

# Save The Regent

## Information Note for Council Meeting, Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council, 20<sup>th</sup> February 2014

1. This brief note supports a presentation by the Save the Regent campaign team to the Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council on 20<sup>th</sup> February 2014.
2. This is not a legal document. All details are correct to the best of our knowledge at the time of writing.

### Executive Summary

**Our campaign aims to Save The Regent cinema / theatre from demolition and put it to use by the community for generations to come. We have significant public support. Despite permissions and agreements being in place for the site's demolition, the final deal is not done. We believe the Council can still intervene with its developers for the bus station redevelopment and save The Regent by finding an alternative site for a supermarket car park.**

### Our Aim

3. Our campaign wants to stop the demolition of a 1920s cinema / theatre known as The Regent (latterly The Gaumont and Flutters Bingo) on the corner of Lancaster Road and Rugby Road, Hinckley. We want to put this 1,200-seater venue to community use as an engine for regeneration, a source of civic pride, and a unique feature in the heart of our town.
4. We would manage The Regent as a not-for-profit enterprise, hiring the auditorium during the day and evening to members of the community. Our supporters want to use the venue as an art cinema, a performance and rehearsal space, for indoor sport, a civic hall for schools groups and community events, or as a wedding venue. There are successful examples of projects like this across the country.

## Why

- **Regeneration.** The Regent was designed to be the gateway to Hinckley. It still could be. A revived community venue on that spot would be a keystone between the town centre shops and 700-year-old market and the new Crescent development and bus station.
- **Heritage.** We have lost many of our heritage buildings in Hinckley. Of course we want new developments to progress, but it is wrong to trade an icon of Hinckley life for 85 years, and a viable community building for generations to come, for a car park. Protecting heritage has proven to be an invaluable tool for regeneration. The Regent could be part of what makes Hinckley different, visited and invested in.
- **Community.** Our town has strong reserves of community spirit in its sports teams, theatre groups, business networks, churches and more, but we do not have a venue in Hinckley where we come together to celebrate that - a civic hall or similar. The Hinckley Hub is not right for this. Also, we have few spaces where young and old can come together. For a town of Hinckley's size, there is a gap. The Regent could fulfil this need.

## The Story of the Campaign

5. A revised planning application in December alerted people in Hinckley to the future of the Flutters bingo hall. One Hinckley business owner was using the auditorium for storage, and started a Facebook page to gauge people's reaction to its demolition. It quickly gathered momentum, and an outpouring of community spirit followed, dismayed that we were about to lose a piece of Hinckley's heritage – The Regent or The Gaumont. Many people didn't even know how incredible the auditorium and Art Deco features were inside. They came to find out and decided that they didn't want The Regent to become a car park. Today our campaign has 2,050 supporters ("likes") on Facebook (see some of their words at Annex A).
6. A small campaign group formed and called on supporters to say how they would like the building to be used. Many ideas were put forward: an art cinema, a rehearsal and performance space, a venue for school plays and civic events, live indoor sport and more. Using our supporters' passion and ideas, the campaign group wrote a business plan to sustain the venue as a not-for-profit enterprise. We opened discussions with the owner and the Council to see what could be done to stop the demolition and secure The Regent for community use.
7. Our support grew. All political parties (some privately, some publicly) gave their support. Bosworth's MP joined the cause. Media interest from the Hinckley Times, Leicester Mercury, Oak FM, BBC Radio Leicester and BBC East Midlands Today enabled us to get our message across. We focused on looking for investors who shared our vision to secure the building for the community. We began a crowd-funding campaign online to build

momentum and demonstrate local support. We received over 100 donations (which have since been returned because we did not reach an ambitious target).

8. We contacted English Heritage and the Cinema and Theatre Association and they sent officials to see the venue. English Heritage has put forward a recommendation that the building be considered for “listing” but this will take many months before a decision can be reached. Sadly, there is no way to expedite this process.
9. Ahead of the planning committee, we decided not to object to the revised planning permission. An existing permission from 2011 was already in place to demolish completely the site. The revised permission, if approved, would keep the shops and a front-section of the building but would demolish the hall. We did not object in order to save the shops. The planning for demolition of the auditorium went through. We were assured that conversations between owner and Council could continue.
10. We received the backing of local businesses through a photo and banner campaign. 1,600 people signed petitions in Hinckley Town Centre. Our search for investors continued.
11. The owner of Flutters Bingo met senior officials at the Council and the Leader of the Council. He told them that he had a deal in place with a supermarket for the site. Later, he held a press briefing, facilitated by the Council, at which he told journalists that the cost to buy and renovate completely The Regent would be £2 million (This was double the figure previously given to us and remains uncorroborated). The press reported this alongside a Council statement which echoed the owner’s statement. To our knowledge, the Council has not carried out an independent survey of the value of the premises. For many, this seemed to signal the end of the campaign. We believe it is not.
12. We began our own fact-finding on the status of the deals in place, and have submitted Freedom of Information requests to the Council. We look forward to replies in due course.
13. Councillor Peter Batty and other councillors requested an extra-ordinary general meeting to discuss the Save The Regent campaign at full Council because of the high level of public interest. Those efforts secured an agenda point at the Council meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> February 2014.

### **The Situation Now**

14. Our fact finding has found out that the deal to demolish The Regent is not yet complete. It can be stopped.
15. It is true that there are provisional agreements in place between the owner and demolition contractors, and between the owner and Iceland. However these agreements depend, we understand, on Iceland completing a deal with the Tin Hat Regeneration Partnership, the

organisation which is re-developing the bus station. The Council has underwritten the cost of much of the work that the Tin Hat is doing with public funds.

16. As we understand it, the chain is as follows:

- The **Council** has in place a Compulsory Purchase Order for the land that the existing Iceland store sits on now. They are purchasing the land for The Crescent (bus station) development. However, the paperwork is not complete. This is the responsibility of...
- the **Tin Hat Regeneration Partnership** (the developers of the new bus station). Tin Hat must submit a "General Vesting Declaration" to Iceland. This completes the process for the supermarket to move and secures for Iceland compensation (paid by Tin Hat, arguably underwritten by the Council with public funds).
- **Iceland** has in place a provisional deal with a company connected to the owner of The Regent (Flutter). Their agreement is to pay the owner to demolish The Regent's auditorium and build a car park. The owner would build a new store for Iceland in The Regent's existing car park.
- However, **the owner** of The Regent and Iceland cannot finalise their deal unless the paperwork for the Compulsory Purchase Order is complete (see the beginning of the chain).

17. Therefore, to this group of campaigners, the deal is not complete. There is still time to find a solution that satisfies all parties.

### **What options are there?**

18. Given that a deal is not complete, we would like to know:

- Would Iceland accept a different site for its store?
- Would Iceland accept an alternative car park for its store?
- Could Iceland be accommodated in The Crescent development (and so have no need to pay to demolish The Regent)?

19. If yes, we hope to convince the owner of The Regent not to demolish the site and we would find an investor to purchase it from him. We would then put The Regent to community use. We are calling on the Council and Tin Hat's good offices to negotiate towards one of those options.

20. We know arrangements are at an advanced stage, but it is clear to us that the Council does have the ability, if it has the will, to stop the demolition by finding an alternative site for Iceland.

21. Separately, however, we should note that this chain of events does not prevent the owner of The Regent carrying out works inside the building now, e.g. stripping the walls.

### **What we have learnt**

22. This campaign has raised a number of other issues which the Council may wish to consider in due course:

- Is heritage given enough emphasis in planning issues? If English Heritage is prepared to consider “listing” The Regent, how was this overlooked before?
- Community spirit in Hinckley is strong and people of all ages want to include heritage sites as a way to regenerate the town.
- Major infrastructure and re-development projects have many moving parts. It would be beneficial for the public to understand who has overall responsibility and overall control of such projects, particularly when they involve public money.
- Social media has been instrumental in galvanising public support, but there is no avenue at present for its consideration in Council decision-making.

### **Recommendations**

23. In summary, our recommendations as a campaign group are as follows:

- a) Save The Regent by negotiating an alternative site for Iceland (through the Council / Tin Hat’s good offices) and encourage the owner to stop internal works until we know the outcome of this.
- b) Find a suitable building that can meet the people of Hinckley’s wish to have a community venue in the heart of the town centre.
- c) Consider how social media can be included in decision-making at the Council, including planning issues.

## Questions for further clarification

24. We will have limited time in our presentation on 20<sup>th</sup> February 2014. We also wanted to keep this note short and digestible. We would be happy to answer further questions on any of the following:

- Our position on development of the bus station
- Our position on having Iceland in the town centre
- Our view on the proposed £2 million for purchase and renovation of The Regent
- Our proposed business model
- Investors we have approached
- The heritage of the building
- The motivation of our campaign team
- The comments and input of 1000s of people who have supported this campaign

## List of Annexes

- A. Testimony from supporters on the Save The Regent Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/savetheregent](http://www.facebook.com/savetheregent))
- B. Summary of History of The Regent

## Annex A - Some of the testimony from supporters on the Save The Regent Facebook page (printed as written on our page)

Can this Borough Council really allow another part of the town's heritage to be replaced by a supermarket car park? I have never been inside this theatre, but from the pictures it looks a tremendous asset worthy of saving. Funding could come from a variety of sources, large employers of the area, national arts and culture organisations, even the likes of Sainsbury's and other national names appearing in this new development. They may have agreed certain schemes as part of 'planning gains', but they also appreciate the importance of respecting communities, and with changes in planning regulations and the emergence of smaller 'supermarkets' to accommodate 'top-up shopping, they need access to high streets again and therefore develop a reputation for working with the areas they're looking to draw revenue out of! Good luck with what you are doing. The Regent deserves better than to be turned into car parking spaces.

Save the regent for £10 membership, (refunded) if fails, the venue has limitless possibilities, weddings, music, cinema, dance groups, ballet class's, theatre, car shows, motor bikes shows, hinckley carnival queen presentation, discos, live bands, come on dont just click like,share, pass it on to your facebook friends, get them to join today, become a member, NOW, TODAY, THIS MINUTE,

Great to see all the support you have been given for this project, just a shame everyone didn't dig deep and donate at least 10GBP at the same time. We lost all of our beautiful old buildings in Perth, Western Australia, because the powers that be decided we could attract more tourists with a 'modern' city and loads of parking spaces. Has had the opposite effect and now the parking spaces are being developed into super ugly concrete & glass structures. It is just so sad that our children and future generations, will have no idea of the beauty that used to be Perth .. except in photos. I do hope Hinckley doesn't make the same mistake when the opportunity is there to buy the building and make a real Community project of it. Wishing you all the best for your excellent efforts.

This is a really significant part of Hinckley's history and it turns out it is even more than that. I have such memories, Saturday morning club, The Parent Trap and 007 (and the friends that go with all those things!).

Save the Regent, its been part of my life in Hinckley for over 30 years! It is a classic old building, to good to be demolished and replaced by some more uglier buildings! Would be great if it could become the soul of the town like i beleive it once was.

I dont know if you realise how many people are talking about this campaign. My family, friends and workmates are all talking about it, everyone I have spoken to about it are all of the same opinion, that Hinckley NEEDS this, needs life breathing back into the town. The community spirit seems to have been lying dormant for a long time but has been awoken by a few people who cared. Thank you all!

[Hinckley AFC](#) support [Save The Regent](#) campaign, two groups of people bringing something special back to Hinckley Town

Sorry I don't have money to donate but I have written an article which hopefully will bring the campaign to the

attention of a few more people <http://lovebirdsvintage.blogspot.co.uk/2014/01/save-regent.html>

I came to Burbage in 2001 and Hinckley was a healthy market town. I would love to shop locally and indeed do buy my fruit and veg in the town. However that is all I go in for. Really sad. The only way to ensure Hinckley grows as a thriving town is to invest in social venues and to encourage people to invest their time in the town centre. If we pop into town for a coffee or lunch then the likelihood is that we "mooch" around and end up buying local from independent retailers. This in turn will drive new businesses into our town. We need a reason to go into town and supporting this effort is a small start lets keep what's great and build on it!

It is brilliant to see that so many people are joining this page and coming up with Ideas and giving support to the campaign, it just goes to show that people do care. Im proud to be a Hinckley gal at the moment!

I was acting Deputy Manager when this was closed down as a cinema in 1968 and knew at the time that this was a beautiful building too good even for bingo. If my memory serves me right the last films we screened were "A Dandy In Aspic", "Planet Of The Apes", and "The Wild One". For this building to be demolished would be a travesty!!

We went along on Saturday to look around the old building and were amazed at the fantastic condition its in. From the sloping floor to the original balcony looking down from a high onto the stage. The stairwell from Regent street to the balcony passes some fantastic stain glass windows onto the projector room where you can only imagine the films people must have watched and enjoyed. Everything is still there, chairs, stage, some lighting controls and even the bar. You could hold an event there almost over night, maybe a boxing night or have a local band play there, Triumph managed to get the Kaiser Chiefs at Mallory Park a couple of years ago, maybe they could do the same to save the Regent. Hinckley has gone through some tough times in recent years and seen some historic building close and fall into dis-repair but others have been granted a new lease of life such as the Atkins building standing proud next to the new college. The bus station development is due to get underway shortly and will be a massive boost to the town bringing people from far and wide. So I say, come on the good folk of Hinckley, young and old, get behind this campaign to save our local landmark, put it to good use other than another car park. Act now before its too late, please. Paul and Tracey.

An interesting approach to Town Planning in Hinckley: take an original 1929 Art Deco building, complete (including stained glass); in good condition as it has been occupied until recently. Then demolish it to create a car-park. Short-sighted - of course. Councillors should look at Napier, New Zealand to find out about respect for Art Deco heritage. Before the bulldozers move in let us do something about this ... let Hinckley Council know what you think ... a Hinckley Times campaign is definitely in order!

Just been and had a nose at The Regent,if they bulldoze this building it's absolute sacrilege.The place is incredible, proper Art Deco, It maybe be on bbc local news tonight so check it out,and if you haven't already done so,go and sign the petition at Indigo Home,Regent Street.

Just wanted to say that it is really nice to see so many people from Hinckley getting together to support such a worthy cause as this. All that usually comes up on the Hinckley related feeds is negativity but this seems to be getting people from the area working together in a positive way.. It's a cause worth fighting together for. Keep up the good work.

comment in the Hinckley times from one council member.."we haven't got the money to buy it." strange how they had plenty of money to build the Hub and to replace the Leisuire center Art Deco Cinema - RESTORE RESTORE RESTORE - this type of building is precious, any fool can design and make a car park. Good luck with the battle. Boogie On Guys & Gals

Now this may be something that has already been mentioned (I must have missed it) but why can they not consider turning the Regent BACK in to a cinema venue and promoting it as an 'art deco experience', giving Hinckley an attraction that would draw people in, rather than simply building another "MultiPlex" that are EVERYWHERE. Or, what about the "Regent Hall"? Nuneaton & Bedworth have their Civic Hall... so Hinckley's Regent would be a great place for touring comics and new bands/musicians to play at. We have lost far too much of our history/heritage to developers over the years and it's about time we stood up and saved what little we have left. (OK... am now off my soapbox

I had a nostalgic trip down memory lane today ... first time i've been in The Regent ( Gaumont cinema ) since1968 . An absolute treasure if you like Art Deco , I hope anybody reading this gets the chance to view as I did. I wish Darren the very best in trying to save part or all of the building ,he has get great vision and deserves all the support he can get .Good Luck

You know what will happen if the support is not enough to save the Regent. Sometime in a couple of years, someone will say when they are parking their car. I remember there used to be a lovely old theatre here, before it became a Car Park. Well that's too late so Share and support this page, try to find a bit of history about it as it can only help.

How can they pull down Flutters Bingo hall down to make a car park. Is Hinckley's heritage a joke. This building could host events from Music to Comedians. There is no where else locally to attract major artists. We can put Hinckley back on the map, instead of letting it become a blob on the map.

My Auntie worked there for many years, I know she would sad at the thought of it going..! This would make an amazing music venue,come on Hinckley council,do something with the council tax we pay!

I used to go here when it was Zettors as a little girl, every Friday and Saturday night with my mum. It's a shame. it's going, it holds so many memories for me. Has anyone on the local council actually looked inside this building, the architecture and internal decor are amazing and as we have so few of the beautiful old buildings with any character left in my home town it is time they realised that once gone these buildings are lost forever and Hinckley will be one of an ever increasing list of faceless, soulless places which could be mistaken for any of the others on the list and all for the sake of a car park!The remains of Hinckley workhouse were demolished without anyone putting up a fight for it just so that yet another housing estate could be built but I suppose if enough money is offered our council will do anything to grab it, shame on you all!!!

One of the last beautiful buildings in Hinckley. It survived the 60th concrete era and surely has to remain as part of Hinckley's remaining heritage. 230 "likes" in less than 20 hours since the "Save the Regent" facebook page was created! I think that speaks for itself! This beautiful Art Deco building needs to be protected from barbaric demolition, restored sympathetically, and used again to its full potential. Once it's gone, it's gone forever along with another chunk of history. Come on! Save the Regent! It could be a huge asset to the town!

I think this would turn into a great wedding venue and even themed nights and also conference parties like Athena or the City Rooms in Leicester! I'm all for supporting this my dad was mortified



when he heard what the council were doing! Shame on you H.C!!! as soon as the regent stopped being used by the last owners i knew it wouldn't be long before this council would want to pull it down , in my eyes this would be such a shame.

### **Annex B – Summary of the history of The Regent**

The Regent theatre and cinema opened on the 11th March 1929. It was built by the Hinckley & Dursley Picture Company as the new gateway to Hinckley town centre.

The architect appointed was Horace G Bradley from Birmingham. The Regent is now the last surviving complete example of a Horace Bradley cinema in the UK and was a near twin with the Kingsway cinema Birmingham, which no longer exists.

The Regent opened with a live stage show entitled “The Adventures or Ambrose Applejohn” and the first film was shown on 14th March 1929.

The Cinema was later known as The Gaumont and then, The Classic. It closed as a cinema in 1968 and bingo was introduced in June 1968. This continued until 15<sup>th</sup> June 15 2013.

### **Save The Regent Campaign Group**

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**19<sup>th</sup> February 2014**