

Stage is set for more new homes in the centre of Chatham

Heart of Medway Housing Association, part of the mhs homes group will provide affordable homes in the heart of Chatham.

Medway's Theatre Royal has been the topic of much conversation since its closure in the 50's. The Chatham theatre was once the largest theatre outside the West End, with stars such as Charlie Chaplin and Max Miller gracing its stage. Built in 1899 at the western end of Chatham High Street the 3,000 seat theatre was originally owned by C and L Barnard, who also owned the local music hall.

Following a decline in theatre-goers, the Victorian building closed in 1955 and has been unoccupied since. In the 1980s a campaign was started by local people to restore the building to its former glory and to reopen it as the largest theatre in the region. However, in 2002, the volunteers of the Theatre Royal Chatham Trust were forced to abandon their campaign to raise the £20 million needed to restore or meet the costs of preserving the entire building.

“...providing affordable homes is more important than ever before...”

Now the site, situated right in the centre of Chatham will set the stage for the development of new homes with key input from 'Heart of Medway Housing Association' the registered subsidiary of Medway's main affordable housing provider 'mhs homes'. The impressive building facade remains. The classically styled Victorian front, with columns and arches will be restored and utilised as part of the new development with the possibility of a restaurant or other commercial use on the ground floor.



The front façade of Theatre Royal which remains in front of the blocks of flats.

Two new blocks of flats will be constructed behind it on the land where part of the Theatre Royal once stood. This derelict part of the theatre, was demolished last year following planning permission for the development of new homes on the site.

Landlord 'Heart of Medway Housing Association' will have one of the blocks of twelve flats for a mixed affordable tenure, whilst the other block will be sold by the contractor 'Orchard Construction and Developments'. The flats in the town centre are at the heart of a large regeneration project in Chatham and are within walking distance of local amenities. Each one of the twelve flats will have underground parking. Two of the ground floor flats for affordable rent will be fully adapted for wheelchair users and four of the properties will be available for shared ownership. mhs homes is contributing £1.6 million towards the development of which £614,000 has been granted by the Homes and Communities Agency.

With property prices more than seven times the average wage and 9,000 families on Medway's housing waiting list, Caroline Proverbs, Operations Director for mhs homes said providing affordable homes is more important than ever before. She said, "We work very closely with Medway Council to provide quality accommodation that is both affordable and sustainable. These new homes will be built to level 3 of the Code for Sustainable Homes and full Lifetime Homes criteria which means that they will be highly energy efficient for residents"

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