



Mr David Fisher
Brighton Hippodrome CIC

Direct Dial: 0207 973 3627

Our ref: PA00950548
20 July 2020

Dear Mr Fisher

Pre-application Advice

BRIGHTON HIPPODROME, 52-58 MIDDLE STREET

Thank you for consulting Historic England on proposals for the restoration and redevelopment of Brighton's Hippodrome. We appreciate that currently you do not have an interest in the building, but we are content to advise you nonetheless. However, as you know obtaining an interest will be essential if you are to fully progress your plans.

Although a long time has passed since your initial inquiry, the information that we now have before us enables us to offer you substantive advice which we hope sets out a clear way forward for progressing applications for planning and listed building consent.

Summary

Historic England wishes to see the Hippodrome put to a long term use that is both economically sustainable and preserves its heritage significance. We are therefore supportive, in principle, of your proposals as they have the potential to address longstanding and serious defects, as well as delivering a long term sustainable use that retains the significance of the auditorium.

We recognise however that there are substantial costs associated with the proposals and that these costs require a significant amount of additional development to cross subsidise the restoration and conversion works, as well a substantial amount of public funding. We will need therefore to be confident that the proposed use of the Hippodrome as a Lyric Theatre is deliverable, that the public funding will be forthcoming and that the heritage benefits we are seeking will be achieved by this scheme.

We accept that some taller development may need to be accommodated at the site to make the scheme viable; however, we have some initial concerns regarding the scale and massing proposed for Option 2 - the hotel proposal. In order for us to make a judgement about the balance of harm and benefit, we will require further information regarding massing options and views analysis to determine what might be an



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acceptable scale of development.

A number of documents, including a heritage statement, transport strategy and pre-application statement have been produced, which form a sound basis for developing proposals. The areas that require further exploration, and in which further information is necessary, are addressed in detail below.

Significance

The Hippodrome is listed at grade II* and is a fine example of a circus theatre. It is considered by the Theatres Trust to be the finest surviving example of its type in the country. It sits centrally in Brighton's famous Lanes and The Old Town Conservation Area but the modest Middle Street façade provides little indication of its extensive auditorium, although the back of house areas are visible from Ship Street.

Brighton's Hippodrome has a long history as an entertainment venue. It was built originally to serve Brighton's burgeoning tourist market during the rapid expansion of the city in the nineteenth century, first as an ice rink in 1897 to the designs of Lewis Karslake and then in 1901 as a Hippodrome circus theatre to the design of the renowned theatre architect Frank Matcham. A year later Matcham undertook further alterations to create a variety theatre for northern theatre magnate Tom Barrasford.

Matcham's designs for the Hippodrome included a splendid dome to replicate the tent of a travelling circus and flamboyant rococo plasterwork. He also installed a shallow stage and proscenium, originally flanked by the equestrian entrances for the circus use and, with the later conversion to a variety theatre, the characterful onion dome boxes reminiscent of the Royal Pavilion.

We consider the aesthetic qualities of the Hippodrome's auditorium and foyer to be of considerable significance but there are also remnants of other phases of the building's history that should not be overlooked, for example, the equestrian ramp of the circus and parts of the adjoining Hippodrome House illustrate important aspects of the buildings history. The latter originally comprised two mid-nineteenth century dwellings, in which Barrasford lived until his death in 1910. The house has been altered but includes within it a miscellany of colourful theatre set pieces dating from its use as a lounge bar, along with features such as the vaulted cellars and kitchen range, which are illustrative of the original domestic use.

In addition, we think that the frequent reinvention of spaces to support a broad range of entertainment uses, which persisted until the closure of Mecca Bingo, is an important part of the building's story.

Policy Framework



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Any application for planning permission and listed building consent for this site will be assessed against the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The NPPF sets a pragmatic framework for the consideration of development proposals that might affect designated heritage assets, aimed at putting heritage assets to viable uses consistent with their conservation while protecting their significance.

The key policies against which the proposals will be assessed are those within paragraphs 193 - 196.

Paragraph 193 states that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. The more important the asset, the greater the weight should be. Paragraph 194 explains that significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting. Paragraphs 195-196 set out the tests that must be met depending on whether the harm to heritage assets is substantial or less than substantial.

We set out below the further information that we will need to be able to assess the level harm that would be caused by the proposals. If the harm will be less than substantial, as we hope it will be, the scheme would be assessed against paragraph 196, which allows for the harm to be weighed against any public benefits of the proposal, including the benefit of securing its optimum viable use. The NPPF Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) provides advice about how to identify the optimum viable use on the following webpage: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/conserving-and-enhancing-the-historic-environment> (paragraph 015).

We suggest that in developing your proposals you should refer to our publications:

- *Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning: 2 Managing Significance in Decision-Taking in the Historic Environment* (<https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/gpa2-managing-significance-in-decision-taking/gpa2/>);
- *Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning: 3 The Setting of Heritage Assets (2nd Edition)* (<https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/gpa3-setting-of-heritage-assets/heag180-gpa3-setting-heritage-assets/>) and;
- *Historic England Advice Note 12 - Statements of Heritage Significance*, which provides important guidance on how to assess the impacts of proposals on heritage significance (<https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/statements-heritage-significance-advice-note-12/heag279-statements-heritage-significance/>).

We advise that you also note that Brighton and Hove City Council, in assessing your application, will consider its compliance with their Development Plan Documents, Supplementary Planning Documents and other guidance, including the Old Town Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan.



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Development Proposals

Your proposal is to use the Hippodrome as a Lyric Theatre, which would be able to receive West End shows together with the provision of all the necessary front of house and backstage accommodation this would need. The supporting information explains that the whole project is hugely ambitious with a likely construction cost in excess of £30 million. These costs would be met through a mixture of cross-subsidy from new development constructed on the wider site as well as from funding from public bodies.

Two options for the development proposals have been presented in the pre-application proposal document. The initial concept plans for the first show 25-30 apartments in a building that is predominately of five storeys, but with a sixth storey on the long block to the east of the fly tower. The frontage to Ship Street would be staggered, starting at three storeys adjacent to the street, rising up to five storeys adjacent to the flat roofed terraced element at the rear of 18/19 Ship Street.

The other option is for the redevelopment of the wider site to create a hotel. The concept plans show development of a greater massing than that of the residential proposals, including several storeys of accommodation around and above the existing theatre dome. We note that this option does not appear to include all the drawings in the PDF report circulated.

We do not object in principle to either residential or hotel accommodation at the site. We appreciate that additional new development within the Hippodrome site is a vital component of your funding model for the restoration project. At present the Hippodrome's service yard creates a large gap in Ship Street and a break in the active frontage with views to the unsightly parking area, the rear of the Hippodrome's fly tower and the intrusive side elevation of Nos.18/19. There are therefore clear opportunities for enhancement of this part of the conservation area and for significant public realm opportunities.

As a result of the narrow streets and limited long views, we consider that some taller development of the scale shown on the site would be acceptable; however, we think that the taller elements of this option would be better located more centrally, and concentrated around the fly tower, where it would then not be so prominent in views. The fourth storey would also need to be set further back into the site than illustrated on the concept plan both near Ship Street and Middle Street.

We think there are three key close views that need to be taken into account in any proposals for this site:

1. from the corner of Prince Albert Street and Dukes Lane looking across to the rear service yard in Ship Street;



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2. looking south down Middle Street towards Hippodrome House and the Hippodrome which address the curve in the road; and
3. looking east along Boyce's Street towards Hippodrome House.

In order to avoid harming the key views, the new elevation facing Ship Street will need to be of the same three storey height as the adjoining terraces, so as to create a consistent street view here. The design should also adopt the existing vertical emphasis that illustrates the strong rhythm of the historic narrow plots. The way in which openings for lorry access will appear in the street scene will also need careful consideration. The design and height of development should address the smaller extension at the rear of 18/19 Ship Street and seek to avoid residential amenity impacts.

Hippodrome House is clearly discernible within Middle Street and its frontage makes a positive contribution to the historic townscape, and therefore should be retained in any scheme. A new lane here, as proposed, will help to increase footfall and help to revitalise this part of the conservation area if the land can be acquired.

The hotel proposal (Option 2) will also be subject to the aforementioned issues; however, the greater massing and scale of this option, together with enclosure of the dome with up to three storeys of accommodation, causes us more concern than Option 1. This is because the development will be much more prominent in the views we have identified above. We will also need to understand more about the structural implications of building over the Dome, along with details of how acoustic separation between the entertainment venue and the hotel will be achieved. In addition we will need to know how access to the auditorium for future repairs will be retained, and how water penetration into the auditorium from the serviced rooms will be prevented.

We will need to assess the impacts of the taller components of both options on the character and appearance of the Old Town Conservation Area, so we recommend that further work is carried out to model different massing arrangements and to illustrate how these would appear in the views we have identified above, and in any others that Brighton and Hove City Council may identify. This work will also help identify how harm might be minimised or avoided through design, as required by the NPPF.

Conservation and Design Matters

There is considerable opportunity for careful restoration based on historic evidence of the appearance of the building, to act as a catalyst for further regeneration of the Old Town Conservation Area, which is identified as at risk on our Register. We therefore have concerns regarding the proposal to insert a new crush bar above the canopy of the entrance to the Hippodrome on Middle Street. This elevation is relatively unchanged from its earliest Karlake designs, and is certainly capable of being restored. While we understand the desire to signal the revitalised building in a



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contemporary way, we think that this can be achieved as successfully through a faithful restoration of the Middle Street façade accompanied by intelligent and elegant signage and lighting.

In addition, we would expect to see an historically accurate restoration of the Matcham interiors based on a scholarly understanding of the significance of the plasterwork. This should be informed by appropriate surveys and analysis, some of which has been undertaken but which will now need updating. We would expect to see a similarly thorough approach taken to the restoration of the auditorium, foyer and circulation spaces, all of which retain significant work attributed to Frank Matcham.

Reports/supporting information and further information required

We set out below the further information that would be required in support of applications for planning and listed building consent.

Heritage Statement

The Heritage Statement explores the history and significance of the Hippodrome in extensive detail, and is an excellent foundation and reference for future work on site. There will however be some harm caused by the proposed development and so we consider it essential that a Heritage Impact Assessment is added that sets out the impacts of the proposed demolition works on surviving features, and how this affects the significance of both of the listed buildings.

Business Plan

The Business Plan is very comprehensive and provides a strong justification for the use of the site as a Lyric Theatre. We recognise the extent of research that has been carried out to justify this use at this site, which is seen as filling a much needed gap in the Brighton's entertainment provision as well as contributing to the overall economy. Of course, this use will now need to be carefully reconsidered in the context of Covid 19 and the implications this may have for live entertainment venues. We also note that there is an aspiration to extend the size of the stage but this will require additional land outside of the Hippodrome site. Please let us know whether the full success of the Lyric Theatre is predicated on achieving this.

As the project is very reliant on public funding, we suggest that statements of intent or letters of support in principle are obtained from the key funders in order to give us and the Local Authority some assurance that the level of funding is achievable. It would also be useful to provide statements of intent from potential operators of the Lyric Theatre.

The other significant portion of your funding is to be raised by development of the rest of the site for residential accommodation. We would need to be confident that the





development element of the scheme is meeting its full potential in contributing to the restoration of the theatre, therefore once the development proposals are finalised, we advise that the Business Plan should contain further information in the form of a developer's financial appraisal that sets out the level of proposed developer's profit, build costs, sales figures etc.

We suggest that it would be prudent for you to appoint an experienced firm of chartered surveyors to carry out an audit of the figures provided in any financial appraisal, and also to advise you on the commercial aspects of the proposed transaction and the overall viability of the developer partner's proposals. This would also provide comfort to any potential funders that the proposed development scheme is deliverable and that you are getting the best deal. We also suggest in your negotiations with your development partner that you ensure that the developer contribution is either paid up front, or there is some form of guarantee that the monies will be paid because consent for the development is likely to be conditional on the restoration of the theatre by means of planning conditions and/or legal obligations.

We note that the Business Plan includes a figure of £250K as a grant from Historic England; however we are not able to make any offer, even in principle, at this stage although we will be pleased to discuss and consider the matter in due course.

Transport strategy

We do not wish to make detailed comments on the Transport Strategy. However, we would need further reassurances that it is possible and plausible that sets could be delivered by large articulated lorries via the local narrow streets. We strongly encourage you to obtain pre-application advice from Brighton and Hove Council's highways officers. If it is not possible to deliver the sets in large lorries, please advise us of any alternative options.

Other reports/surveys

Your conditions survey was carried out in 2016 but the building has continued to deteriorate since then and continues to do so, which increases likely costs. If the owner will allow you access we suggest that the following surveys are commissioned, and existing ones updated, to ensure that the condition of the building and the cost of restoration are fully understood:

- Updated conditions survey;
- A hydrology survey/package;
- A fibrous plaster condition survey - (some further advice about these types of ceilings is available on our website here:
<https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/technical-advice/buildings/inspection-and->





maintenance-of-fibrous-plaster-ceilings/>)

- A full structural survey by an appropriately qualified conservation accredited engineer;
- A dry rot survey;
- Costing of the conservation and conversion by a suitably qualified quantity surveyor;
- Full building record to recording level 4;
- Details of methods of and materials for repair and restoration of the Hippodrome.

As mentioned above, we would also wish to see the following information submitted in support of the application:

- An updated Business Plan that includes costings and a developer's financial appraisal for which ever development option is taken forward;
- An updated Heritage Statement, including a Heritage Impact Assessment;
- Updates to the acoustic survey that demonstrate how acoustic separation can be achieved between proposed uses;
- Massing modelling and views analysis that takes into account the views we identified above, along with any others that BHCC may identify.

Next Steps

We hope that the comments above will be useful in providing a clear way forward in this complex case. Historic England is committed to finding a solution to this building and exploring the option of a Lyric Theatre with you. We would be pleased to provide further advice as your plans progress, preferably in conjunction with BHCC. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of any further assistance.

Yours sincerely

Alma Howell

Inspector of Historic Buildings and Areas

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Information Provided

Hippodrome Site Plan; Hippodrome Block Plan; Business Plan - March 2020;
Community Engagement Plan - March 2020; Foster Wilson Pre-app Proposal March
2020; Heritage Statement - 2020; Transport Strategy - April 2020.



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