

PRESS RELEASE

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Theatres Trust calls for Public Inquiry on loss of Farnham Redgrave

The National Advisory Public Body for Theatres has written to the Planning Director of the Government Office for South East calling for a Public Inquiry on behalf of the *Redgrave Theatre* Farnham over Council approved plans to demolish the theatre. The Theatres Trust has urged Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP to use her reserve powers to save Farnham's only purpose built theatre.

Constructed with public money in 1974, the *Redgrave Theatre* is well equipped and has full stage facilities including an orchestra pit and a large workshop with back-of-house facilities provided in neighbouring Brightwell House, a Grade II listed Georgian building.

The Theatres Trust has consistently objected to applications for development on Land at East Street, Farnham on the basis that the plans include demolition of the theatre without any proposals for replacement or financial compensation for the loss. Although the theatre has been closed for 10 years the Trust believes that it can be reopened and used to provide a cultural centre to the redevelopment, helping to revitalise the heart of Farnham.

The Trust is also concerned by the precedent set by approval of this application. The plans completely conflict with national and regional policy including Surrey County Council's own Cultural Strategy 2002 – 2007 and the Waverly Borough County Cultural Strategy '*A Blueprint for Leisure, 2003 – 2008*' which identifies a lack of theatrical provision in the area and refers to the *Redgrave* as a cultural asset.

Mhora Samuel Director of The Theatres Trust says, "This development has not addressed the impact of the loss of the *Redgrave* nor the benefits associated with the economic, social and cultural strengths a theatre brings to the development. There are no plans to include a 350 seat theatre or provide financial compensation that could provide local residents with a proper theatre. As Planning Policy Statement 6 (PPS6) states, 'The Government's key objective for town centres is to promote their vitality and viability... and make the town more attractive to local residents, shoppers and visitors'. The loss of the Redgrave does not support this policy."

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Notes to Editors

1. The Theatres Trust

The Theatres Trust is the National Advisory Public Body for Theatres. The Trust aims to protect theatres on behalf of the nation. It advises in planning, regeneration and development, architecture and design, heritage, and theatre. It enables better planning to secure, improve and achieve sustainability for new and existing theatre buildings and to protect theatre use. Our aim is to ensure that current and future generations have access to good quality theatres that reflect our rich cultural heritage and offer inspiring new environments in which to enjoy theatre.

2. Farnham Redgrave

Original theatre architect (s): 1974: Frank Rutter (with Theatre Projects Consultants).

Description: Brightwell House was built in 1790 and was acquired by the local council in 1920. In 1974, the *Redgrave Theatre* was attached, the house itself providing a restaurant (the Castle Restaurant) and club room, with other offices and dressing rooms above. The theatre comprises of a single tier auditorium seating 356, entered from the top of the rake and designed to give excellent sightlines. It has a distinctive and unusual concrete roof structure, with beam ends forming eaves, overhanging the brick walls of the auditorium. REDGRAVE is spelt out with a single letter in each deep recess. It has no fly tower and the stage is open-end of 12m width with a thrust effect in the middle; with a large workshop behind. A rehearsal room/studio is situated under the steps of the auditorium, the large foyer serving both.

Theatre Use: The *Redgrave* was partly built by public donations in 1974. It was leased to the Farnham Repertory Theatre but was forced to close because of lack of funds and poor management in 1998 and has been empty ever since. The Council prepared a development brief for the site but it did not include a replacement for the *Redgrave*. Crest Nicholson is the preferred developers for the town centre regeneration and its plans do not include a replacement building; neither is money set aside for the loss of theatre provision.