

Drinks balcony refused at Caley Picture House

The Edinburgh Wetherspoon's bid to open its balcony up as a drinks terrace has failed.

The council refused to grant planning permission over fears the changes would ruin the character of the former Lothian Road cinema, which is occupied by the pub chain.

It was proposed the currently unused first floor balcony of the Caley Picture House would be restored as a new outdoor drinking area overlooking the city centre street.

A petition sent to the council showed over 250 people added their signatures in support of the development going ahead.

However, the plans were thrown out as they went before councillors this week.

JD Wetherspoon's bid to make alterations to the iconic B-listed building was registered with planners in November and was referred to the Development Management Sub-Committee for consideration on Wednesday.

Plans showed the pub wanted to create new access to the balcony by replacing a window with a door, whilst attaching a new perspex balustrade to the existing stone parapet.

The drinks terrace would have been complete with "seating, tables, planters and floor up-lighting," and be open to customers until 11 pm.

A planning document said: "The balustrade now proposed has been designed to evoke the Art-Deco interior of the host building, fitting with the character and appearance of the building.

"The proposed development also seeks to enlarge the existing women's bathroom and remodel the female staff toilets and the

staff room on the internal top-floor balcony level of the building.”

A petition with 261 signatures submitted as part of the application urged the committee to give the terrace the green light, arguing it was “fitting with the continued social history” of the 100 year-old building and would result in “additional employment opportunities.”

It was also argued that allowing the terrace to go-ahead would allow customers to experience the Caley Picture House “in a new light.”

Plans added: “The use of the, at present, defunct balcony area will increase the capacity of the building and afford a greater level of engagement with the surrounding streetscape.”

However council planners took the opposite view, saying the balustrade would disrupt the building’s “sense of symmetry” and describing it as a “significant and visually intrusive external feature.”

They added it would also “severely reduce the ability to appreciate the composition of the building, creating an undesirable and unsympathetic focal point on the first floor.”

A report recommending councillors refuse the plans continued: “The creation of an accessible use of the space at first floor level would formalise an outdoor use.

“It would result in people being able to congregate on a very prominent location on the building, which was never intended to be accessed and used in the way that is now being proposed.

“The change of this part of the building from an architectural feature, positively contributing to the overall character of the building, to a functional space, occupied by individuals, would have a negative effect on the special interest and character of the listed building.”

The committee sided with officers, unanimously refusing planning permission. The pub now has three months to lodge an appeal if it wishes to do so.

by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter

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Proposed balcony alterations. Image: Wetherspoons.