
From: planningcomments@staffs Moorlands.gov.uk
Sent: 26 August 2025 11:00
To: Planning Comments (SMDC)
Subject: Comment Received from Public Access

Categories:

Application Reference No. : SMD/2025/0312 Site Address: The Foxlowe Market Place Leek Staffordshire ST13 6AD
Leek Comments by: Michael Quine

From:

Alsop St
Leek
LEEK

ST13 5NZ

Phone:

Email:

Submission: Support

Comments: I am in support of this application and my comments follow. To be open, I have to declare a small interest & I have been fortunate to be allowed to bring some small-scale touring theatre companies in to the Foxlowe, but I have no other connection with the Centre or its management.

It seems to me that there are three areas of possible concern: 1: the feasibility of making the whole building accessible to those who are at present denied access; 2: whether the town needs or indeed can support a performance facility of this increased size; 3: the immediate land-based neighbours; 4: environmental matters.

1: at present the building is only Accessible on one level, the ground floor: first and second floors are inaccessible to those with seriously impaired mobility. This means they cannot visit the Gallery or work in the Centre's first-floor office nor, indeed, work in the top-floor workspaces. These days, this is not acceptable and the proposed development would put that right.

2: Leek has a population of some 21,000. Buxton is declared at a little fewer yet has a fully equipped cinema seating 352 showing the latest blockbusters, NT Live and similar events as well as world cinema & Leek shows film one time a week, much of the year, in a fit-up context. Without mentioning the Buxton Opera House, it can be suggested that Leek has the potential to provide bigger audiences than it can at the moment. And that refers only to film & the Foxlowe offers much more than film. It is worth pointing out, too, that the Foxlowe serves more of the Moorlands than just the town of Leek.

More: the creation of an adaptable space will make it possible to attract a wider range of live performance, whether theatre/drama, dance or more contemporary activity. The present flat floor and letter-box stage with no headroom offer few opportunities for other than relatively simplistic presentations.

To be sure, the development would cut car-parking space. In evenings, this would not matter since there is free public parking very near. In the daytime, for customers and staff, there might be an issue: to address this might, in the first place, be to encourage the use of walking or bicycles, or, in the second, to add to the existing pressure on local government to in turn pressure for bus service improvement. Beyond that, of course, SMDC has substantial parking space to the north of its building: whatever is to happen to that building after SMDC disappears, a formal Agreement could well offer ongoing parking there for Foxlowe users.

3: Larger audiences can of course provide noise disturbance. From my reading of the documents, audiences will exit on to Stockwell St as now or through the yard to the immediate east of that doorway. That does not seem to me to create un-neighbourly disturbance for residents.

To be sure, some music performances can be relatively loud, but a new-build can and must take account of that.

4: It is a great pity that the proposed development does damage to the existing open/garden space which has been assiduously looked after and developed by a committed group of gardeners and enthusiasts: unusual apple trees, meadow grasses and more will be harmed if not even removed. It's hard to see how what will be destroyed can be replaced though I suspect that there are no threatened plants or indeed fauna there, which is some consolation.

I am not qualified to comment on any possible damage to Listed historical/architectural features of the building, internal or external. From the Market Place there will apparently be little change to the view of the building: to be sure, the new-build at the rear will be a startling change for those used to the present view but surely no view of other buildings or horizons can be guaranteed not to change even trees grow. After all this is not St Paul's Cathedral.

The Foxlowe was created on a wing and prayer some 15 years ago, as a not-for-profit organisation. It receives no ongoing public funding and has nonetheless built a secure and welcomed presence in the town. Few, very few (if any), arts centres operate without such subsidy. The proposed development would give the Centre the opportunity to sustain and develop its wide-ranging cultural offer benefiting the wider community while also maintaining and securing the listed building for future generations.

Do you really need to print out this Email? Be green - keep it on the screen.

This email is intended for the addressee(s) only and may contain sensitive, privileged or confidential information that could be protectively marked. If you are not the addressee please do not use the information in any way. If you have received this email in error please notify the sender immediately and delete it from your system. Thank you.

The Council may be required to disclose this email or any responses to it under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The way in which we handle personal information is set out in our privacy notice and is available at <https://www.staffsmoorlands.gov.uk/YourData>
