

**The Watergate Theatre,
Parliament Street,
Kilkenny.**

**Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment
of
New External Insulation Works**



**On the instructions of
KILKENNY COUNTY COUNCIL**

BLUETT & O'DONOGHUE

PROJECT MANAGEMENT ARCHITECTURE ENGINEERING BUILT HERITAGE PLANNING FORENSICS

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Date : 4th Oct 2024

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Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment of New External Insulation Works

CONTENTS

1. Introduction & Planning Context
2. Historical Background.
3. Description & Heritage Significance.
4. Proposed Development & Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment
5. Conclusion

1. Introduction & Planning Context

The Watergate Theatre is a conversion and enlargement of the former Savoy Cinema which was constructed in the early 1930's.

The building is not included in the Kilkenny Record of Protected Structures but it is described in the non-statutory National Inventory of Architectural Heritage, NIAH survey ref. 12000098, where it is rated as being of special architectural, cultural and social interest and as being an important element of the mid-20th century architectural heritage of Kilkenny.

The Watergate Theatre is also located within the Kilkenny City Centre Architectural Conservation Area (CCACA) which encompasses the medieval core of Kilkenny and the Theatre is close to many surviving upstanding monuments from that period including St. Francis' Abbey, parts of the City Wall including Evan's turret at the mouth of the Breaghagh, and Grace's Castle (the lower parts of the Courthouse).

Otherwise, the surrounding buildings include many 18th & 19th century structures, some of which are likely to encapsulate the medieval fabric of earlier structures.

The streetscape along Parliament Street generally adheres to classical and Georgian proportions but the Art Deco Watergate is an appropriately theatrical outlier in that context.

The purpose of this Report is to describe the heritage significance of the Watergate Theatre and to assess the impact of the proposed upgrading works on its heritage significance and on the character of the CCACA.

This Report has been prepared by Cormac O'Sullivan, RIAI Accredited Conservation Architect, Grade 2 and the methodology follows the guidance set out in the Dept. of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government "*Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Architectural Heritage Protection, Appendix B; Architectural Heritage Assessment Reports*".

This Report should be read in conjunction with the accompanying drawings;

P-01 Site Location Map

P-02 Site Layout Plan

P-03 Basement & Details

P-04 Ground Floor & Mezzanine

P-05 First Floor Plan

P-06 Second Floor Plan

P-07 Roof Plan

P-08 Elevations Sheet 1

P-09 Elevations Sheet 2

P-10 Sections

2. Historical Background

The cinema became a popular and affordable form of entertainment for all during the 1930's. Cinemas were modern and glamorous and Art Deco, with its bold angles, bright colours and imitation gold and silver trims was the ideal architectural style for this new phenomenon.

The Watergate Theatre in Kilkenny began life as the Savoy Cinema which opened in 1936 with a showing of *'Anthony Adverse'* starring Fredric March and Olivia de Havilland.

The pre-war heyday of the cinema gradually waned, with declining attendances in subsequent decades, and the Savoy finally closed in March 1985 with a showing of *'Ghostbusters'*.

Many early cinemas were demolished or lie empty, but the Savoy was fortunate to be acquired by local theatre enthusiasts and with assistance from the Mayor's Fund was adapted for live performance by construction of the stage/fly tower block and was formally opened as the Watergate Theatre by President Mary Robinson on April 4th 1993.

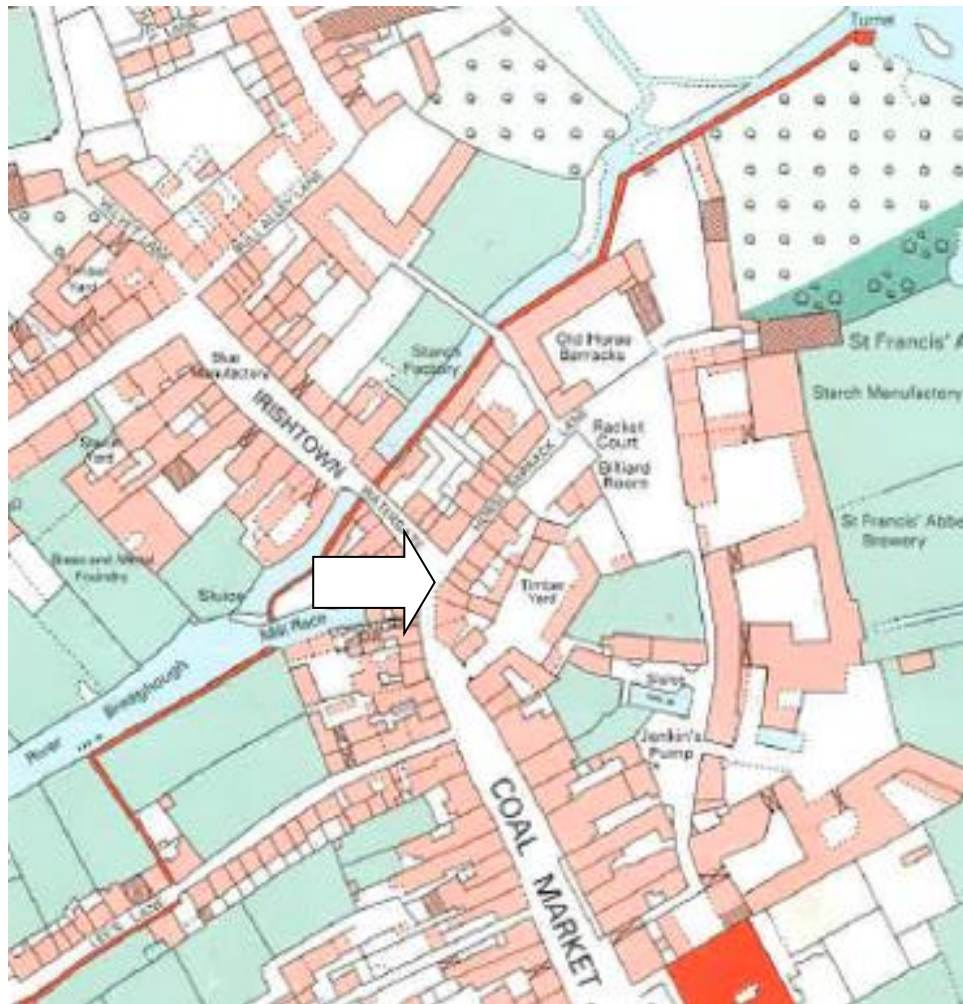


Figure 1. Extract from the Historic Towns Atlas, Kilkenny c. 1842

The cranked footprint of the Watergate Theatre aligns closely with the shape of the timber yard accessed from Coal Market. A Racket Court and Billiard Room are noted on Horse Barrack Lane behind the timber yard so it appears this area had the benefit of some leisure facilities long before the arrival of the Savoy Cinema.

Today's theatre takes its name from the Watergate, marked as a street name on the 1897-1913 mapping, but which originates from the gate in the City Wall at the River Breagagh which divided medieval High Town to the south and Irishtown to the north.



Early image of the Savoy Cinema with its well-considered Art Deco façade, embellished further by the SaVoY lettering.



View from the same vantage point today.

The Art Deco façade remains largely intact although The Savoy lettering is no longer present and the flat cantilevered canopy over the entrance has been replaced by the glazed pitched-roofed canopy/draught lobby.

The fly tower extension to the rear of the theatre can be seen to the left (surmounted by the antennae).



The Savoy in 1974 during the inaugural year of the Kilkenny Arts Festival.

The entrance canopy has been extended to each side to reach the flanking wings, which reduces the dominance of the central block. Other than the façade to the street, the plain unadorned nature of the structure is evident.



The Savoy, of somewhat faded glory, in later years. The Lounge Bar in the left flanking wing was subsequently converted to the Theatre toilets.



The Watergate Theatre today with the tower of St. Francis' Abbey behind.

The right flanking wing of the Theatre is an important element of the balanced façade to Parliament Street even though it is merely a screen wall to the theatre side yard.

The 3 principal elements of the Theatre can be seen, the entrance block, the auditorium with crow-stepped gable and the slightly taller fly tower to the rear.

The recent conversion of the Smithwick's Brewhouse behind the Theatre to offices and the conversion and extension of the former Mayfair Ballroom as the new City Library, along with the hard and soft landscaping of Horse Barrack Lane to a high standard, have brought the rear of the Watergate Theatre into greater prominence and the upgrading of the Theatre presents the opportunity to further enhance this reinvigorated part of the public realm of Kilkenny.

3. Description & Heritage Significance

The Watergate Theatre is aptly described in the NIAH as “adhering to a standard evident across the country, a functional auditorium block exhibiting little extraneous ornamentation is fronted by a finely detailed entrance bay”.

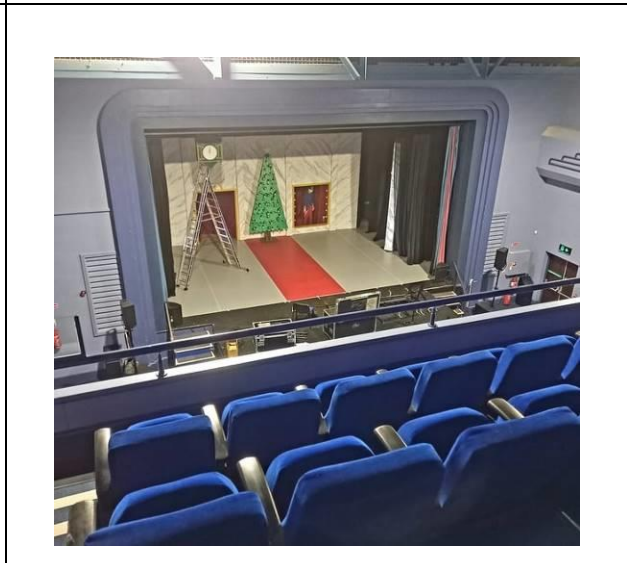
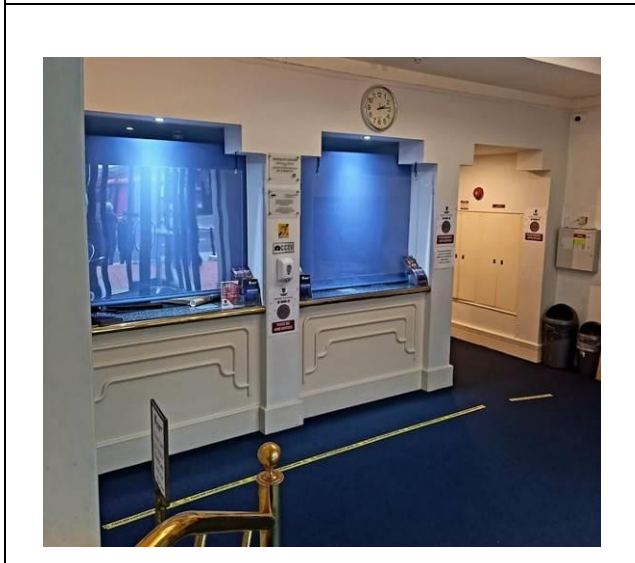
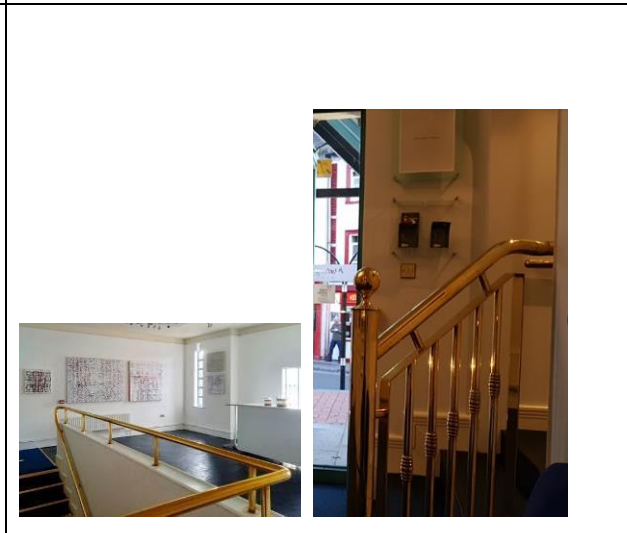
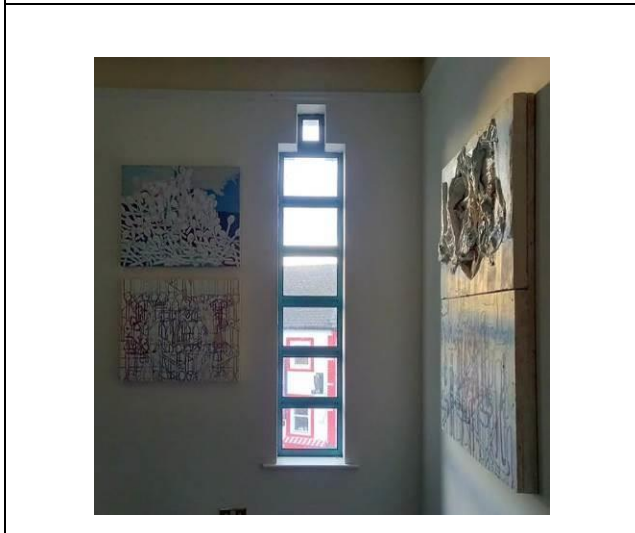
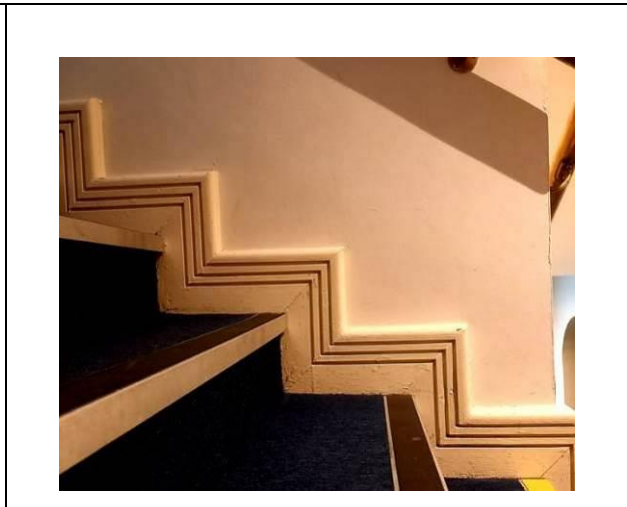
Flat roofs with brick parapets and ‘crow stepped’ concrete construction and detailing are features of the Art Deco style. At the Watergate, this is evidenced by the flat roofs to the entrance block and to the left flanking wing (and originally to the entrance canopy), by the crow steps at a large scale to the gable of the auditorium, by inseting the large central upper floor window in the entrance block within a crow stepped recess and by the crow stepped heads to the flanking lancet windows.



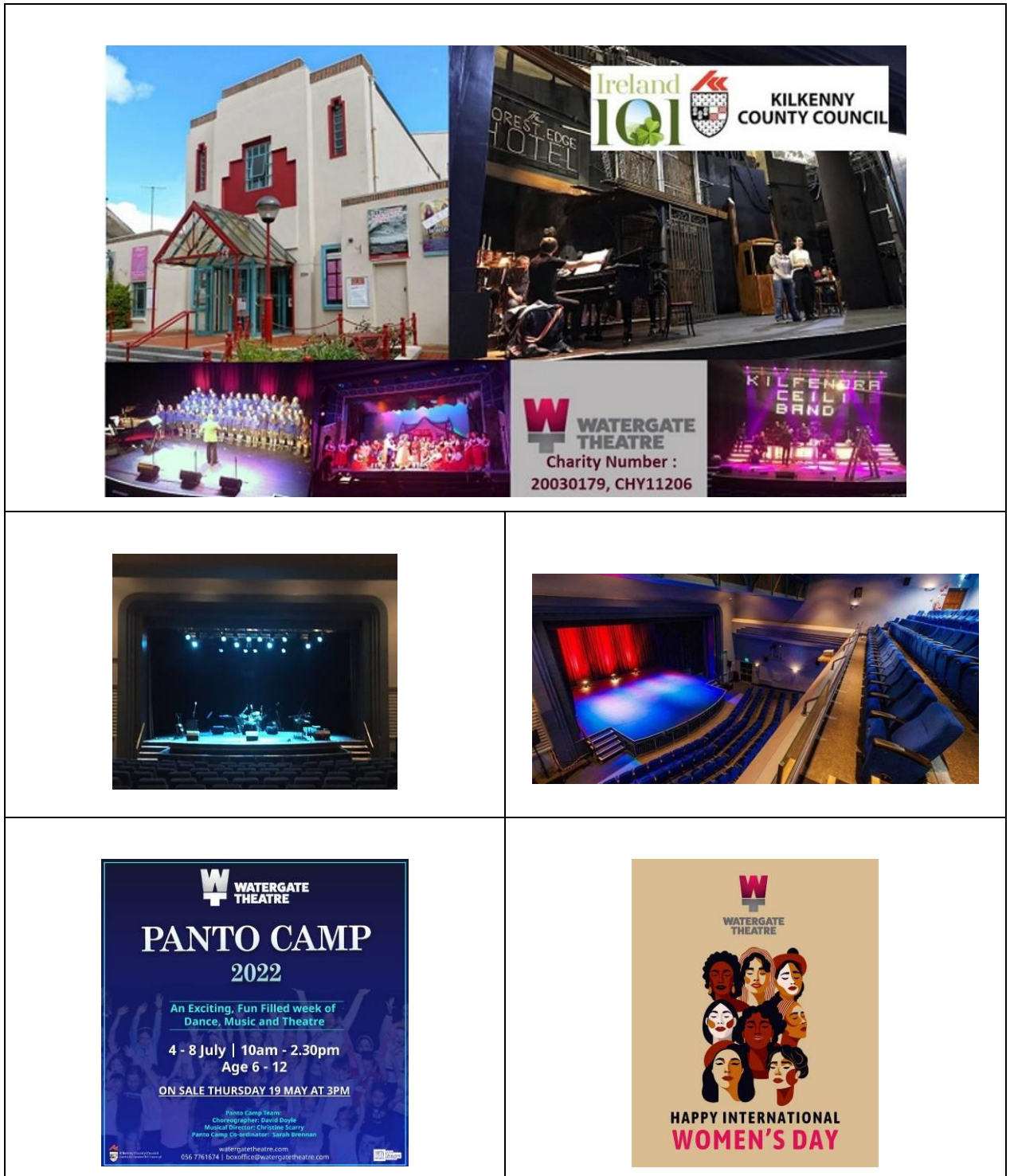
The Watergate presents itself to Parliament Street as a stage set in its own right.

The sense of occasion of going to the cinema, or now to the theatre, is facilitated by how the building is set back from the street and elevated up a broad flight of 6 stone steps across a brick-paved forecourt.

The Art Deco style can also be seen internally in the crow stepped openings to the box office and is carried through to the detailing of the doors and skirtings, the brass balustrading and trims in the foyer and the arched motifs below the box office counters preview the grand moulded plaster profile of the proscenium arch in the auditorium.



The Watergate Theatre is the established venue in Kilkenny for the performing arts and also accommodates a wide range of social and community activities and events on an ongoing basis.



Heritage Significance

The Watergate Theatre is of architectural heritage significance as a good example of Art Deco architecture and as noted in the NIAH, *“While many contemporary cinemas have been lost, having been sympathetically converted to an alternative cultural use, the building remains an important element of the mid twentieth-century architectural heritage of Kilkenny”*.

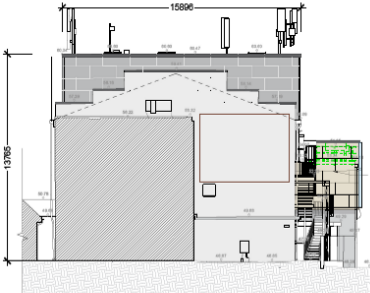

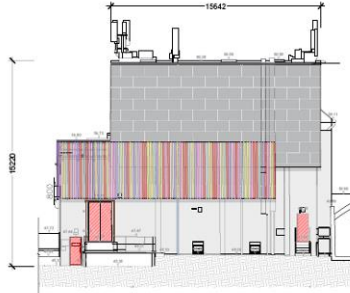
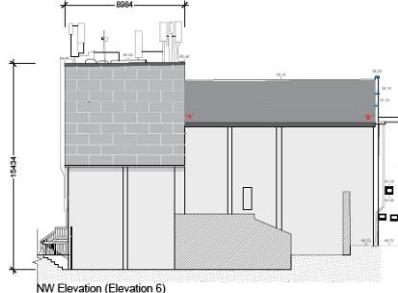


The Watergate Theatre is also of cultural & social heritage significance as a purpose-built entertainment venue which remains in use as a public building today,



4. Proposed Development & Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment

- **The Proposed Development**

The objective of the proposed development is to improve the energy performance of the theatre, thus enhancing comfort levels within the auditorium and reducing running costs.

The works involve the application of external insulation to the walls of the auditorium and the stage/fly tower block, external insulation to the roof of the fly tower and upgrading the insulation of the attic space above the auditorium internally.

 <p>SW Elevation (Elevation 3) scale 1:100</p>	 <p>SE Elevation (Elevation 4) scale 1:100</p>
 <p>NE Elevation (Elevation 5) scale 1:100</p>	 <p>NW Elevation (Elevation 6) scale 1:100</p>
	
<p>Rear view of the Watergate Theatre to Horse Barracks Lane, as existing.</p>	<p>It is proposed to clad with external wall insulation with a fibre-cement panelling system and coloured aluminium fins in colours which complement the new hard and soft landscaping along Horse Barracks Lane and the finishes of the City Library conversion of the Mayfair Ballroom.</p>

	
<p>Side view of the Watergate Theatre Horse Barracks Lane, as existing.</p>	<p>It is proposed to clad with external wall insulation with a fibre-cement panelling system and coloured aluminium fins in colours which complement the new hard and soft landscaping along Horse Barracks Lane and the finishes of the City Library conversion of the Mayfair Ballroom.</p>

Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment

The proposed development is assessed in terms of its impact on the heritage significance of the Watergate Theatre as identified in Section 3 of this Report and on the character of the City Centre Architectural Conservation Area.

- **Impact on the architectural heritage significance of the Watergate Theatre**

The architectural significance of the Watergate Theatre lies in the Art Deco styling of the entrance block, both externally and internally. The symmetrical massing and Art Deco features of the frontage to Parliament Street are not impacted by the proposed works, nor is the Art Deco detailing of the interior.

- **Impact on the cultural and social heritage significance of the Watergate Theatre**

The cultural and social significance of the Watergate Theatre lies in its continued use as a performance arts and entertainments venue which is open to all. The conversion from cinema to theatre between 1985 and 1993 was compatible with the character of the building and the upgrading of the energy efficiency of the theatre is a positive measure which can sustain its ongoing use into the future.

- **Impact on the character of the City Centre Architectural Conservation Area**

The management of historic areas is guided by the principles of the ICOMOS Charter for the Conservation of Historic Towns and Urban Areas. (The Washington Charter, 1987).

This Charter encourages *“the conservation and restoration of such towns and areas as well as their development and harmonious adaptation to contemporary life”*.

The proposed works will help to keep the Watergate Theatre ‘fit for purpose’ by contemporary standards and can do so in a manner that has regard to its heritage significance.

The improvement of the appearance of the auditorium and fly tower elements of the theatre, which overlook Horse Barracks Lane and the new City Library, would enhance

a part of the CCACA which is coming into greater prominence as the former Smithwick's Brewery is redeveloped as the Abbey Quarter.

The upgrading of the Watergate Theatre can complement the recent impressive conversions of the Smithwick's Brewhouse and the Mayfair Ballroom and can enhance the pedestrian route via Horse Barracks Lane to the planned riverside public park focused on St. Francis' Abbey and Evan's Turret.

5. Conclusion

This Report outlines the history of the Watergate Theatre and explains its heritage significance.

The impact of the proposed energy upgrading measures on the heritage significance of the building and on the character of the City Centre Architectural Conservation Area is assessed.

It is concluded that the design of the proposed works has had due regard to the heritage significance of the building and that carrying out the works will be a positive factor in sustaining the ongoing use of an important element of the mid twentieth-century architectural heritage of Kilkenny as a public building.

The proposed development can also, in tandem with the conversion of the Smithwick's Brewhouse and the Mayfair Ballroom, enhance the appearance and ambiance of Horse Barracks Lane which is set to become a much more vibrant part of the city centre as the development of the Abbey Quarter unfolds.

SIGNED



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