph 98 of the NPPF (2024) seeks planning decisions to plan positively for facilities of this nature.

This proposal relates to a later building to the rear of the original theatre. In the past this has been a performing arts centre but in more recent years has been used for storage. Utilising the building for dance studios will complement the core theatre function and further enhance the Empire's community and cultural offer. The original Empire building can be considered as a non-designated heritage asset, we do not consider the proposed external alterations will cause harm to setting or significance.

We are supportive of the granting of planning permission.

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

Theatres Trust

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