

Planning Objection to 22/02486/FUL | Partial demolition, renovation and extension of Octagon Theatre, Yeovil. Expansion of main auditorium from 622 to 900 seats, construction of 2no. new cinemas, dance studio and expanded foyers. Construction of new theatrical fly-tower and expanded backstage provision. | Octagon Theatre Hendford Yeovil Somerset BA20 1UX

Dear SSDC/Area South planning committee

I would like to draw your attention to a planning application scheduled for a decision at Area South Planning Committee for South Somerset District Council next Wednesday (February 1st) and highlight a number of planning reasons on why this planning application cannot be approved based on its current proposal.

<https://publicaccess.southsomerset.gov.uk/online-applications/applicationDetails.do?activeTab=summary&keyVal=RH89N8OWGQ600>

Putting aside some of the wider concerns over the size of investment into a single project when Yeovil is suffering in so many others areas and also putting aside the potential for increased cost and time on this project, given the global cost of living crisis, rising inflation and the experience from the Yeovil Refresh, there are a number of planning concerns that have been raised and should be addressed before this planning application gets approval. Firstly, there are a number of clarifications that need to be made in relation to the Planning Officers report.

Listed buildings and Conservation area.

The planning application is to significantly increase a building that is in direct vicinity of two listed buildings, Historic England have stated that they have concerns over the visage of these buildings on the back of this proposal and highlights that there would be significant harm to the Grade II-listed coach house, and to the Yeovil conservation area. The Planning Officers report however chooses to focus on the feedback of the second listed building where Historic England state, "a less than substantial degree of harm" The former significant harm has been ignored in the Planning Officers report.

The full quote from Historic England in relation to Hendford Manor states that "This harm would be significant, because it would harm the principal views of the principal elevations of Hendford Manor."

Additionally, what has been overlooked by both the Planning Officer and Historic England is the impact of the proposed material on both the listed buildings and the Conservation Area it sits alongside with the risk that this building could in time resemble a rust bucket! In addition to this, Cor-ten Steel has the potential for causing pollution of the local environment, this has not been considered or mitigated (more on Corten Steel below) within the design document.

Lead Local Flood Authority Feedback and other Water Concerns

Somerset's Lead Local Flood Authority raised a number of concerns with this planning application on 16th November 2022, specifically around drainage for the new building, while a number of these issues seem to have been resolved (although no reference to how these are resolved, appears in the planning portal) there are still as of 17th January 2023 several outstanding concerns around this proposal from the LLFA.

- Can the Applicant please provide justification for the increase in the proposed discharge rate from 4 (in the Drainage strategy report reviewed for the previous LLFA response) to 5 l/s? It appears that the blue roofs have been removed from the proposal (and now only permeable paving and filter strips are proposed in terms of SuDS? Appropriate justification should be given to why these changes have been proposed.

- No information/response has been provided regarding our previous comment on SuDS (point 3 of our previous response 16/11/22).

The LLFA therefore state in summary “the LLFA requirements for a Full Planning Application have not been addressed and the above issues need to be addressed/clarified before an appropriate planning condition can be set.”

Yet the Planning Officer in their final report has stated “Discussions and negotiations are on-going with the Applicant and LLFA and further details and clarification is to be submitted. It is anticipated that the drainage strategy for the site will be agreed in due course and thereafter detailed specifications and implementation can be the subject” But it is clear that no final decision can be made, and no report should have been published until these issues had been resolved.

In addition to the above and specifically related to the drainage concerns raised by the LLFA, I have raised in both the planning application and to the LLFA the concerns over the use for Corten Steel for this building which has been identified as a potential pollutant without suitable drainage. I quote from one source.

“to the issues you have raised is the issue around ensuring there is no build-up of rain water and adequate drainage in relation to the Cor-ten Cladding Steel, failure to do so can result in rust-dirty water dripping onto adjacent surfaces and staining them permanently, or even worse, can cause pollution of the local environment. (nickel, iron and manganese). This could have a significant damaging effect on the area.”

Landscape and Trees / Conservation area

In relation to landscape and Trees the planning officer has consented to document what appears within the original proposal for the planning application but has however failed to address or even highlight the concerns raised by SSDC Tree Officer who in summary of this planning application has stated.

“In the absence of securing appropriate tree protection and landscaping details, I strongly recommend that we ought to avoid granting planning consent.

For the reasons I have outlined, I’m afraid that I am obliged to object to this proposal, because I believe it is contrary to the Council’s objectives to preserve and enhance the quality and character of the local landscape and the features (trees) within it - in accordance with the following policies of The South Somerset Local Plan (2006 - 2028); EQ2: General Development, EQ4: Bio-Diversity & EQ5: Green Infrastructure.

Nor do I believe that the proposal currently provides suitably detailed measures to fulfil the Council’s duty (to secure the planting of new trees and shrubs) as relates to The Town & Country Planning Act, 1990 (Para 197a - as amended).”

All the above leads to an understanding that this planning application is not ready to go to final committee for decision at this point and if it did and was approved would have been done wholly based on the timescales around a mid-2023 start date for this project (as communicated publicly by SSDC) and the time pressures around the dissolving of SSDC. While investment is encouraged it doesn’t allow for procedures and processes to be overlooked to fast track because it is an internal (to the Council) project.

In addition to the above I would also like to highlight a number of other issues that have been raised on the Planning Portal by the public, this includes greater detail on the issues of Cor-ten Steel, the primary cladding for the building. While reference of these have been made in the Planning Officers report these have not been addressed in anyway, largely, we assume due to the speed in which this has been processed. These critical planning concerns should all be addressed before this planning application can be approved.

Landscape and Trees / Conservation area

The loss of mature trees within the Country Park which should have TPO's on is of concern, SSDC should have had these mature trees under TPO however because it was SSDC land they have refused to do so. Now there is a proposal to destroy 13 mature trees. While replacing these is a positive output this is a significant loss of trees of considerable age that SHOULD have been under TPO.

The removal of these trees means that this planning application is not complying with the following policies

- South Somerset Local Plan 2006-202 Policy EQ2 seeks to achieve high quality development which promotes the local distinctiveness and preserves or enhances the character and appearance of the area.
- South Somerset Local Plan 2006-202 Policy EQ3 seeks to conserve and where appropriate enhance heritage assets.
- National Planning Framework Section 15 Conserving and enhancing the natural environment.
- Comment submitted date: Tue 15 Nov 2022

Cor-ten Steel

The use of Cor-Ten Steel as the primary material for cladding on the outside of the building raises significant concerns over the impact of the look of the area especially in such proximity to two listed buildings and a conservation area. While Cor-Ten seems like a great solution to 'blend' in with the Country Park. There is sufficient risk going forward in the way in which this material 'evolves' and it has many risks which could see a very different future look to the outside of this building and just look like a rusty building! For those of you not familiar with Cor-Ten it is the same material used for the Angel of the North. From a distance it looks great, up close (as the Octagon visitors would see it) not so good and also note the Angel of the North is constantly maintained by a steel company to ensure it is treated correctly and Cor-ten has to be kept clean at all times. Who will be maintaining the Octagons Cor-Ten? Examples below highlight the concerns of the future look of this imposing building.



When looking into Cor-ten as a solution there are many don'ts related to this material, Considerations such as

- Don't get mud, grease, oil, paint, cement, mortar and other substances, and keep leave piles away from it.
- Don't build with Cor-ten in contact with other metal materials which has a negative impact on the evolution of this material. What metal is being used for the framework of the building?
- Ensure there is no build-up of rainwater and adequate drainage, failure to do so can result in rust-dirty water dripping onto adjacent surfaces and staining them permanently, or even worse, can cause pollution of the local environment. (Nickel, iron and manganese). Given the concerns from LLFA the likelihood of drainage problems seems high.

If you examine the designs the plan is to have Cor-ten bordering directly with a lawn area (page 14 Section 4 Part1 Architecture) therefore being in direct contact with mud, which will splash up the building during rainy weather. There is no mention of the material to be used alongside Cor-ten for the internal structure of the building, therefore this planning application is unable to confirm if there is a risk of contact with other metals that would negatively impact the

Cor-ten. Finally, it has already been noted the concerns over drainage by the LLFA, however the risk that this could cause pollutants into the locality highlights why this planning application cannot be approved until a full assessment of the management of water and drainage and the behaviour of Cor-ten steel within the proposed location.

By using Cor-ten there is no guarantee about what the building will look like going forward, therefore designs presented do not provide a clear indication of the impact of the area on this development and because the Cor-ten can evolve in different ways based on sun exposure, rain exposure wind and contact with other materials there is no guarantee of consistency.

In addition to this Cor-ten steel is known to have an issue with rust run off during rainy weather which then stains the ground around it, some examples of this can be seen below. Given the wide path areas and the extensive use of Cor-ten Steel on the building, it surprises me that there are no plans for mitigation this issue within the formal plans?



Details of this staining issue can be found in many articles in relation to the use of these for planters in the garden, one such example of the issue can be found <https://niceplanter.com/will-my-corten-planters-stain-surrounding-area-with-rust-or-runoff/>

However, and most relevant I believe; to the issues you have raised is the issue around ensuring there is no build-up of rainwater and adequate drainage in relation to the Cor-ten Cladding Steel, failure to do so can result in rust-dirty water dripping onto adjacent surfaces and staining them permanently, or even worse, can cause pollution of the local environment. (Nickel, iron and manganese). This could have a significant damaging effect on the area.

This issue has been documented in a number of research papers and are referenced in these websites,

<https://www.cantorialluminio.it/en/cladding-of-facade-in-sheet-corten/>

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0269749116301828>

Proper analysis of how Cor-ten Steel will react into the proposed location, must be carried out before this is allowed to proceed – to do otherwise not only risks the character of the area but has a potential to pollute waters used by our local wildlife.

Therefore, not complying with

- SSDC Local Plan 2006-202 Policy EQ2, EQ3 or NPPF section 16 /17

Impact on Community Groups and use of a Community Asset

The increase in capacity actually risks 'sizing out' the Community and Amateur shows currently put on at the Octagon, many of these are far from fully attended and this change would risk (over)' half empty auditoriums causing these community groups to look elsewhere and removing the opportunity for young and amateur performers to perform on a professional stage! In addition to this the cost of a larger venue would price many local performing clubs out of being

able to use this facility. If this happens what are the alternatives Westlands does not have the back of house facilities and The Swan Theatre is often too small

Consideration also needs to be given on the impact of price, caused directly by this proposal and the ability for Yeovil residents ability to be able to afford this "Community Theatre". Prices have risen sharply over the past few years due to Covid-19 and the cost-of-living crisis. This proposal will see the Octagon place an additional Levy on tickets to support the cost of this development and the cost-of-living crisis is not going away anytime soon – the risk of pricing out the general user and in particular families is extremely high.

Therefore, this proposal risks the community aspects of the Octagon and does not therefore comply with

- South Somerset Local Plan 2006-2028 Policy EP15 supports the provision of new community facilities.

Impact to Other Local Businesses

There is an inclusion of 2 Cinema screens in this proposal, this is a community Theatre, and the addition of screens changes its use. There is already have a Cinema in Yeovil at the leisure park which would be directly impacted by this competition and would risk that business.

Cineworld is already impacted by SSDC's decision to screen mainstream films at Westlands. A loss of Cineworld, would have a knock-on effect to the other business within that Leisure Park (which already has a number of empty premises), this will have an overall negative impact on the vitality of the Town.

Therefore, this planning application does not conform with

- South Somerset Local Plan 2006-2028 Policy EP11 supports proposals that enhance the vitality and viability of the town centre.
- National Planning Framework Section 7 Ensuring the vitality of town centres.

Public Transport

The planning application highlights the need for providing adequate public transport to the location the published travel plan states and I quote. "Having regard to the proximity of the bus stops, the frequency of buses and the areas that the existing local buses serve, the Theatre is accessible by public transport."

While this may be adequate for daytime travel, the majority of performances at the octagon take place in the evening for which there is no public transport as Yeovil has no buses running in the evening. Also, worth adding that there are no buses on a Sunday - therefore adequate public transport is not available and the only way for the majority of visitors to the Octagon both currently and within the future is by Private Car - causing increased traffic, lack of parking spaces and increased environmental impact.

Therefore, this planning application does not comply with the following.

- South Somerset Local Plan 2006-2028 Policy TA1 seeks to reduce single car occupancy and the need to travel, or encourage the use of more sustainable travel, or alternative fuels where travel is necessary.
- South Somerset Local Plan 2006-2028 Policy TA5 sets out the Council's policy relating to the transport impact of new development and encouragement for sustainable transport.
- National Planning Framework Section 9 Promoting sustainable transport.

Car Parking

The issues of parking have not been resolved through this planning application, there is a significant shortfall in the current Petters way Car park for the Octagon even when it is not at full capacity already, and the proposed solution for car parking at the nearby Goldenstones carpark is already one used as an overflow for the Octagon. We also need to remember that these car parks are used for other reasons such as the Gym and pool, Ninesprings and the Town Centre.

There are peak times in the evenings during the summer when Goldenstones car park is largely full already (with the community's use of Nine Springs Country Park) and the Petters way Car park is used extensively during the day for Town Centre which often clashes with Matinee performances.

The report from the planning officer highlights a potential 1000 plus users at any one time once redeveloped. The current primary car park for the Octagon (which is also a general Town Centre car park and used by those who work in offices close by) is 211 spaces, this is already a shortfall for the 600-seater theatre that the Octagon is now. Proposals in the Transport Plan (see planning application) suggest that additional space can be provided in a number of areas.

- Goldenstones Car park - this is a small walk away but up a large gradient hill and therefore not suitable for many. The Goldenstones car park also provides parking for a Gym and Pool as well as the local Country Park. This car park is heavily used in the summer evenings when most of the Theatre shows would take place.
- Tesco underground car parking - this has been highlighted as an alternative park area for Octagon users, but due to antisocial behaviour this is locked from 7:30pm each evening. Therefore, cannot be counted.
- Tesco Main Car park - this car park is a supermarket car park and is restricted to supermarket users only and a maximum of two hour stay. Therefore, not a suitable alternative parking location.
- It should also be noted that matinee shows tend to take place on a Saturday for shows, this would coincide with the busiest day for the town centre and therefore has a potential significant clash of usage for all the car parks above leaving a huge shortfall for a potential 1000 visitors.
- Once again it is worth noting that Yeovil has no evening bus services therefore any evening shows and car parking capacity cannot be mitigated by the use of public transport - the only option for attendees of the Theatre is to drive.

Below was an example day of the Peters Way (the primary car park for the Octagon) car park on a Thursday during the Christmas period when the Pantomime was taking place, attendance for this show was around 80% of capacity however as you can see the Petters Way Car Park is full (save for a couple of disabled spots).



Petters Way is a poorly designed car park with a significant gradient and regardless of 'other car parks' around town, Octagon visitors will head to Petters way as their first option, an additional several hundred cars trying to manoeuvre on a sloped car park with drivers needing to reverse out due to lack of space will cause chaos. Regardless of minimal parking requirements that are suggested for a proposal of this type, the hard facts are that there is not enough parking for this service as anyone attending a show at the octagon will testify too this.

Therefore, not complying with

- South Somerset Local Plan 2006-2028 Policy TA6 states that parking standards for new developments should be undertaken in accordance with the Somerset County Council Parking Strategy.

While it is positive to see investment into Yeovil (although maybe over-investment in a couple of projects was the wrong approach for SSDC) this does not get away from due diligence within the planning approval process and as can be clearly seen from the issues provided within this document, there are currently too many concerns and unknowns around this planning application to allow it to be approved.

Kind Regards

Tareth Casey