

# SAVE BRITAIN'S HERITAGE

21 October 2015

## BACK TO THE FUTURIST: SAVE BRITAIN'S HERITAGE WITH STRONG LOCAL BACKING APPLIES TO LIVERPOOL COUNCIL FOR MEDIATION OVER DECISION TO DEMOLISH LIME STREET



**The Futurist Cinema. Picture by Barry and Genesis Eveleigh**

This week SAVE served proceedings on Liverpool Council, to Judicially Review their decision, taken in August this year, to demolish an important run of Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian buildings along Lime Street, including the 1912 Futurist, Liverpool's oldest Cinema and one of a diminishing number of pre-WWI movie theatres in the UK.

Today, SAVE wrote to Liverpool Council asking for mediation in order to secure the best possible outcome for the street. SAVE, with strong local backing, considers that a better decision can be made for this important gateway street.

SAVE has offered Liverpool Council the option of mediating rather than Judicial Review. This would lead to a workable solution with broad support.

Liverpool Mayor Joe Anderson himself turned down the first design from architects Broadway-Malyan in March, saying that it was "not very impressive". The second

attempt continued to propose demolition of almost the entire historic frontage between the listed Crown and Vines pubs, and has been condemned by local and national architectural and heritage bodies. SAVE considers that more creative options can be explored to decide the fate of one of Liverpool's most important streets.

Speaking in a personal capacity, architect Trevor Skempton, a member of Liverpool's World Heritage Site Steering Group, says: "The historic facades incorporate aspects of communal memory and a varied texture which relates to the human scale of the street. If this potent character is to be lost, this should only be accepted if something much better is to replace it. The proposal shows a monolithic structure. Repeated bays of equal width and similar texture do not have the same effect as the varied existing façades – it's a mistake that's been repeated many times in historic English cities – the grain is made coarser, and subtlety and interest disappear... Faced with this, conservation of the historic buildings seems to be the most logical way."

Lime Street is one of Liverpool's most famous streets – enshrined in the folk-song Maggie May, once a West End hit for Hollywood's Judy Garland, and also because it shares a the name with Liverpool's only surviving mainline Rail Terminus, and Alun Owen's play 'No Trams to Lime Street'.

SAVE's grounds for Judicial Review are that Liverpool Council failed to consult with either UNESCO or the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) regarding the impact on the World Heritage Site (WHS). The North part of Lime Street is in the World Heritage Site, while the South part lies in the Buffer Zone. The present scheme exceeds the height restrictions in the buffer zone and, it is considered by objectors, who include Merseyside Civic Society, the Victorian Society, the Cinema and Theatres Association and respected local figures such as Florence Gerstein of Save Our City, that the design is obtrusive, heavy, and inappropriate for such a historically important and carefully planned area of Liverpool. The area abounds in listed buildings, including Lime Street Station, and St. George's Hall, both part of William Brown Street conservation area.



**The current proposals**

The Futurist Cinema, in the centre of Lime Street, is Liverpool's first purpose built cinema, constructed in 1912 by renowned theatre architects Chadwick and Watson. It has a highly decorative façade of faience tiles. It has been claimed that it is beyond repair, but an engineering report carried out in February by independent civil and structural engineers Sutcliffe's stated that the 'external façade was found to be in reasonable condition'.

It is unfortunate that the street, mostly in the freehold of Liverpool Council, has been neglected over many years. However, it is clear that the buildings are not beyond repair and that it is possible to maintain the human scale, variety and texture of the street whilst developing new accommodation behind.

**SAVE Director Clem Cecil** says: "This is a gateway street of great value and significance – whatever is decided will be the legacy of the future. Our campaign has a lot of local support. This has the potential to be a fantastic working street with strong economic impact. There is scope for building on the back of the site, but there is no need to destroy the entire block."

Speaking in a personal capacity, **architect and member of Liverpool's World Heritage Site Steering Group Trevor Skempton** says: "The WHS and buffer zone include most of the city centre. There is no other WHS like it. Comparable areas like The Bund in Shanghai and Lower Manhattan do not face the restrictions of being World Heritage Sites. But, Liverpool, like them, has to breathe and grow – conserving the historic fabric and the spirit of the place as an integral part of its future...we should be ensuring that all developments within the WHS and its buffer zone are either exemplary in conservation terms or outstanding examples of modern design, representative of the progressive spirit of Liverpool."

**SAVE President Marcus Binney** says: "The proposed new frontages along Lime Street are wholly inappropriate in a street which is a main approach to the World Heritage Site. Liverpool needs to keep the street frontages including the handsome early cinema, and develop on the empty site behind. With a little more effort this can be a win win situation."

**Jonathan Brown, a planning consultant and Merseyside Civic Society council member** says: "This is a golden opportunity to deliver a first-rate future for Lime Street. Neptune should be able to offer Liverpool a better balance of new buildings and restoration on this most important city gateway, as they did in their excellent redevelopment of the art-deco airport in Speke.

"I hope the offer of mediation is embraced by the Council to encourage the developer's architects to come up with a more sensitive and sophisticated scheme."

In March this year Baltic Triangle based architects 'We Make Places' worked with a group of local designers to come up with [a widely praised alternative vision for Lime Street](#), retaining the facade of the Futurist as a 'Winter Garden' to connect the historic street front with the new development.



**International award-winning screen writer Frank Cottrell Boyce**, who is working on the new Harry Potter prequel film currently being shot in Liverpool, visited the Futurist on Back to the Future Day, 21 October 2015, the date on which the heroes of Back to the Future 2 are projected from 1985. He said: "This cinema is called the Futurist because it once represented the future when Liverpool led the world. I saw 2001: A Space Odyssey as a kid at the Futurist, which was full of visions of an amazing future. I still feel Liverpool's future could be different and amazing, and does not have to be about knocking down our historic buildings and putting up off - the - shelf student accommodation.

"Instead the Futurist could show the imaginative use of our heritage. It would be great to see its fine French Renaissance interior restored for use not just as a commercial cinema, but in an interesting and different way as a cinematic exhibition space for, say, I-Max or 3-D special features. Some of these could be aimed at visitors to tell Liverpool's story in a spectacular way.

"There's a future for these niche cinemas as seen in New York and Berlin. So why not make the Futurist into the UK's leader and put Liverpool ahead of the game again?"

For more information please contact the SAVE office on 0207 253 3500 or [office@savebritainsheritage.org](mailto:office@savebritainsheritage.org)



Photos by Barry and Genesis Eveleigh

## Notes to Editors

**SAVE Britain's Heritage** has been campaigning for historic buildings since its formation in 1975 by a group of architects, journalists and planners. It is a strong, independent voice in conservation, free to respond rapidly to emergencies and to speak out loud for the historic built environment.

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