Hon Stirling Hinchliffe MP
Member for Stafford

Queensland Government

Minister for Infrastructure and Planning

Our ref: MC10/614

Your ref: Petitions

20 DEC 2010

Mr Neil Laurie
The Clerk of the Parliament
Parliament House
George St
Brisbane QLD 4000

Dear Neil

Thank you for your letter of 29 November 2010 about Petitions received by the Queensland Legislative Assembly No. 1591-10 and 1593-10 concerning the redevelopment of the Regent Theatre.

The petitioners have expressed their opposition to the proposed redevelopment of the Regent Cinema, Brisbane and what they consider the unviable and highly limited nature of the new auditoria proposed as part of the redevelopment. The petitioners also expressed their desire that the Brisbane City Council (BCC), in conjunction with the developers and the State Government, immediately review the approved decision to ensure the development:

- is a viable, full scale venue for the Arts which will remain open to the public in perpetuity
- integrates in a meaningful way the retained elements of the Showcase Theatre and bar area
- consists of a venue in which the scale and design are in harmony with the original foyer, ticketing and style of the original theatre.

Petition 1593-10 also requests an amendment to the *Queensland Heritage Act 1992* to return power to the responsible Minister to declare an 'object' a heritage place.

I am pleased to advise the Parliament and the petitioners that in addition to the heritage features of the Regent Theatre which are listed on the Queensland Heritage Register, a wide range of heritage artefacts and selected architectural features from the theatre will also be retained. These will be re-used in the redevelopment, as part of an agreement brokered between the State Government and the developers. A Heritage Management Plan (HMP) articulating these improved outcomes was approved by the Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Infrastructure and Planning (DIP) on 13 December 2010.

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This is the result of both the Deputy Premier and former Minister for Infrastructure and Planning, the Honourable Paul Lucas MP, and I as the current Minister for Infrastructure and Planning, intervening in the interest of all Queenslanders to impose conditions on this development. The State's conditions ensure that heritage features, both listed and non-listed, are preserved and, most importantly, the 'Regent' continues to operate in the future as a cinema venue, with added potential for live theatre and functions.

The redevelopment will also build on the Regent's reputation as an Arts precinct with new local headquarters for the Queensland Film and Television Centre, Brisbane International Film Festival and the Asia Pacific Screen Awards being established in the new development.

It is worthwhile for me to recount the actions which have been taken by the Queensland Government through the Deputy Premier and me to achieve a beneficial outcome for all stakeholders.

Firstly, I remind the Parliament and the petitioners that the demolition of the Regent Theatre was allowed by the Bjelke-Petersen Government in December 1978. This resulted in the Regent Theatre being redeveloped from the 2583 seat live performance theatre to four cinemas with a total capacity of 1461 seats and a mix of replica and original heritage features. Some two years later, the remaining 1920s elements of the Regent Theatre were heritage-listed, including the box office, foyer and staircase. The Bligh Government recognises the significance of the original features of the Regent Theatre and demonstrated a commitment to protecting these elements through the imposition of appropriate development conditions.

This was achieved through the Deputy Premier and then Minister for Infrastructure and Planning, the Honourable Paul Lucas MP issuing a Ministerial direction in relation to the development application on 25 February 2008 in response to community concerns regarding the preservation of the Regent Theatre. The purpose of this direction was to stop further consideration of the development application by BCC until the Chief Executive of DIP could gain an understanding of the remaining heritage value of the Regent Theatre and of the artefacts contained within the theatre.

Subsequently, the Queensland Heritage Commission advised that the only components of the Regent Theatre to be included on the Queensland Heritage Register are the entrance and grand foyers and the marble staircase which are required to be preserved 'in situ'.

On the basis of that advice, a second Ministerial Direction was issued by the Deputy Premier on 19 February 2009. This Ministerial Direction specified a number of conditions which the State required the BCC to impose as part any development approval and preliminary building approval. The conditions imposed by the Deputy Premier included that:

- the Regent Theatre's unique heritage features are to be preserved
- the new development must retain the name 'Regent'
- the purpose of the Regent, as a venue for ongoing cinema use, is to continue
- the preparation of a HMP, to identify and preserve theatre features and artefacts which may not be listed on the Queensland Heritage Register but which nevertheless have heritage value and which included a floor plan to be approved by the Chief Executive Officer of DIP.

It was also a requirement that the HMP be prepared in accordance with the *ICOMOS Burra Charter 1999* which serves to provide guidance for the conservation and management of places of cultural significance.

In response to these conditions the developer commissioned a well regarded team of independent heritage experts from Environmental Resources Management Australia (ERM) to advise on the preparation of the HMP. ERM advised that a number of artefacts, while not heritage-listed, could be re-used in the new development and others presented in an interpretive display within the new development.

Given the size and volume of many of the Regent Theatre's fittings and features, it became clear that to accommodate all of these was not only physically impossible without making significant alterations to them, but also their use was incompatible with the intended design concept for the new development. In recognition of this, the developer engaged additional independent experts, X Squared Design, to interpret these elements which could not be reused in a display compatible with the contemporary design of the new development.

DIP initiated several meetings with the developer, the Department of Environment and Resource Management (DERM), BCC and 'Save the Regent" representatives during extensive consultation over a nine month period. This resulted in a number of amendments to the draft HMP.

During this consultation process, the Government was able to secure the inclusion of the external grotesques and metal grilles currently on the Elizabeth Street facade, a selection of the ornate lanterns, all paintings and additional furniture in the Grand Foyer and in the proposed interpretive display.

Heritage professionals in DERM peer reviewed the draft HMP and concluded that an acceptable outcome has been achieved which maximises the potential for reuse and the protection of features which could not be accommodated in the redevelopment itself.

Finally, The Regent Theatre is recognised by the community as an important part of Brisbane's cultural heritage. The Government acknowledges this and that is why the Government ensured that appropriate conditions were imposed by the BCC as part of the development approval.

I trust this information is of assistance. If you require any further information, please contact Mr Noel Thorne, Executive Director, Regional Development Branch, Infrastructure and Land Group, Department of Infrastructure and Planning, on 3405 5634 who will be pleased to assist.

Yours sincerely

Stirling Hinchliffe MP
Minister for Infrastructure and Planning