

Heritage Statement  
to support planning application for change of use etc  
at The Palace, Market Place, Longridge

RVBC planning application: 3/2025/0612

October 2025

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## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 This heritage statement has been produced to support planning application 3/2025/0612 to Ribble Valley Borough Council (RVBC), for the “*Proposed change of use from vacant cinema (sui generis) to children’s role play centre Use Class E(d) with ancillary café Use Class E(b) and external alterations to the building*”. It was commissioned by the applicant, and a site visit was made by the writer on 22 October 2025, when the roof was undergoing re-slating.
- 1.2 The site lies within the Longridge conservation area (a designated heritage asset), and is identified by the council as a “building of townscape merit”, which thereby automatically meets their criteria for a non-designated heritage asset.

## 2 Location and setting

- 2.1 The building stands on the north-west side of Market Place near the east end of Longridge town centre, at NGR: SD 60604 37206. Its front forms the north-east end of a row of terraced houses facing the street, at back of footpath, and beyond a narrow gap at the right-hand side of the building, another terrace continues along Market Place to its junction with Berry Lane. Further terraced houses line the opposite side of the street, facing the building.



Photo 1: The building in its setting, on the north-west side of Market Place

- 2.2 There is a yard to the rear, on different levels, accessible from Brewery Street. This road is mainly lined by other terraced houses, but also contains a modern care home building.

### 3 Current use

- 3.1 The building is currently disused but its last use was as a cinema.

### 4 Historical background

- 4.1 The Lancashire Historic Environment Record has an entry for the Palace Cinema (PRN24745 - MLA24334). Its description reads:

Handloom weaving warehouse, now used as a theatre/cinema. Dated to early 1800s. Two entrance doors with ornate sandstone surrounds, one including the figure of a horse {1}{2}.

The Palace opened as the Music Hall, adapted by local builder and entrepreneur Joseph Fletcher from a workshop. Two-storey building in local stone with facings and attic. The stage had flies, and there were dressing rooms built below-stage. This area remains today, as do the original emergency gas light fittings. Nothing otherwise remains of the original interior. With short intervals as both a skating rink and as a bingo hall, the Palace survived until 1976 when, under new management, it was run successfully as full-time cinema.

Owner/Management: Later: Mrs Fletcher (widow of James)

1800 - 1899 Design/Construction: C19 as cotton mill

Unknown - Architect

1905 Use: Until when not known.

1905 Alteration: converted to music hall

Joseph Fletcher - Architect

1905 Owner/Management: Joseph Fletcher (also builder)

1922 Owner/Management: James Fletcher

1976 Alteration: converted to cinema with stage

Unknown - Architect

1976 Owner/Management: John Williamson

2003 Owner/Management: Mrs Williamson (widow of John) {3}

#### Sources

{1} Webpage: Ribble Valley BC. -. Longridge Heritage Trail: Religion and Commerce.

{2} Digital archive: LCAS. 2004. Lancs EUS Historic Town Report for Longridge. PDF.

{3} Webpage: Theatre Trust. 2014.

<http://www.theatrust.org.uk/resources/theatres/show/2500-longridge-palace.2500>

- 4.2 Other sources suggest that use as an entertainment venue began in the late 19th century, or in the early 20th century, when acquired by Will Onda of Preston, who converted it from some type of weaving shed into a music hall, in which silent movies were also played. The Ordnance Survey's 1:2500 map of 1912<sup>1</sup> names it "Palace Theatre", so clearly it was already established by then; by 1930<sup>2</sup> it had been extended at the rear and had become a "picture theatre".



OS 1:2500 map, 1912

- 4.3 According to one source, the ornate stonework and white horse sign were added to the façade under the ownership of the Fletchers in the early 20th century, and the latter is believed to have come from a nearby pub. These details appear on an early but undated photograph (photo 2, below).

## 5 Longridge conservation area (CA)

- 5.1 The CA was designated in 1979, was extended in 2003 and 2008, and its special architectural and historic interest is described at length in the adopted character appraisal<sup>3</sup>. That interest derives from numerous aspects, but particularly from the fact that the settlement is a good example of a Lancashire industrial town, with cotton mills and stone quarries important to its 19th century development. The CA contains three main streets, all with good quality 19th century buildings, as well as long terraces of workers' houses, and the overall character is urban and with a distinctly industrial flavour.
- 5.2 Market Place falls within one of three character areas identified in the CA appraisal and seems to have been in use for trading from the 18th century, but instead it now forms a busy thoroughfare for vehicles. The appraisal describes it as enclosed by two and three storey buildings, which are stone-built and mainly 18th and 19th century. The application building is noted as a "*rare survival of an early theatre.... two storeys high with a wide gable facing the street, decorated*

<sup>1</sup> Lancashire, sheet 53.8, revised 1910

<sup>2</sup> see Lancashire, sheet 53.8, revised 1930

<sup>3</sup> Conservation Studio 2005 *Longridge Conservation Area Appraisal*



Photo 2: Early 20th century photograph

*with Moorish-inspired symbols, probably of the 1920s*", and is depicted as one of numerous "buildings of townscape merit" on the accompanying map.

## 6 The building

- 6.1 The application building comprises two main parts, which are easily distinguished in the street frontage: the right-hand part, containing the auditorium, which stands end-on to Market Place and appears to have had an industrial function originally; and the left-hand part, which was adapted from a pair of terraced houses, and contains the entrance foyer with shop front, offices, toilets, and living accommodation.
- 6.2 The façade could not be described as architecturally refined, but is nonetheless very distinctive and readily intelligible as an early 20th century cinema or theatre, albeit converted from earlier buildings. The inexpert decorative enhancement to which those were subjected illustrates how its owners sought to follow fashion within the entertainment industry, and imitate leading examples of cinema or popular theatre architecture in larger towns and cities.
- 6.3 Within the right-hand part of the frontage is a pair of wide doorways serving the auditorium, containing modern panelled doors set well back from the wall face. The surrounding decoration is a flamboyant if slightly incongruous addition to what is otherwise a relatively plain structure. The first floor window above the



Photo 3: Front of auditorium (former weaving shed)

doorways was evidently once a much larger opening, whose present appearance diminishes architectural interest. The early photograph above (photo 2) shows it containing a window with top-hung light.



Photo 4: Front of entrance foyer etc (former pair of houses)

- 6.4 The left-hand part of the façade's ground floor, originally two terraced houses within a street dominated by such buildings, has been made eye-catching through the application of channelled stucco around the openings (in mimicry of rusticated stonework), the largest of which contains a timber shop-front in traditional style, but which is no doubt relatively modern and can be seen to differ in design from that in the early photograph.
- 6.5 The sides and rear of the building are entirely plain and have few openings; they have a back-yard appearance which makes very little contribution to the CA.



Photo 5: Back of auditorium (former weaving shed), facing Brewery Street

- 6.6 Internally, the auditorium (photo 6), which has a short, plain balcony over the Market Place end, and a stage at the opposite end, remains as a single open space, although all seating has been removed, and the current projection room is modern. Other parts of the interior lack any interest.

## 7 Statement of heritage significance

- 7.1 The Palace makes a small positive contribution to the Longridge CA through its architectural and historic interest as a small cinema or theatre, established through the conversion of earlier buildings in the early 20th century, and which seems to have been the town's only such institution, although its exact use varied through its lifetime. The significance arising from its architectural and



Photo 6: Auditorium and stage

historic interest clearly merits the status of building of townscape merit, and its treatment as a non-designated heritage asset.

- 7.2 The interest is however largely confined to the Market Place frontage, where early 20th century alterations led to the current appearance, and the interest here is slightly diminished by the partial blocking of the first floor opening in the auditorium block. The other parts of the exterior are of little or no interest architecturally, though they contribute in a nominal way to its historic interest, while internally it is only the auditorium, stage and balcony which survive as legible spaces relating to its use as a theatre or cinema.

## 8 Proposals and impact on significance

- 8.1 The building has been redundant and vacant since 2021, so the currently proposed use is considered to be the optimum viable one and would confer an obvious public benefit, although given the nature and small scale of the proposed alterations, it is not believed that they would harm the significance of any heritage assets.
- 8.2 In terms of impact on the CA, it is only the proposed external alterations which need to be considered, and these are very low-key. Within the Market Place frontage, the doors within the two auditorium entrances would be replaced by fixed glazing and a pair of glazed doors, and the window above reinstated to its

former size, in order to introduce natural light into what is currently an unlit space. The ground floor doors and window have been designed with the existing four-panel pattern as a model, while the first floor window would be small-paned, in a more traditional style. Additionally, the large-paned window above the shop front would also be replaced with a similar small-paned window. The only other external alteration proposed is a new, very discretely placed escape window within the rear elevation.

- 8.3 The proposed external alterations are clearly of a minor scale and sensitive design, and enhancement would accrue from the improvements to the front, first floor fenestration. They would both preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the CA, without harm to significance.
- 8.4 The proposed modest internal alterations would also preserve the key features of the auditorium, stage and balcony, which lend significance to the building as a non-designated heritage asset.

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30 October 2025