

DELEGATED REPORT

Application No:	P/23/0277
Site Address:	Theatre Royal And Thespian House Park Place Penydarren Road Merthyr Tydfil CF47 0LJ
Development:	Change of use to Cafe/Yoga Studio (Listed Building Consent)
Case Officer:	Marlene Ferreira
Site Visit:	24th October 2024
Application Expiry Date:	22nd January 2024
Consultation reply date expired:	18th November 2024

APPLICATION SITE

The application site relates to Thespian House, an irregular shaped building, located off Penydarren Road, near the town centre. The premises, a Grade II Listed Building (by virtue of its association to Theatre Royal) located to the north of Trevethicks Monument/public space, is served by an enclosed private courtyard/garden area to the rear and adjoins Theatre Royal to the northeast and southeast, residential properties (1-3 Gwalia Place) to the south and the adopted highway, Penydarren Place to the northwest. An undercroft/storage room provides a link between the rear garden and the Nant Morlais River, which runs north to south, approximately 20 metres from the rear of the building.

Thespian House is an extension to Theatre Royal and this is evidenced in historic maps, which shows Theatre Royal, built in 1900, and a vacant plot where Thespian House is currently standing. It is understood that Thespian House was built in the 1920's and considered a good example of a Neoclassical building. The growing popularity of the theatre at that time and the name 'Thespian House' meaning actor or actress, would suggest that it was built to house those performing at the Theatre Royal. It is also assumed that Thespian House was likely designed by another Architect, but in a way that adopted to the architectural language of Theatre Royal. The theatre was taken over by the Associated British Cinemas (ABC) chain in 1932, who gave the venue the Art Deco makeover and it is likely that Thespian House was refurbished at the same time.

Its designation for listed status is described as '*...Attached downhill to right is Thespian House, a 2-storey rendered block set back with a splayed bay further right. Continuous plain parapet (formerly crenellated), architraves with keyblocks to (boarded) windows, string-course over ground-floor links to theatre. Arched ground-floor openings also linked with segmental carriage arch on left, double boarded doors...*'

In addition to Theatre Royal, the building's character and appearance was consistent with other nearby architecture of that time, including Masonic Temple, Merthyr General Hospital and Labour Exchange.

Overtime, Thespian House has been subjected to numerous unsympathetic alterations, internally and externally, including the removal of the crenelated parapet, the removal of timber windows, the blocking up of openings, the application of pebble dash to elevations, and the removal of internal walls and floors. An extension measuring also appears to have been added to the rear of the premises. As it stands, due to the lack of use, essential maintenance and unattractive modifications, Thespian House has lost much of its neoclassical and art deco character. It is currently in a very poor state of repair, remains vacant and has been a target for vandalism and anti-social behaviour. It would appear that it was last occupied approximately 20 years ago and this is evidenced by its current condition which includes overgrown vegetation within the building itself as well as the wider site.

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

This application seeks listed building to change the use of the building to provide a yoga studio/gym with café (D1 use class), to include removal of a rear extension, construction of a rear extension and refurbishment/restoration works.

At ground floor, by virtue of the addition of new walls and creation of arched entrances, the building would be subdivided to provide a seating area within the bay fronted section of the building, with a café and a WC to its rear. A small, flat roof, single storey extension, measuring 1.8m wide, 3.9m deep and 3.05m in height, would be constructed to the rear, adjacent the WC area. The cloister timber extension would create a lobby/hallway at the rear of the building. A large U shaped gym area with new central staircase, to include the retention of the original fireplace, would be provided within the rectangular part of the building. Timber panelling would also be introduced within this part of the building.

At first floor, by virtue of the addition of new walls and creation of arched entrances, the building would be subdivided to provide a studio within the bay fronted section of the building, with a changing room, shower area and WC's to its rear. A further two studios with storage space, one of which (studio 2) would include the retention of the original fireplace would be provided within the rectangular part of the building. Timber panelling would also be introduced within this part of the building.

Externally, the building would be refurbished and restored to include re-instatement of all existing window openings at ground and first floor and installation of new sliding sash timber windows set behind architectural detailed surrounds. The existing sections of pebble dashed elevations would also be removed and smooth render would be applied throughout. The crenelated parapet would also be re-introduced to the front and side elevations of the building.

A wellbeing garden would be provided to the rear of the premises, which would include a segregated area for outdoor yoga. This would be achieved by the demolition of the existing lean-to extension to the rear of the building (measuring approximately 21m³, and which appears to has been historically used as a plant/store room). The undercroft area which adjoins the rear garden wall, forms part of the application site but would not be converted to be used in association with the yoga studio/gym with cafe.

PLANNING HISTORY

The following planning history is relevant to this site:

P/23/0276 (FUL) – Thespian House - Change of use to yoga studio/gym with café – under consideration.

P/98/0241 (LBC) – Theatre Royal and Thespian House - Conversion into two shops and five flats – Approved: 3rd December 1998

P/98/0240 (FUL) – Theatre Royal and Thespian House - Conversion into two shops and five flats – Approved: 3rd December 1998

CONSULTATION

Civic Trust for Wales (CTW)	No response.
-----------------------------	--------------

Royal Commission of the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales (RCA)	No response.
---	--------------

The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (ANCIEN)	No response.
--	--------------

Merthyr Tydfil Heritage Trust (HERIT)	No response.
---------------------------------------	--------------

The Victorian Society (VICTOR)	No response.
--------------------------------	--------------

PUBLICITY

In accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (Wales) Order 2012, a site notice was displayed within the vicinity of the site and a notice was advertised in the local newspaper. No letters of representation have been received in response to the publicity exercise.

POLICY CONTEXT

National Development Framework

- The Future Wales – the National Plan 2040

This document sets out a strategy for addressing key national priorities through the planning system, including sustaining and developing a vibrant economy, achieving decarbonisation and climate-resilience, developing strong ecosystems and improving the health and well-being of our communities.

National Planning Policy

- Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

Section 16. – (1) Subject to the previous provision of this Part, the local planning authority

or, as the case may be, the Secretary of State may grant or refuse an application for listed building consent and, they grant consent, may grant it subject to conditions.

(2) In considering whether to grant listed building consent for any works the local planning authority or the Secretary of State shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.

(3) Any listed building consent shall (except in so far as it otherwise provides) ensure for the benefit of the building and of all persons for the time being interested in it.

Section 66. - (1) In considering whether to grant planning permission or permission in principle for development which affects a listed building or its setting, the local planning authority or, as the case may be, the Secretary of State shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses.

(2) Without prejudice to section 72, in the exercise of the powers of appropriation, disposal and development (including redevelopment) conferred by the provisions of sections 232, 233 and 235(1) of the principal Act, a local authority shall have regard to the desirability of preserving features of special architectural or historic interest, and in particular, listed buildings.

- Welsh Office Circular 61/96: Planning the Historic Environment: Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas

Part 1 Paragraph 11 requires local planning authorities considering applications for works which affect listed buildings to have special regard to its character and setting.

- Planning Policy Wales (PPW) (Edition 12, February 2024)

Section 6.1 recognises the importance of protecting the historic environment and paragraph 6.1.10 states that ‘...for any development proposal affecting a listed building or its setting, the primary material consideration is the statutory requirement to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building, its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses...’

-Technical Advice Note (TAN) 24: The Historic Environment (May 2017)

Paragraph 1.25 states ‘The setting of an historic asset includes the surroundings in which it is understood, experienced, and appreciated embracing present and past relationships to the surrounding landscape.’ Paragraph 1.28 explains that there will be cases where a proposal will enhance the setting of a historic asset and this will be treated as a benefit resulting from the development’.

Local Planning Policy

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Replacement Local Development Plan (LDP) 2016-2031

Policy SW11 – Sustainable design and Placemaking
Policy CW1 - Historic Environment

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

The issues to consider under the assessment of this application relate to whether the proposed works, externally and internally, would adversely affect the special interest, character or setting of the Grade II listed building.

Thespian House, as explained earlier, is an important listed building associated with Theatre Royal. Although having been altered overtime by unsympathetic adaptations, it remains a prominent building located off Penydarren Road, which shares a close relationship with Theatre Royal and continues to exert architectural details and historic qualities that reflect Merthyr Tydfil's history and heritage. Nevertheless, the building has been vacant for approximately 20 years which has led to the continued deterioration of its appearance. Its conversion would re-introduce historic detailing which has been lost as a result of the unsightly and unworthy alterations, particularly to its streetscene elevation, and bring the building back into use.

Whilst the restoration works are welcomed, the internal and external alterations would have an impact on the character and appearance of the building.

Impact of external alterations

The proposed alterations, as noted above, would include the demolition of a lean-to extension at the rear of the premises. The extension is a small-scale structure finished with pebble dash elevations and a corrugated steel roof. This appears to have been used as a plant/storage room, evidenced by the numerous flue/vents on the wall of the building. It is understood, that given its siting, design, finishes and use, this extension was a later addition to the building and is of no historical or architectural value. The extension is therefore not considered to form part of the original listed building and its removal would not adversely detract from the character or appearance of the building or the wider conservation area. Indeed, its demolition would reveal the original rear façade of the building and is therefore welcomed.

A new extension would also be constructed to the rear of the building. The cloister addition is a lightweight timber structure which would provide a lobby/hallway and improve circulation and access to the WC and the rear garden. Given its single storey scale and siting on the rear elevation, would be completely screened when viewing the premises within the surrounding area. It would also be located on a modest part of the building (rear elevation) which does not comprise of any intricate detailing. Thus, whilst it could be argued that the addition of an extension would be harmful to the character and appearance of a listed building, in this instance and under these circumstances, this is not considered to be the case. The extension would somewhat 'mimic' the original building by virtue of its arched openings/windows, drawn from the design of the ground floor windows on the premises' primary elevation, and its material finishes and design would provide transparency between the original listed building and this later addition. A suitably worded condition requesting further details of the extension, in respect of its materials and colour finishes would be attached to any listed building consent granted to ensure that its an appropriate addition to the premises. Thus, this proposed extension would not adversely detract from the special character or appearance of the listed building.

The external refurbishment and renovation works would comprise the most prominent alterations to the building. All existing window openings at ground and first floor would be re-instated and new sliding sash timber windows would be installed, set behind

architectural detailed surrounds. The design and fenestration arrangement would be sympathetic, add a sense of symmetry whilst also reflecting the historic appearance of the building. Smooth render would be applied to all elevations (following the removal of pebble dash finish). The crenelated parapet would also be re-introduced to the front and side elevations of the building. These proposed works, particularly to the streetscene elevations, would significantly enhance the appearance of the listed building by removing the blocked-up windows, unsympathetic material finishes and re-establishing formerly lost architectural and historical detailing. It would also enrich the relationship between the premises and Theatre Royal. These works are therefore considered to have a positive impact on the character and appearance of the building. Whilst it is acknowledged that detailing of rainwater goods have not been included in this proposal, to ensure architectural integrity and consistency throughout the appearance of the building, a condition, requesting such details would also form part any listed building consent granted.

Impact of internal alterations

The internal alterations would also be considered acceptable. The internal walls and floors have been previously removed, thus new internal floors would be laid and new internal dividing walls would be constructed to ensure the safety and future use of the building as a yoga studio/ gym with café. The internal walls would be designed to maximize the internal space given the site's proposed use. However, this would also incorporate arched entrances which would reflect the appearance of the original building's roadside elevation. Whilst it is appreciated that the sub-division of the building would not be entirely in accordance with the building's original layout, these alterations are essential to enable the future use of the building as a yoga studio/gym with café. It should be noted however that the existing historical fireplace located within the rectangular part of the building would be retained at ground floor (within the gym area) and first floor (studio 2). The use of colour would aid to emphasise this historical feature and act as a reminder of the buildings original function. Whilst there is no historic detail to evidence the treatment of the building's interior, timber panelling (up to dado rail level) would also be introduced to the walls of the rectangular part of the building, at ground and first floor. A hardwearing flooring, which is consistent with the neoclassical style would also be introduced which is durable and fit for purpose given its proposed use as a yoga studio/gym. The timber panelling and flooring would add character to the internal appearance of the building and an appropriately worded condition would be added to any listed building consent to ensure that their colour and appearance are appropriately suited to the premises. Another notable internal alteration would be the insertion of an internal staircase which would provide access to the upper floor of the premises. This would be sited in the rectangular part of the building. Whilst this would appear to amount to a new addition (since the heritage statement makes no reference to an existing staircase) and may be uncharacteristic of the building, it is considered that this element of the proposal would be essential to serve the two-storey building and could be acceptable depending on its design and fixing. As such to ensure consistency in the appearance of the listed building further details of this would be required by condition.

Finally, it should be noted that no responses or objections have been received from Civic Trust for Wales, Royal Commission of the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales, The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, Merthyr Tydfil Heritage Trust, or The Victorian Society.

The development, as proposed, would result in the restoration of the building to its former quality and distinctiveness, which would otherwise fall into further disrepair, whilst also

enabling its adaption to a yoga studio/gym with café. The proposal is therefore considered to positively enhance and contribute to the character and appearance of the listed building and would comply with LDP Policies SW11 and CW1.

CONCLUSION

The proposed development for the reasons discussed above is therefore considered acceptable and would comply with the relevant LDP policies.

The duty to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, under section 3 of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (“the WBFG Act”) has been taken into consideration when determining this application. In reaching the following recommendation, the ways of working set out at section 5 of the WBFG Act have been considered and thus the proposal is in accordance with the sustainable development principle through its contribution towards one or more of the Welsh Ministers well-being objectives set out as required by section 8 of the WBFG Act.

Accordingly, the following recommendation is made:

RECOMMENDATION: **BE GRANTED LISTED BUILDING CONSENT** subject to the following **CONDITONS**:

1. The development hereby granted consent shall be begun not later than the expiration of five years beginning with the date of this consent.

Reason - To comply with Section 18 of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Area) Act 1990.

2. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved plans and documents:

- 907.08C Proposed Ground Floor Plan, received: 26th February 2025;
- 907.13A Proposed Section, received: 5th February 2025;
- 907.18B Proposed Block Plan, received: 28th January 2025;
- 907.12A Proposed Rear Elevation, received: 28th January 2025;
- 907.09B Proposed Front Elevation, received: 15th January 2025;
- 907.10A Proposed First Floor Plan, received: 15th January 2025;
- 907.11B Proposed Side Elevation, received: 15th January 2025;
- 907.19A Proposed Enhancements Building B, received: 15th January 2025;
- 907.15 Drawing of Internal Refurbishment, received: 27th November 2023;
- Design, Access and Heritage Statement, received: 27th November 2023;
- Bat Survey Report by Little Wing Ecology, received: 20th January 2025;
- Green Infrastructure Statement, received: 21st November 2024.

Reason -To ensure compliance with the approved plans and clearly define the scope of the permission.

3. **Prior to the commencement of development** the following samples/details to include section details, design, material and colour finishes, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority:

- doors;
- windows;
- smooth render (including texture);
- rainwater goods;
- internal wall panelling; and
- internal flooring.

The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Reason - To ensure that special regard is paid to protecting the special architectural and historic interest and integrity of the building to accord with Policies SW11 and CW1 of the Merthyr Tydfil Replacement Local Development Plan.

4. **Prior to the commencement of development** a method statement for the restoration/refurbishment of the internal fireplaces including details of the material/colour finishes, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Reason - To ensure that special regard is paid to protecting the special architectural and historic interest and integrity of the building to accord with Policies SW11 and CW1 of the Merthyr Tydfil Replacement Local Development Plan.

5. **Prior to the commencement of works** full construction details of the internal staircase, including the material finishes and any fixtures to the existing fabric of the building, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. All works undertaken shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Reason - To ensure that special regard is paid to protecting the special architectural and historic interest and integrity of the building to accord with Policies SW11 and CW1 of the Merthyr Tydfil Replacement Local Development Plan.

6. **Prior to the commencement of works** full details of the internal and external material finishes of the rear cloister extension, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. All works undertaken shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

Reason - To ensure that special regard is paid to protecting the special architectural and historic interest and integrity of the building to accord with Policies SW11 and CW1 of the Merthyr Tydfil Replacement Local Development Plan.

RECOMMENDATION ENDORSED



Director of Neighbourhood Services

DATE: 11.03.2025