

PRESS RELEASE

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Leicester Square's Iconic Cinema Heritage at Serious Risk New developments are dire disappointment

What is happening to Leicester Square? Each year the centre of film for London and the Nation hosts 50 global film premiers attracting up to 50 million people to this phenomenally popular area of London. But the Square as we have grown to know and love it is now under threat. Although it is supposedly protected by its Conservation Area status, buildings of value are coming down and being replaced by banal or inappropriate structures. Leicester Square will be a very different and anonymous place if nothing is done soon.

First to come down was the Swiss Centre with the wonderfully kitsch Glockenspiel on its curving façade facing into the Square. Everyday when the clock struck, the 27 bells and dancing figurines of this landmark would move into action on their cleverly orchestrated mechanical system delighting scores of young and old, foreign and local with a variety of 200 tunes. But the new structure by *Jestico + Whiles* that has been pulled up in its place and was promised by Westminster Council to provide London with a new iconic structure and hail in an era of regeneration for one of London's busiest public places, has failed to impress. The building's 11 storey glass wall is dull and ordinary – a lost opportunity in this prime location.

The next building on the list is the old Leicester Square Theatre as it was originally called, the *other* Odeon on the Square. It was built in 1930 by the famous cinema architect Andrew Mather and in its glory days this cinema could seat up to 1750 people. Like so many cinemas on the square it is the historic façade that is left – the interior having been changed over and over again throughout the years. But this building is now to go as well and all permissions are in place. Meanwhile the replacement building promises to be a dire disappointment. The architects *Make* have designed what looks like a nine storey stainless steel clad wobbly layer cake. There is still a cinema in the basement – a token gesture to the location – but the rest is again hotel accommodation.

Eva Branscome of the Cinema Theatre Association is seriously concerned: "None of the cinemas in Leicester Square are protected through statutory listing. The Empire, the Vue (formerly Warner) and even the flagship Odeon could be next in line for demolition - all in the name of 'regenerating' one of London's busiest and best liked locations. This is a senseless destruction of our cinema heritage!"

Ends

PHOTOS ATTACHED

Notes to Editors

The Cinema Theatre Association

The Cinema Theatre association is a membership organization which actively campaigns for the protection and study of the finest historic examples of cinema buildings. It has established a nationally acknowledged expertise on this genre and regularly advises the Ancient Monuments Society, the Theatres Trust, the Twentieth Century Society and the Victorian as well as many local authorities on planning applications regarding alterations and demolition of cinemas. The Cinema Theatre Association also functioned as an adviser to English Heritage during their survey on cinemas in 1999. It has also been successful in obtaining listing status for many cinemas and has been instrumental in preventing summary demolition in some cases.

Leicester Square Theatre

Opened in 1930 to the designs of Andrew Mather

<http://flickr.com/gp/-emodern-/K96v7G>

and the proposed replacement building by *Make*

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/-emodern-/4127797025/>

The Empire

Opened in 1928 to the designs of Thomas Lamb

<http://flickr.com/gp/-emodern-/k340h4>

The Odeon

Opened in 1937 to the designs of Andrew Mather, Thomas Braddock and Harry Weedon

<http://flickr.com/gp/-emodern-/1H706C>

The Vue Cinema (former Warner)

Opened in 1938 to the designs of Edward A Stone and TR Somerford

<http://flickr.com/gp/-emodern-/4v8SD8>

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