

Heritage Statement

Job No 760
Job Name Conversion of The Palace Cinema
Location Normandy Street, Alton, Hampshire
Date December 2023
Rev PL01

The Byre, Lantern Courtyard
The Street, Bramley
Hampshire, RG26 5DE




Introduction

This Heritage Statement has been produced by Morse Webb Architects to support a full planning application for the conversion of Palace Cinema (Sui Generis Use Class) to create 6no. 1 and 2-bedroom residential dwellings (class C3). This statement should be read in conjunction with the associated drawings and specialist reports which accompany this application.

The property is located within the Alton Town Centre Conservation Area and sits opposite a selection of Listed Buildings. Because of this, the following Heritage Statement has been prepared with particular reference to the following documents:

- Alton (Town Centre) guidance document (1970)
- Alton Neighbourhood Plan (as modified April 2021)



 Alton town Conservation Area

Statement of significance

Context

While the Palace Cinema itself is not a listed building, it does sit within the boundaries of the Alton Town Centre Conservation Area. The existing building was identified by the Alton Society as a building of local interest. The Local List however has not been formally adopted by East Hants District Council.

The C20 Art Deco appearance of the cinema contrasts the surrounding residential properties which date back to C17 and C18. The render finish and painted street façade of the existing building sits opposite two Grade II Listed residential and commercial buildings, and a Grade II Listed Church, the United Reformed Church, constructed in C19. The residential and commercial buildings surrounding the site have retained their traditional appearance and consist of timber frame structures with brick façades, tiled rooves, and sash windows.

There are rows of terraced and semi-detached dwellings and retail buildings either side of the cinema, many of which were constructed before C20. The overall style of these buildings are traditional, with painted brick façades, timber sash windows, timber panelled doors, and tiled rooves. Some properties have exposed brick finishes, while others have a pebble dashed finish coupled with vertical tile hanging on upper floors.



Site Location Plan: red line indicates site boundary

Existing Property

The Palace Cinema contained two cinema screens, one on ground floor and one on first floor; lobby spaces; projection rooms; and ancillary space for storage and staff use. It was constructed in early 1910's with a highly ornamental semi-circular façade, which was later replaced with the current Art Deco façade in 1930 when the cinema was rebranded. The existing three storey building incorporates a large painted concrete façade with no openings on the first and second floor, and minimal ornamentation throughout the principal elevation. The Art Deco motifs of the façade somewhat contrast the more traditional buildings located along Normandy Street and across the rest of Alton Town. Primary access is from Normandy Street, with a public alleyway along the Southern side of the building to the rear of the site, providing fire escapes and secondary access to the building.



Existing Art Deco principal elevation (left) and previous arched stone principal elevation (right) from Normandy Street

Impact Assessment & Mitigation Strategy

The alterations to the principal elevation are minimal, with the only change being the replacement of the two double doorways on the ground floor with a double-glazed single doorway and a single double-glazed window, constrained to the width of the previous double doorway. The sign above the existing entrance is to also be removed and two high-level windows are to be added in line with the existing openings below. This element of the proposed elevation has been designed to retain the proportionality and symmetry of the entrance, and to not differ too much from the existing façade. The painted concrete frontage is to be appropriately re-rendered and decorated in order to revitalise the weathered finish, while retaining its Art Deco characteristics.

The majority of the works are to be carried out internally. The only exceptions are a minor extension to the first floor, the addition of a small second floor element, and new external windows and doors on the Northeast and Southwest elevations. The first floor extension is located near the rear of the property, away from Normandy Street and the public realm. The second floor extension will be set back behind the existing art-deco façade on the south-east elevation and therefore screen Normandy Street. The new windows to the side elevations will not be visible from public vantage points. There are minimal aesthetic alterations to the external fabric of the building in order to preserve the visual appearance of the building in the Conservation Area.

The impact of the development will be similar to the approved conversion of neighbouring site 58A Normandy Street, application ref: 32440/003, whereby the approved alterations were either internal or were concealed by the existing building and could not be viewed from Normandy Street.

It is also noted that the partial demolition and development of new residential dwellings to the rear of the Palace Cinema, application ref: 32440/004, was approved in October 2014. This application created 4no. 2-bedroom flats within a new build development, finished in red brick and brown colour cladding panels. This development was largely concealed from public vantage points, particularly from Normandy Street.

Statement of Justification

The proposed change of use of the Palace Cinema to residential dwellings has been carefully considered to minimise the impact on the Alton Town Centre Conservation Area and surrounding listed buildings. The primary concern throughout the development's design was to maintain the appearance of the principal elevation fronting Normandy Street. Because of this, minimal alterations to the primary elevation have been proposed and instead the principal elevation is to be sensitively regenerated using a rendered finish to preserve the characteristics of the Art Deco façade, as well as preserve and enhance the appearance of the Conservation Area setting. The replacement of the existing entrance doors with a new single doorway and double-glazed screen is sympathetic to the architectural language of the existing building and material treatment of the southeast façade.

Much of the work is focused on the interior of the existing building, with minimal external work proposed. External work that is required, such as the addition on the first floor, extension on the second floor, the inclusion of external windows, or the replacement of external doors, is located either in the access lanes to the side of the site or set back from the principal Normandy Street elevation. Because of this, they are obscured from public view and therefore have minimal impact on the perception of the Conservation Area.

Consideration of the financial sustainability of The Palace Cinema highlights the issue of keeping the cinema open, due to the loss in profits and increase in running costs over the previous years. The now unused property does not generate any income for the town, and instead occupies and wastes a potentially high value site near the centre of Alton. Instead, converting the disused structure into 6no. flats will provide much needed new dwellings in a convenient location. Furthermore, the sustainable benefits of reusing the existing building far outweigh the cost of demolishing and reconstructing a new building in its place.