

Development Control Committee
1 February 2017

Appendices for Planning Application BR/156/16/PL

Advisory Review

Sir Richard Hotham Project, New theatre in Bognor Regis

Date 1 December 2016

Time 10:30 am

Location Theatres Trust, 22 Charing Cross Road, London, WC2H 0QL

Review into the viability of the theatre aspect within the proposed Sir Richard Hotham Project development which is being presented to the planning committee of Arun District Council in January 2017

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Issue Date: 5 January 2017

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1 Context

This review focuses on the viability of the proposal for a new 1100-seat theatre to be built on the Hothampton site, Bognor Regis, which is currently a car park with formal public gardens adjacent. The proposed theatre forms part of a wider privately funded mixed-use development called *The Sir Richard Hotham Project*.

1.1 Brief for panellists

Background

Arun District Council has asked Theatres Trust to convene an Advisory Review to consider the development of a new theatre in Bognor Regis, a scheme which is part of an overarching masterplan for the town aimed at the regeneration of Bognor Regis Seafront.

The proposal for the regeneration is on land owned by Arun District Council. The land comprises three sites; the Regis Centre site, the Esplanade Theatre site, and the Hothampton car park and amenity land site. The proposal also links with development along the Promenade.

The original principle of regeneration of these sites was established through a Joint Venture scheme between Arun District Council and St Modwens (details of the original masterplan can be found in the 2004 Bognor Regis Masterplan document). The scheme terminated in September 2014, prior to any planning application being submitted.

The current application, whilst using the proposals developed by the Joint Venture scheme as a basis, is independent of the Council and has private financial guaranteed funding. It has been confirmed that no public finance will be sought for the capital cost of the development. The scheme is headed by Sir Richard Hotham Projects Ltd, a private Ltd company.

The proposal includes the following:

- Hothampton site - a theatre, retail and a hotel;
- Regis Centre site - retail, leisure, hotel and residential;
- Esplanade Theatre site - a destination restaurant and residential units;
- Promenade - provision of 3 kiosks to provide retail and toilet and shower facilities for beach users.

The Advisory Review is to focus on the viability of the new theatre to be built on the Hothampton site, currently a carpark with formal public gardens adjacent.

The operation of the theatre will be by a private party and, as confirmed in the development plans, will not fall to the Local Authority. The securing of an operator will be the remit of the developer.

Regarding the capital cost for the theatre; the masterplan is to be phased, with the Regis Centre site being developed prior to the Hothampton site. The capital investment for the new theatre to come from the sale of the residential units proposed for the Regis Centre site.

A consequence of the proposed phasing is the demolition of Bognor Regis' current theatre and arts centre (the Regis Centre) prior to the development of the new theatre. The regeneration proposals are to provide a temporary space to replace the lost facility – location and building yet to be determined. (Note: the Esplanade Theatre site, despite its name, is currently a skate park).

Hothampton Site and Theatre Proposal

The Hothampton site is seen as a Gateway location and the proposed theatre/conference centre and hotel is to be a Landmark Building. The visual aesthetic for the building is taken from an overarching

Design Concept drawn up by Neil Holland Associates for Sir Richard Hotham Projects, which is intended to unify all 3 sites in the regeneration proposal.

The new theatre will open out onto a theatre plaza / interactive digital square which is to provide performance space for outdoor entertainment, exhibitions, markets, community events etc. The plaza in turn will link to a re-landscaped Hothampton Gardens which forms an important green corridor link from the town centre towards the seafront and the pier beyond.

The building comprises a 1100-seat commercial theatre with fly tower and 48-bed hotel. It will also include conference facilities. The scheme design provides a multi-storey car park to service the building (400-spaces), and two retail units.

The theatre is to be a venue for touring productions and conferences. It is to host a wide variety of entertainment including large theatre productions, children's shows, opera, classical concerts, and is to also provide conference facilities. It is to have the ability to be reduced to 384-seats¹ for smaller productions, including productions by Arun Arts Co, operator of the existing theatre at the Regis Centre, and local amateur dramatic groups. The theatre is also to provide opportunities for students at Chichester University (Bognor Campus) studying theatrical and stage & theatre management courses.

The theatre will also have a restaurant and bar facilities.

Regis Centre Site and Current Arts Facility

The Regis Centre site currently comprises the Regis Centre (community arts centre run by Arun Arts Co, which hosts a varied programme of entertainment), Place St Maur Des Fosses (modern apartments) and a pay and display car park. The regeneration plans propose a mixed use scheme for the site including retail, offices, café, pub, leisure centre and hotel plus landscaped gardens.

The Regis Centre's current facilities include the 357-seat Alexandra Theatre, the Little Alex - a 60 seat studio theatre situated on the stage of the Alexandra Theatre, a studio space, and a gallery. As well as theatrical and musical events, the Regis Centre has its own resident musicians and is home to the Arun Youth Theatre. The gallery exhibition space displays works by visual artists throughout the year. The centre also hosts many community classes and is also available for hire for functions and private events.

Further information

Prior to the review the Panel were sent the documentation as itemised in section 1.2 which included the documents which make up part of the planning application Arun District Council. The panel were also sent a full brief as included in this section of the report. As well as current documents forming the planning application, the Panel were also provided with background information relating to the wider regeneration of Bognor Regis dating back to 2004. These documents also included a Burrell Foley Fischer / Arup feasibility study into the current Alexandra Theatre and a Bell Pottinger report for Arun District Council around the regeneration consultation which took place from March-May 2015.

¹ The original briefing document issued by the Theatres Trust had this figure down as 200, Michael Holden, Theatre Consultant to the project when discussing the project corrected this.

Areas for Advisory Review

The review is to provide feedback on the overall design of the new theatre proposed for the Hothampton site and to review the viability of this scheme. The following 5 topics are highlighted for particular discussion:

1. The viability and demand for the type of theatre proposed;
2. The viability of the theatre operation without the requirement for any public funding;
3. The ability of the building to meet the needs of both the local community and regional audiences, and the adaptability of the theatre for the wide range of differing uses;
4. The integration of the theatre with the hotel and any practical considerations that this may bring;
5. How to maximise the design to ensure other regeneration benefits for the town.

1.2 Documentation for review

The documentation for the review comprises the planning documentation for the theatre as outlined below:

From Sir Richard Hotham Projects planning application:

- Location plan, plans and elevations of the new theatre
- Transport Assessment Plans (swept path analysis)
- Landscape proposals – masterplan and more detailed site analysis
- Design and Access Statement (original 2015 document and resubmission document of 2016)
- Feasibility Study (Jan 2015) including appendices
- Tourism and Impact Statement (Jan 2015)
- Theatre and Tourism Study (April 2016)
- Planning Statement
- Design Concept Statement
- Heritage Appraisal
- Construction and Waste Management Plan incl. Master Programme
- Planning Responses from University and Arun Arts Ltd

Background Documentation:

- 2004 Bognor Regis Masterplan
- Additional Council Papers from Full Council meeting of 11/11/2015 including 2014 initial feasibility study for the Alexandra Theatre by Burrell Foley Fischer / Arups
- 2015 Bell Pottinger Public Consultation Report on the Regeneration proposals

2 Attendees

FOR: Theatres Trust Advisory Review Panel

PW	Peter Wilson	Special Adviser to Theatres Trust (Chair)
SH	Simon Harper	Harper Tackley Consultants
RB	Rab Bennetts	Founding Director, Bennetts Associates
TB	Tim Brinkman	Director for G Live, HQ Theatres
RM	Rebecca Morland	Interim Director / Theatres Adviser, Theatres Trust
CA	Claire Appleby	Architecture Adviser, Theatres Trust
MS	Mark Scott	Administration Officer, Theatres Trust (Rapporteur)

FOR: Add Theatre / Organisation

CP	Claire Potts	Strategic Development Team Leader, Arun District Council
DV	Denise Vine	Head of Economic Regeneration, Arun District Council
TE	Thomas S Elliot	Applicant, Sir Richard Hotham Projects Ltd
SL	Susan Leeson	Planning Consultant
PR	Paul Rumke	Project Manager
MH	Michael Holden	Theatre Consultant
PT	Paul Tyrer	Independent Theatre Producer

2.1 Apologies

None

2.2 Conflicts of interest

Simon Harper stated that his wife and business partner, Rachel Tackley, is also the Executive Director of Chichester Festival Theatre, which would be a stakeholder if the new project were to be given planning permission. However, Chichester Festival Theatre are not involved in the design process, planning application or indeed the operation of the venue if thought to be viable.

No direct conflicts of interest regarding the project under discussion were identified.

3 Observations and recommendations

The following section presents a digest of the points of discussion between the Theatres Trust's Advisory Review Panel and the panel representing the Sir Richard Hotham Project and Arun District Council. It aims to provide a review from the point of view of the theatre profession of the documentation as itemised in section 1.2 and the information presented to the Panel from both the Sir Richard Hotham Project team and also members of Arun District Council.

This report does not record the proceedings of the discussion in full nor does it identify individuals who have made comment. It is to be noted that the review is focussed on the questions specifically raised by Arun District Council on the viability of the project and therefore does not provide a full technical review of the scheme or serve to answer queries raised by any third party interests outside of the review itself. Furthermore, it should be recognised that constraints of both meeting time and review documentation determined the scope of discussion and of recommendations.

Advisory Review Panel members are experienced and independent industry professionals selected from a pool of volunteers by the Theatres Trust in response to the perceived needs of the brief as agreed with the organisation requesting the Advisory Review. They do not represent any particular organisation and are invited to participate as individuals.

3.1 Sir Richard Hotham Project Ltd Presentation

There was no formal presentation as part of the review, however Michael Holden, Theatre Consultant to the project brought along additional drawings of the theatre indicating sight lines, the orchestral shell and differing stage configurations, and views from various parts of the auditorium. In addition, Thomas S Elliot, Applicant for Sir Richard Hotham Projects Ltd, distributed a brief business plan for the theatre. These were discussed as part of the review.

3.2 Review Brief

Arun District Council specifically requested that the Panel examine the viability of the theatre aspects of the project. The five key questions that the Council wished to be examined were.

1. The viability and demand for the type of theatre proposed;
2. The viability of the theatre operation without the requirement for any public funding;
3. The ability of the building to meet the needs of both the local community and regional audiences, and the adaptability of the theatre for the wide range of differing uses;
4. The integration of the theatre with the hotel and any practical considerations that this might entail;
5. How to maximise the design to ensure other regeneration benefits for the town.

During the pre-review discussions the Panel determined that it was important to acquire more information regarding items 2, 3 and 4, in particular a cost plan and a full business plan. The development team at the Sir Richard Hotham Project confirmed during the review that if the scheme were successful in gaining planning permission these documents will be released but at the moment they are currently held in commercial confidence by the developers and their private funders.

3.3 Review of the Viability for a New Theatre

3.3.1 The need for regeneration

Discussion and Observations

- Bognor Regis is a deprived seaside town with a population at the 2011 census of 63,855. The Sir Richard Hotham Project is a proposed development which aims to regenerate and revitalise the town of Bognor, making it a preferred destination for tourists as well as encouraging spend in the town by local residents.
- The proposed development is privately funded and requires no subsidy from the local authority, Arun District Council. The funding is derived from private investors and equity funds. The planning application submitted and which is due to go to committee on January 4 2017, is a scheme which is intended to fill the vacuum left by a previous scheme, which was abandoned in 2004. The team of the Sir Richard Hotham Project Ltd include local people with a strong interest in seeing Bognor Regis flourish once again and they bring a range of skills to the project.
- The local population tend to have low incomes which has caused a downturn in the commercial outlets within the town centre. It is believed that the proposed location of the new theatre will increase footfall within the town and in turn aid regeneration of retail space and public realm spaces within Bognor. Butlins, located to the east of the town centre, is currently the biggest employer in the town.
- It was confirmed that the theatre will be a commercial venture and not require subsidy from the local authority. There have been discussions regarding partnerships with the University of Chichester, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and Moscow State Circus amongst others to create a varied programme which it is anticipated will provide an increased boost to tourism.
- It was also reported that there have been positive discussions with Butlins with regards shared conference facilities. The link may attract those within the Butlins complex into the town centre and thereby increase local trade.
- The developer stated that their investigations into the current Alexandra Theatre (located on the Board Walk) indicated a need of serious investment to redress a state of disrepair. The developer has looked at a potential refurbishment / remodelling of the Alexandra, however this was deemed not to be viable as it would prove costly and prevent the provision of valuable additional car parking space which is in short supply in Bognor.

Items for Consideration

- The developer believes that the regeneration of Bognor Regis by a team of passionate individuals, who wish to see the town thrive once again, would be a golden opportunity for the town.
- The proposed theatre would be primarily a night-time activity and this should be taken into consideration when considering the true impact of the theatre in increasing footfall and in generating a resurgence of retail space.
- The location of the theatre, its links and permeability to the surrounding townscape, and its daytime programme are also matters that need further consideration in this respect.
- Further public consultation would be a useful exercise in informing the proposals and subsequent business planning for the resulting facilities.
- The viability of the theatre is difficult to determine without access to a full costing of the development including a key breakdown of the costs for the theatre and the business plan for the theatre operation which were not available at this time.
- The positive discussions with potential partners are encouraging, however, until fully confirmed are still an unknown quantity, including any financial benefits that these partnerships will bring to the project and if they have specific spatial requirements that

may impact upon the buildings design i.e. break-out spaces, rehearsal rooms, studio space etc.

- The proposed closure of the Alexandra Theatre makes it important that the current tenants in situ, Arun Arts, be found alternative accommodation for the duration of the construction of the project and are fully engaged in the discussions regarding the provisions of and operation of the new theatre to ensure their needs are properly catered for now and in the future.

3.3.2 The viability and demand for the type of theatre proposed

Discussion and Observations

- The aim for a new theatre is to make to restore Bognor Regis's former status as a destination.
- The business proposal is for the theatre to be a fully receiving and not a producing house. With just over 1100 seats over three levels, the developer believes that the theatre could attract a wide range of touring shows. The theatre would be equipped with the necessary technical facilities required by this form of product.
- It is felt that the big West End brands would not go to Bognor straight away (other existing venues would take these shows) but that the theatre would be able to offer a different scale of shows. The aim of the theatre operators will be to build trust with the tour producers, to encourage productions to come to Bognor.
- With regards scale, the theatre intended to be able to be reduced from 1100 to 384 seats. This would be achieved through closing levels, by reducing lighting in parts of the building and through deployment of acoustic curtains. Work is ongoing with regards to the acoustics provision.
- The theatre will not aim to compete with other theatre product in the area, especially Chichester Festival Theatre (CFT), seven miles to the north. CFT's primary focus for their summer season is producing work with the aim of transferring these to London or touring them at the end of the season. The remainder of the year is made up of receiving productions which will be different in nature from the work to be shown in the proposed theatre in Bognor.
- The developer has commenced initial discussions with the University of Chichester (its Vice Chancellor has publicly supported the project), with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and with the Moscow State Circus. From these discussions it is estimated that the University of Chichester would become a major stakeholder in the theatre, presenting at least 60 performances in the venue each year. The University has a thriving music and drama department with particular focus on musical theatre and opera. They currently lack reasonable performance spaces - on campus they have a 200 seat small studio space and occasionally use local churches for music performances. It has also been announced that the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra will visit the University in three years' time, however there is currently no performance space suitable for the orchestra, so such activity would most likely have to take place in London. It is also proposed that circus shows be produced for the new venue as well as the aim to create a UK based circus school. The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra have also indicated they would be interested in undertaking a season of work in Bognor which would include education and outreach work.
- The theatre would be operated by a Trust set up by Sir Richard Hotham Project Ltd. It is proposed that the Board of the Trust would include representatives from Arun Arts and various stakeholders such as the University of Chichester, Moscow State Circus, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, to name but a few.
- It was confirmed that the programme will be planned around the needs of Arun Arts.

- It was noted that the theatre is to be a 'cost effective' build as the budget is limited. It was also noted that the theatre interior will be constructed from prefabricated materials which the developer team believe will be an inexpensive method of construction.
- Pricing for tickets in the new theatre will be based on a 6:1 model with a top price ticket of £30 and a bottom price tickets of £5 to cater for the growing student population of Bognor.
- It is intended that the theatre will cater for the need for a decent concert hall on the South Coast - audiences currently travel to Bournemouth or London to attend concerts as other local venues such as Plymouth Guildhall and Brighton Dome are deemed to not be acoustically good enough for some performances. The new theatre will be able to transform into a concert hall by a motorised proscenium that folds upwards to become the acoustic orchestra shell above the stage. This is a new concept that has yet to be tested.
- The stage and auditorium space will be able to be configured into a number of different arrangements. Primarily the venue will be a proscenium arch theatre but will be able to be transformed into a flat floor for standing events. The orchestra pit has been designed so that it can be lifted in or out creating an additional 69 seats. The upper levels of the auditorium will be able to be closed off through the use of acoustic curtains (see also earlier item). This will provide a venue which is adaptable for most needs including conferencing as well as performance. It is anticipated that conferencing will form a key part of the daytime market for the venue.
- The main entrance of the theatre will open onto an interactive square, although how this is to be programmed has yet to be determined.
- There will be 24 fully automated fly bars within the fly tower. Auditorium seating will be on air pallets to allow for quick turnarounds between events in the theatre. The proscenium is a folded, motorised panel design that is to allow for the creation of different acoustic arrangements. The decision to automate is to aid the speed of turnaround between events.
- The developer has concluded that there is demand for the type of product as described above within Bognor and that there is a business case for the viable operation of the theatre. There is no immediate competition from the Mayflower Theatre in Southampton as that is 40 miles away or CFT as previously mentioned.
- The developer has also been in discussion with Butlins which has indicated an interest in working in partnership with regards conferencing facilities. Butlins' current facilities offer smaller spaces for conferences and therefore a partnering relationship which allows use of the theatre for larger events has potential.
- **POST MEETING NOTE:** The current landowners for the site are Arun District Council who have been approached by the applicant but are not able to enter into negotiations at present with regards to sale or lease.

Items for Consideration

- The ambition to bring a wide variety of activities and performances to Bognor provides a real opportunity for the town. However programming of the venue to meet the needs of so many stakeholders, all with varied requirements, will be challenging and require strong management and leadership. The needs of Arun Arts within this, and the desire for a community programme to lead the programme of events, whilst admirable, raises concerns regarding commercial viability.
- The positive discussions with potential partners and the varied programme that they would bring to the theatre are reassuring, however, until they are fully confirmed, remain an uncertain element of the theatre's viability. It is also noted that the partners will undoubtedly have specific and additional spatial requirements that may impact upon the building's design i.e. break-out spaces, rehearsal rooms, studio space etc. and therefore need to be involved in design discussions early.
- It was recommended that the branding and unique selling point of the theatre be considered, alongside the audience that they wish to attract. The current population of

Bognor Regis is an ageing one and currently they do not wish to travel to Chichester or indeed further afield to attend the theatre. However, the project also is looking towards an increasing student population in the town. The theatre could also potentially draw people from Worthing and Havant which may be possible with high quality programming however this is difficult to ascertain without a draft programme and business plan.

- The new theatre is intended as a gateway building for Bognor and it is therefore important that budgets reflect this ambition and that the building is of real quality both architecturally and within the facilities that it offers.
- The inclusion of an interactive square to the front of the theatre provides exciting opportunities both during the day and for evening performances and, if properly programmed could be a real asset to the project.
- It was suggested that the reliance on full automation to switch between the differing configurations should be further explored, particularly with regards override systems for any mechanical or electrical failure (refer also to point 3.34 below).
- A receiving house needs simple-to-operate systems so that there isn't a steep learning curve caused by extensive automation.
- Consideration is also to be given as to whether the traditional style and layout of the venue fully corresponds to the varied programme of entertainment that it is hoped that the theatre will offer, and whether this is reflective of the audience that it is hoped the theatre will attract (see also item 3.3.6 below).
- The business plan should reflect timescales for the theatre to fully establish itself with tour producers (e.g. an initial 3-year start-up period).
- As with the theatre partnerships, confirmation of the commercial partnership with Butlins is required to fully understand the viability of the proposal.
- Auditoria designed to operate with a wide range of seat numbers are very challenging to design effectively and further work might be undertaken to assure stakeholders of the possibility of spatial and acoustic intimacy in the smaller configurations.

3.3.3 The viability of the theatre operation without the requirement of public funding

Discussion and Observations

- The developer's proposals are for a theatre that would be operated by a trust and would operate without subsidy.
- The ability to procure a mixture of receiving productions, conferencing and to work with Butlins and other partners, will be essential to the financial self-sufficiency of the theatre. The business plan reportedly requires the theatre to break even to be viable although it is hoped that it would operate in surplus.
- The programme of events will be essential to this, so work to create a balanced and exciting programme to incorporate all the partners is crucial.
- Capital to build the theatre will be raised through the development of the Regis Centre (Alexandra Theatre) site.

Items for Consideration

- It is difficult to fully understand how the theatre would run without any public subsidy without seeing a full cost analysis and business plan for the project. Comparator projects indicate that a new theatre venue would not break even for at least three years in operation due to significant amounts of trust that would have to be created between producers and the operators.
- Similar commercially-operated venues all receive financial support from local authorities in one form or another. A lack of such funding could prove to be a weakness which would substantially narrow the operating options of the venue.

- Concessions (food and beverage) are an important part of a theatre's business plan and at present it is unclear how this would work in relation to the theatre given the proposed operational relationship with the adjoining hotel.
- The adjoining car park could be a very lucrative source of income and the management / operation (i.e. whether this should be linked to the theatre / carried out by the overall trust etc.) should be carefully considered within the business plan.
- There is a current reliance on the proposed partnerships for the success of the theatre. Confirmation of these partnerships and greater detail about how they might work will be necessary to gauge whether the theatre would be viable and not have to rely on public funding.
- The majority of larger scale presenting regional theatres within the UK are owned outright by the local authority with management contracts awarded to operators. As this won't be the case here and as Arun District Council are the land owners, it is important to see how a leasing / freehold deal will impact on the costings for the theatre.
- The viability of the theatre operation without the requirement of public funding needs to be thoroughly tested to ensure that the operation will not be detrimental to the local council financially.

3.3.4 The ability of the building to meet the needs of both the local community and regional audiences, and the adaptability of the theatre for the wide range of differing uses

Discussion and Observations

- The developers confirmed that the needs of Arun Arts will be factored first and foremost into the programme of the new theatre. However, although Arun Arts have been involved within the discussions for the new theatre, they have expressed concerns regarding the plans and the suitability of the new theatre as a venue for them.
- The site would be developed with a car park situated next door to the theatre that would allow for easy parking and access to the theatre. In addition, the railway station is only four minutes' walk away meaning the new theatre is well served by public transport.
- As previously mentioned the theatre is proposed to be capable of adaptation into a number of configurations, allowing it to serve a number of uses. Smaller 384-seat community events could be played in the auditorium by deploying acoustic curtains and reductions in light effectively 'closing' upper sections of the auditorium and reducing the perceived volume; larger productions would play to an auditorium of 1129 making the auditorium attractive to touring producers.
- The theatre design is a proscenium arch form, the decision for which has been based on the fact that 95% of touring product requires a proscenium arch making the venue attractive to that sort of producer. Here, the proscenium arch would be formed of motorised panels which would have the ability to fold back to create an acoustic shell for orchestral performances. The auditorium would also convert to a flat floor format to accommodate music gigs and other appropriate performances.
- The proposed pricing structure of 6:1 with a top price ticket of £30 and a bottom price ticket of £5, has been based on providing affordable access to the theatre for the demographic of Bognor.
- It is anticipated that foyers would be open throughout the day with foyer events and art exhibitions. It was stated that there is a potential partnership with the Tate to provide William Blake artwork for the foyers.
- It is anticipated that conferencing will form a key part of the daytime market for the venue.

Items for Consideration

- How accessible would the foyers be during the day when commercial activity such as conferencing is taking place?
- Is the ticket pricing structure realistic? Would such sales meet the needs of the contract for a touring production?
- There is a heavy reliance on mechanically operated equipment in the theatre. What would happen if there were a breakdown - could turnarounds still be completed on time?
- Whilst it is anticipated that conferencing would form a key part of the daytime market the current designs lack the required ancillary facilities – e.g. break out spaces, catering etc. It will be important to factor servicing costs for high levels of automation into the business plan.

Post Meeting Notes:

- It is queried whether the complex concept of a folding proscenium is the correct acoustic solution for the venue. It is suggested that further consideration be given to this aspect.
- The ambitions of the regeneration project and its hoped impact on the town are great. It is therefore important that the scheme should deliver this ambition. Whilst cost and site constraints are understood, would the ambition for providing the concert hall of choice for the south coast be better served by a dedicated music space as well as theatre?
- The proposal to utilise a 1,100 seat venue for a 400 seat event presents a dilemma for any operator. For example, given the chance to book a week of Hairspray grossing over £200K or a half week of a community show with a potential rental in the singles of thousands of pounds. The hard commercial reality will mean that potentially the community users would find themselves with a greatly diminished utility.
- If it became necessary to seek public funding at some point (Lottery, Council...) there would need to be evidence of competitive selection procedures, (including design competition perhaps) and other requirements such as strict DDA compliance, which might raise questions about overall quality.

3.3.5 The integration of the theatre with the hotel and any practical considerations that this may bring

Discussion and Observations

- The inclusion of a 48-bedroom hotel is to allow a degree of flexibility to the scheme in terms of visiting productions. It is envisaged that the accommodation could be used by visiting artists and associated crew as well as tourists and conference delegates.
- There is currently no hotel operator on board for the scheme nor has one been involved in the design elements of the hotel.
- The hotel is designed to be a boutique hotel to be run hand in hand with the theatre and the car park operation, although operational policies have yet to be clarified.

Items for Consideration

- The relatively small size of the hotel and its commercial viability requires careful consideration and further detailed analysis by the development team.
- With regards the hotel, entrance, signage and identity are all areas that need careful consideration and need to be addressed in developing the design to the mutual advantage of theatre and hotel
- A hotel and a theatre are not likely to be undemanding neighbours and may compete in some respects. It is crucial to determine the operation of the hotel and the integration – or otherwise – of the hotel. Both may have an effect on the built design – e.g., how the entrance area operates, operation of the bars, food offers etc. and also a big impact on the business plan. An early decision (pre-planning) is therefore recommended.

3.3.6 How to maximise the design to ensure other regeneration benefits for the town

Discussion and Observations

- It is predicted that the expansion of the University will bring 1500 additional students to Bognor, a key factor in the regeneration of the town.
- The proposed location of the building - at the head of a series of parks running down to the seafront - is intended to draw the seaside trade into the town centre and aid the regeneration of town's retail sector. The location is also very close to the station, which will be used by many of the theatre audience.
- The design of the building is intended to reflect the architecture of the Bognor Regis heydays. The developer's own public consultations have indicated that the architectural style was the most liked feature of the scheme. The developer was keen to stress that this whole scheme was a development and not a regeneration for Bognor Regis.
- Will the rail timetable accommodate those travelling to evening performances? If not, the relationship between the station and the theatre will be less significant.

Items for Consideration

- Are young audiences currently reflected in the current design for the building, will the current design be enticing for younger audiences? Could the design be properly contemporary and result in a landmark building which would complement the town?
- Does the scheme adhere to the place branding of Bognor Regis and complement Arun District Council's other regeneration plans?
- The main entrance of the theatre currently opens out onto the park and a new interactive square which could provide exciting opportunities for performances and a very active frontage. The vision is to make the building permeable and to draw visitors to the theatre and through to the town beyond, however opportunities are being missed with the current design, particularly to the sides and rear of the theatre which provide little animation or hint of what lies beyond, and become more of a full stop to the pedestrian flow rather than an encouragement. Take the opportunity to consider how the architecture of the theatre addresses the town and fits with the vision. Making non-theatre spaces more accessible and outward-facing will encourage daytime use and pedestrian flow through across the site. Scale, permeability and animation are all important considerations.
- An analysis into routes and footfall would be useful to undertake to better understand the integration of the scheme with the town. It appears from the plans that the only route through the site is between the theatre and multi-storey car park – see also above point about permeability.
- Consider thresholds - the building should be welcoming and inviting to all with no sense of thresholds.
- Consider branding and market placement. Where is the market pitched? Do the designs match? Will the architectural styling of the building appeal to external stakeholders (performing arts companies, Arts Council (if relevant) and so on) and audience alike? Look to future proof the building and consider the demographic of the town in 10 years' time - for example as more students come to the town, potentially the one night stand would increase in popularity, with larger bar spaces required for the flat floor configuration which is not currently reflected in the designs. Likewise, the popularity of music events. Could a music venue flexible enough to house orchestras and touring rock acts provide the desired flexibility whilst better futureproofing the venue?
- There is a potential for dislocation between the architectural style proposed and that of the actual architect, and possibly a further dislocation if a delivery architect is appointed. There has been a strong adherence to the original façade concepts, which do not

necessarily now match the desired usage of the building – refer also to points about permeability, outward facing spaces and thresholds.

4 Summing Up

4.1 Opportunity for Bognor Regis

This scheme provides a really good opportunity to provide Bognor Regis with a state of the art theatre facility to cater for a growing population, to act as a catalyst for the regeneration of the area and to help Bognor become a destination town. It is agreed that Bognor requires investment to help with its ambitions to regenerate the town, however it is also important that any proposal meets the needs of Bognor Regis and fits with the overall masterplan of Arun District Council. It is also important that any proposal does not, in the future, become a financial burden to be carried by the Council and hence the absolute need to determine the scheme's viability.

With regards this last point, in order to fully assess the viability of the project and the risk to the council it is recommended that the following items are taken into account:

- Commencement of discussions regarding the purchase / leasing of the land between the developer and Arun District Council;
- Submission of a business plan and project costs for the scheme (incorporating any costs from the point above), including setting out the full operating model for the theatre and how it will fit within the wider development;
- Thorough testing of the viability of the theatre operation without the requirement of public funding to ensure that the operation will not be detrimental to the local council financially. This would also necessitate further proof of support from potential partners.
- Submission of more details regarding programming to ensure resilience of operation, including agreed parameters between partners, e.g. the university, Arun Arts etc. in terms of numbers of days usage;
- Consideration of the operating model of both the hotel and the car park and how this ties into the theatre operation;
- Further consideration of the urban impact of the building on the town, and the building's permeability and attraction to the community it serves and will serve in the future;
- Consideration of future-proofing of the building in terms of a changing audience;
- Examination of the design and construction timetable to provide the necessary credibility about the delivery aspects of the proposal. This currently appears incredibly short and may affect viability / income / cash flow.

The following items were also discussed post meeting and are recommended as items for consideration by the Council when reviewing the planning application:

- Should permission be granted it is strongly recommend that a new home for Arun Arts be established prior to the existing theatre being demolished / site being developed;
- The current planning application covers all three development sites. The developer has commented that the new theatre will form the first phase of the works. To predicate any future issues surrounding phasing, it is strongly recommend that any planning permission include a condition that the other, commercial sites cannot be inhabited until the theatre is operational.

As a final point of note, it has been stated that if the development doesn't gain planning permission in the New Year, it will not happen. The report recognises the ambition for the regeneration of Bognor Regis and for a new theatre. However, it can take time for a measured, and collaborative approach between developer and Council to develop. This would ultimately result in a project with a greater chance of success.

DSE Advice Note

Sir Richard Hotham Projects Bognor

Sir Richard Hotham Projects, Bognor

Reference: 598-491

DSE advice note

Meeting date: 28 November 2017

Location: Arun District Council Offices, Littlehampton

DSE attendees

Ben van Bruggen, Planner and Urban Designer, DSE Panel Chair

David Tittle, Head of Design Advice, DSE

Arun District Council attendees

Claire Potts

Ian Whightman

Site visit

The site and the surrounding areas were visited by all attendees prior to the meeting.

Summary

We fully support the aims of the project but although we welcome the intention to create three striking new projects for Bognor, to revitalise the town we think that the plans are fundamentally flawed. We do not think that, if built, these buildings will be high quality architecture or successful places. A fresh start is required and we would urge the applicant to withdraw the scheme and engage with the local authority and our design review panel to help resolve these issues.

General

There is an admirable ambition by the promoters of the scheme to bring new facilities to Bognor and to invest in its public realm. Such initiative should be welcomed but this ambition is not matched by the quality of the design of the proposals, which seem clumsy, confusing and in some instances inaccurate, in comparison. The proposals for the public spaces seem eclectic and confused. There are many different elements and design precedents competing for attention that the essential elegance and consistency of the Regency seaside environment will be lost.

It is unfortunate that this proposal has not come for a full design review and we would urge the applicant to withdraw their current proposal and arrange a design review. The 'Architectural Review' submitted with the planning application does not address design issues. It is not a design review within the meaning of the NPPF.

For all parts of this development there is a need to agree key receptors for views and for the applicant to submit accurate 'before and after' photographic illustrations showing the effect of this development on those agreed key views from all points of the compass.

Regis Site

Clarity of thought

There is a general problem with understanding the plans, sections and elevations and consistency across all the planning application information. This gives us little confidence that the design has been considered in sufficient detail.

We are particularly concerned by the car parking layout and heights, how cycle storage will work, how residents will store and access the refuse, and how it will be collected and moved across the car parking to the central store. The courtyard designs show trees and planting within the depth of the deck but there is no provision for roots; will all planting therefore be in large raised planters? What does this do to the feel of the place?

The ground floor includes a variety of uses but a consistent floor to floor height. What works for retail for example does not necessarily work for residential or leisure uses, yet these share the same language of plan, section and fenestration with little if any difference. The windows for retail are likely to be large, the residential on ground floor will need maximum light but also to respect privacy, and the leisure use may well need no natural light at all. How are these reflected in the architecture?

There is no recognition that the different uses will require different plant (now and for future users) and some, if not most, of this is likely to be accommodated on the roof. The applicant should show how all these different uses will be serviced, how the ventilation, extraction and plant will be dealt with.

Scale and massing

The approach has been to wrap the perimeter of the block with a new building around a central courtyard. This is a well understood typology for forming urban blocks. However, this proposal is for many different uses and it is clear to us that not all are sitting comfortably in the plan or are successful in the elevations. This leads to the sense of a dominant continuous built form whose scale seems alien to the place. The architecture is trying to be domestic albeit on a large scale, but this is fighting against the need to include community uses, hotels, leisure, retail and residential. A consequence is that the plan is muddled, space is poorly allocated and does not flow, uses are compromised. It seems likely that grills and vents at the level of the ground or courtyard may be required and that there will be substantial rooftop plant, access points and lift overruns which are not clear on the drawings. For example, the kitchen for the hotel and pub/restaurant is large but it has no extraction or plant. If it is vented on the courtyard level fumes will have a direct impact on hotel rooms above.

A consequence of this programme is that the upper level accommodation is suffering. Units are accessed from overly long corridors, often very many units to each core, which have no natural daylight, requiring artificial lighting all day. This will not feel like a welcoming place to live or stay. Some units have wonderful views of the sea but others will face north only and receive little sunlight, especially those at the level of the courtyard, which appear particularly poor. They also have no external access from the courtyard and little private space to address the public courtyard.

We do not believe that these uses have been combined successfully into a single building form and we think that a series of separate buildings which come together to form a block would be a better approach.

Other detailed considerations

- The detailing of car park entrances is critical to the street scene but is not clear on the plan. Sections are needed to show that these entrances can function effectively.
- The refuse strategy appears to rely on somebody (residents?) dragging bins a long distance.
- The cycle store is in a poor location.
- The ground floor apartments are served from an internal corridor when they could have direct access from the courtyard. These are single aspect north facing apartments. There is little defensible space in the courtyard to protect their privacy.
- On the upper floors there are a number of single aspect north facing apartments with balconies that will be constantly in shade.
- The number of apartments using each access core seems excessive; up to 12 per floor across 4 or 5 floors.
- There is a failure to make the best of the rear of the council building which (for the rear of a building) is quite attractive.
- Public realm proposals ignore the Esplanade and the barrier that has been created between it and the promenade. A key move by anyone considering the regeneration

of this part of Bognor should be to improve permeability between the promenade/ beach and the town. The town has embraced a shared space approach in the High Street and a similar calming strategy could be adopted for The Esplanade. The 'Broadwalk' outside the Regis building creates another barrier as it has just one central opening.

Architectural approach

The planning system is rightly neutral as to architectural styles and Design South East would take a similarly agnostic approach. However, when one claims to draw strongly on the precedent of a particular historical style, and here the name of the original developer of Regency Bognor has been applied to the project, there is a duty to do so with a certain scholarship. The buildings that Sir Richard Hotham was responsible for had a certain elegance. In our view, this approach has not translated well when scaled up to an urban block. It has led to an unsatisfactory monumentality. These proposals take some of the features of the Hotham buildings but are over-scaled and monotonous, while introducing new elements like the large projecting balconies. The domes exaggerate the scale of the corners, which lack elegance. Here all reference to the Sir Richard Hotham Grade I Listed Building, the Kursaal Building or indeed the Esplanade Grande is lost. The domes and corners appear substantial and bulky, adding a heaviness to the building at roof level.

One would expect a contemporary interpretation of the Hotham style to either be more faithful to the original or to take a step back, simplify it and make it more elegant. These proposals seem to be unconvincing.

This matters because it effects the image of Bognor at a critical time when a number of seaside towns are seeking to reinvent themselves and take advantage of the resurgent demand for day trips and short breaks by the coast.

If the application is approved the detailing (at 1:20 and 1:5) needs conditioning to ensure that fully detailed plans are examined before reserved matters are discharged.

Theatre

Much of the same criticism that is described above relates to the plan, section and elevation of the theatre, hotel and car parking. The result is that the hotel and theatre use and design collide. It seems extraordinary to us that the uses of the hotel lounge and coffee bar will have to access the Theatre to use the toilet, which for both male and female users is through a convoluted route across the foyer. The floor plans mix up the hotel and theatre uses to the extent that the lighting bridge and storage are accessed not only from the flytower but also the hotel, presumably as fire escapes. The lack of clarity of thought of use of these elements suggests that the plan is overly tight and that the uses are not compatible.

Public realm

The theatre is a large building with a single main entrance, servicing and fire escapes. The problem with a stand alone theatre building is that it presents three sides that are necessarily blank. The treatment of the east and west facades is particularly disappointing offering very little to the public realm. Where uses such as the hotel entrances, café and foyer might be used

to enliven the street instead they face the car park and the service street. The connection from Queensway to Styene Street and the Park will be particularly dismal.

Arrangement of uses

There is a lack of legibility in the arrangement of uses. The grand front of the building which is its only active edge shows upper stories which appear to be part of the building but are in fact hotel rooms. The hotel appears as a more modest and understated building at the side.

But the most serious consequence of this arrangement is blank walls are proposed on three sides of the development. The planning authority has encouraged the inclusion of some retail units to Queensway (not shown on all plans) but there is still a decked car park facing Queensway and Steyne Street at the point where people arrive from the Station and a blank side wall to Queensway and the walkway south past the flats. These are serious urban design failings which will blight these streets for years to come. Theatres by their use require little activity at their edges apart from a prominent frontage. However, there are ways of dealing with this problem which can deliver a new theatre and attractive streets. Many theatres in the modern era were successfully sited within a landscape setting. The opportunity may exist to achieve this here but the proposed landscape and public realm is mean and pinched. We question how this will survive. The alternative strategy, as with many historic London theatres, is to bury them within an urban block. That strategy might be followed here by using the hotel and some of the more outward facing theatre uses as the 'wrapping' element around the theatre. Whatever strategy is chosen it should not leave Queensway as a back service road. Indeed an alternative design might have the theatre fronting Queensway but with an attractive back terrace facing the park. The Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford upon Avon is an example of a stand-alone theatre that presents an attractive and active edge on 3½ of its 4 sides (the other ½ being the service area).

Architectural approach

The same comments apply as above but in this case the architectural style of the façade, although striking, seems to be a confusing hybrid of historical and contemporary elements. It is certainly nothing like a Hotham building but it is hard to know how its style has been derived.

Restaurant

Seaside towns often have such quirky buildings (for example there is a glass circular restaurant in a contemporary style on Weston-super-Mare sea front) so there should be no objection in principle to this. However, this is adjacent to a listed building and the comments we make above about the architectural approach apply here. What is proposed is a massive dome, neither contemporary in style nor faithful to any historic precedent.

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