

HERITAGE CASEWORK

by Mike Whitcombe

The CTA Casework Committee are continually involved in securing a positive future for many endangered cinemas, both present and former. It's important work – here's a summary of our current work load.

England

Grade II*

STATE, GRAYS (Francis Chancellor, 1938)

The local MP, Jen Craft, has met the owner about security and an impending planning application for the State. He said that CCTV will be installed to help prevent further vandalism and that the planning application will be submitted to Thurrock soon – but how soon?

EMPIRE, WISBECH (F Ward and SEA Woolnough, 1932)

Rio Bingo have taken over the lease from the former operators, Winners Bingo. Rio Bingo are a small family business and are unlikely to make any alterations to the building.

Grade II

PICTURE HOUSE, HALIFAX (William Longbottom, 1913)

We have supported Tasmin Cook, the Conservation Officer, on this case, but we are still concerned for the interior, which is being used by a church, who have allegedly made internal alterations without Listed Building Consent. Permission for an external sign on the right-hand side has been refused by the council.

FORUM, LIVERPOOL (William Glen, 1931)

We have contacted Councillor Nick Small and passed on his details to several parties who are interested in the building for use as a theatre. We feel it would be beneficial if all concerned could meet. Latest pictures from Urban Explorers show how devastating the deterioration of the interior is.

SAVOY, BURNT OAK, LONDON (George Coles, 1936)

The original plan was for an open-plan workplace plus mini flats but a new application has increased the number of flats to 218 instead of the original 125. We had a Zoom meeting with the planner and the Conservation Officer, and tried to persuade them to decrease the number of flats proposed but was told that the proposed number is the minimum deemed viable. We have also discussed the proposal with Historic England.

CAPITOL, FOREST HILL, LONDON (John Stanley Beard, 1931)

We sent a letter to the Case Officer of Lewisham Council to say that we are happy with most of the proposals in the current planning application, except for the removal of the seating for reuse at another cinema in London, designed by Beard. We have received no response. Lewisham council's website does not show any comments from us or others, either.

FORUM, FULHAM ROAD, LONDON (John Beard & Alfred Clare, 1930)

The scheme for the building was shared with us - the developer is Little Houses Group. There will be two cinema screens and the original proscenium will be visible again. The interior is already divided into seven screens. The interior of the entrance corner rotunda still exists on the ground floor as a first-floor space. It is planned to have a children's play area incorporated in the scheme. Although it's at a pre-application stage at present, we are generally supportive of it.

CURZON, MAYFAIR, LONDON (Horace Hammond, 1966)

The owner, Dan Zaum, told us that he wanted the 'royal boxes' at the back of the auditorium, which were boxed in some years ago, to be extended on a new (hidden) steel structure for VIP use. Although this is a significant intervention, we have written to say we can tolerate the alterations to the building as long as it's operated as a cinema.

REGAL, ROTHERHAM (Blackmore & Sykes, 1934)

The owners, Rotherham Council, have spent a considerable amount of money shuttering the windows to secure and maintain the building. Although it is not clear what the Council intend to do with the cinema, that is a positive start.

NORTHWICK, WORCESTER (Charles Wilford, 1938)

At the time of writing, we can confirm the building is still for sale.

NOT LISTED

PICTURE HOUSE, BEACONSFIELD (Julian Leathart & William Granger, 1927)

A planning application for a Wetherspoon conversion has been approved. As no original interior remains, we feel the proposals look acceptable.

GAUMONT, BIRKENHEAD (Daniel MacKay & William Trent, 1938)

The building was sold for £145,000 in June but we have heard no news since. We have written to the Conservation Officer to say that we are concerned about the case, and that the façade facing Grade I listed Birkenhead Park should be retained in any redevelopment. The building has interesting internal vertical glazed lighting fixtures but the auditorium is otherwise plain. The actress, Nova Pilbeam, imprinted her hands in cement there in the 1930s, and it is the only cinema building left in Birkenhead.

RITZ, BRIGHOUSE (JH Freer, 1937)

The building is looking sorry for itself and there are plans to demolish it and replace it with a drive-through coffee shop. The local Civic Society do not seem to be particularly interested in the case but we have written a letter to Calderdale Council to emphasise the loss of community use and, as the consultation process is now over, we will await developments.

CENTRAL, CAMBRIDGE (George Banyard, 1930)

This case went to appeal on 10 September 2025 but we were not informed. It was a one-day hearing.



MAJESTIC, CRADLEY HEATH (David Gray & George Webb, 1933)

News that the cinema had been demolished was false and we have been told by the Conservation Officer for Sandwell Council that it would need a 'prior approval' application for demolition. It is totally derelict and the best feature of the building is a stained glass window in the stairwell. We are hoping this can be salvaged.

BRONTË, HAWORTH (Albert Thompson, 1921)

Historic England have decided not to recommend the building for listing. We feel it would be worth asking the owner to photographically record the building. We feel it is important to save the surviving paybox.

PICTURE HOUSE (1913) & RITZ, KEIGHLEY (Samuel Beverley, 1938)

The Picture House is still functioning as a two screen cinema, operated by Northern Morris Cinemas and owned by Bradford Council who have put the building on the market for £110,000. Keighley Town Council are hoping to purchase it. Campaigner Jane Lee re-formed the local Civic Society and achieved an Asset of Community Value designation for the Ritz.

CLIFTON, LEOMINSTER (Ernest Roberts, 1936)

We are still trying to find a home for the ticket kiosk. We have, however, received reassurance from a member of the Herefordshire conservation staff that the paybox is safe for now.

BROADWAY, LETCHWORTH (Robert Bennett and William Bidwell, 1936)

We have supported a listing application that has been submitted.

ODEON, CAMDEN TOWN, LONDON (Daniel MacKay, William Trent and Sydney Trent, 1937)

We have written again to Camden council to say that we object to the proposals, saying we want the foyer, with its original decoration, retained.

DOMINION, HARROW, LONDON (Frank Bromige, 1936)

We have written to the Harrow Council planner about having the main name signage reinstated. A new cinema, named the Metro, has opened on part of the site.



GENESIS, STEPNEY, LONDON (William Glen, 1939)

A decision has not been made yet regarding the redevelopment application. Along with The Spitalfields Trust, SAVE and The Twentieth Century Society, we are objecting.

CORNER HOUSE, MANCHESTER (1910, and Peter Cummings, 1935)

The building is threatened by the redevelopment of Oxford Road railway station but because little or nothing of the original cinema scheme survives, and the changes by Peter Cummings of the mid-1930s are compromised, we will not be making representations.

POINT, MILTON KEYNES (Building Design Partnership and Neil Tibbatts, 1985)

We have been consulted by Historic England about a new Certificate of Immunity from listing and we are being supported by The Twentieth Century Society in our objection.

PREMIER ELECTRIC, SOMERCOTES (1913)

We have objected to demolition. Unfortunately, we feel that the very large moulded cement sign is probably not salvageable.

PLAZA, WINCANTON (Edward Holding, 1934)

The building has been in use as a church but cinema operators applied to bring it back into film use by dividing it up into three small screens. Work has already begun.

PLAZA, WORTHING (Harry Weston, 1933)

We were only told about this case at the last minute and that the proposal is to demolish the building but to give the new flats a replica of the original façade. We are asking for the building to be photographically recorded.

Wales

Grade II

PALACE, CONWY (Sydney Foulkes, 1936)

The Palace is currently for sale and we have rung Joan Vaughan (Conwy Town Mayor) to discuss the situation; we are also hoping to look at the interior to assess its condition.



THEATRE ROYAL, MERTHYR TYDFIL (TC Wakeling, 1891)

We are not hopeful for this case as the building, derelict since 2006, is in a remote location at the north end of Merthyr Tydfil and is prone to flooding. We are, however, still contacting the local council in an attempt to save it. It ran as a cinema from 1932 when it was acquired by ABC and given an art deco makeover. Some of this survives but it's in a very dilapidated condition.

Past and present cinemas around the country are always under threat. The CTA Casework team are always happy to help another cinema from disappearing forever and your help could be vital in doing just that. If any member learns of a threat to a cinema, please let the Casework Committee know. You might just save a cinema for future generations.

