

**Response prepared by
the Culture Leisure and Tourism Group, RTW Town Forum,
to planning application 18/00076/Full by TWBC for the development of
a new theatre and part speculative part own use office space**

The Culture Leisure and Tourism Group of the Town Forum fully support the Council's concept that Tunbridge Wells should be a vibrant cultural centre for the community and region of the High Weald, as shown by the proposals for the Cultural Hub.

The Group is aware that it can only comment on the application for the Theatre and Civic Complex in its present form and therefore its comments are limited to the current application.

The Group has reservations about the siting and principle of the development, the conflict between the proposal and the Council's policies and approved plan, and the conflation of two disparate projects into one application.

Environmental

We recognise that the massing of the theatre has been adjusted to reduce its impact, but the bulk of the building and its impact on Calverley Grounds remain of concern.

The council office building has not been modified in a way that will reduce its impact upon Calverley Grounds. This building has an inappropriate horizontal emphasis and bulk resulting from the combination of Council offices, car parking and speculative offices for rent.

Overall we feel the proposals will result in inappropriate urbanisation of the western boundary of the park, and loss of the green screen.

Traffic and Parking

The application does not make suitable proposals for the traffic and parking needs of the development, the exit point for large vehicles relies upon a CPO which will adversely affect a car parking thoroughfare of a major store in the town centre. Vehicle movements by HGVs, coaches and personal traffic will increase in a very congested part of the town centre, in conflict with the Council's aims for reduction of congestion and pollution.

Introducing frequent HGV, coach and small vehicle movements into a restricted junction will interfere with existing traffic flows and pedestrian movement. It will also prevent much needed improvement of Mt Pleasant, the High Street/Grove Hill Road, an important link in the north south pedestrian route for leisure and tourism.

The proposed public space will be more congested than appears on the application documents, particularly due to the frequency and scale of deliveries to the theatre, with consequently lesser pedestrian access than promised.

Previous comments during consultation, that alternative parking arrangements should be considered, have been ignored. The impact of the office block results both in loss of existing parking and the need for extra parking spaces

Response prepared by the Culture Leisure and Tourism Group, Town Forum ,
to planning application 18/00076/Full by TWBC for the development of a new theatre and new offices

Strategy

The Group believes the imposition of Council Offices on the site is arbitrary and not enough has been done to consider alternative strategies and options which would reduce the impact of such a large building, and reduce costs overall.

We are concerned that by embracing this project without long-term plans the Council is placing at risk the future of the existing Civic Complex which comprises nationally important Listed Buildings to which the Council has a duty of care both as owner occupier and planning authority.

We also believe the impact of the underground car park, proposed landscaping and future of Calverley Grounds has not been properly considered.

Summary

Like the Civic Society, the Culture Leisure and Tourism Group, of the Town Forum is reluctant to oppose this application, which contains elements that some members support, but in its present form, combining theatre, civic building and underground car park we believe the application should be refused because

The proposals

- Will harm the environment by urbanising the western boundary of Calverley Grounds;
- Fail to resolve the demands of additional traffic at a congested area in the town centre;
- Show a lack of local character or appropriate scale in the design, of the offices in particular;
- Place the existing Civic Centre at risk.
- Do not satisfy the Decimus Burton Arcadian values it purports to follow.

22 February 2018