

Conference 14 Report
Community Theatres
28 April 2014

The
Theatres
Trust



Protecting theatres for everyone

Conference 14

Community Theatres

Conference Chair

Henry Bonsu

Opening address

Peter Stark OBE

Keynote speech

Stephen Williams MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Session chairs

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Ruth Eastwood, CEO, Blackpool Grand Theatre

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Mhora Samuel

Director, The Theatres Trust



What did we learn about community theatres on the 28 April in Leeds, as we gathered in the City Varieties Music Hall, the illustrious home of *The Good Old Days*.

In the spirit of our annual conferences, whilst we reflected on our past, we did not reminisce – we looked forward and saw how the future ownership, management and sustainability of our national theatres infrastructure is at a turning point.

People are emerging from their local communities, taking responsibility for their local theatres and joining the ranks of existing theatre owners – who are in turn making new connections with their communities and adapting and harnessing their buildings to create spaces for social, education and community activities. We saw how theatres and arts centres share values in relation to their social purpose and artistic ambitions, and how, as Philip Thomson said, as 'one big family', we could share resources and experiences in this new paradigm.

In my introduction to the Conference Programme I commented that a community theatre reflects the diversity of its surroundings, has both theatre and a social purpose at its core and is loved by its community. At Conference 14, we learnt that this has to be backed up by a sustainable and realistic business model driven by a theatre's engagement with all its communities.

We learnt that that we need to be very aware of how the demography (particularly the young and old), ethnic diversity, and cultural expectations of our communities is changing; how audiences are flocking to live screenings in theatres and cinemas of national and world renowned theatre, opera, dance companies; and how theatres need to ensure they are equipped and the buildings modelled to help develop those audiences and provide for those changing tastes – harnessing them as opportunities to create those sustainable business models.

We found out how communities are giving their time and energy to ensure the success of their local theatres and arts centres – whether as audiences, actors, champions, volunteers, hirers, fundraisers, donors, organisers, staff, committee members, owners, philanthropists, theatre builders and restorers... At Conference 14 we learnt how important these volunteers and activists are and that we need be supporting and encouraging new volunteers to come forward.

And we learnt how theatres' relationships with local authorities are changing – less as direct funders, more as partners – as communities take over theatres and ensure they continue to support local economic growth and provide access to a centre for the arts in their locality. We heard how tough this evolving landscape of relationships can be, but we were also inspired by the idea of embedding long term arts and theatre funding models into the growth of existing and new towns and cities – whether through endowment income from property portfolios, or positioning theatres to be recipients of the Community Infrastructure Levy from local authorities or neighbourhood forums.

I quoted the words of the eminent philosopher Sir Ernest Barker in my conference programme introduction. He said in 1942, 'the cultivation of the arts is not only a matter for artists; it is also a matter for the whole community, which has to build for itself a house of beauty in which communal life can be happily and finely spent'. He said 'each community should take care of its own cultural well-being'.

At Conference 14 we learnt much more about how cultural well-being is being promoted through the new Community Rights agenda, and how communities need to really be committed and in it for the long haul. We recognised that succession planning is vital as they become future custodians of our theatres. Importantly, we saw how communities are taking control, determining their priorities and working together to ensure there is a future for our theatres in towns and cities across the nation.

I am delighted that Dominic Cavendish agreed to be our Conference Reporter this year and his report makes excellent reading. In the following pages, he takes us through the sessions and presentations from the day and ends with a summary of his own thoughts and conclusions.

Our Conference Report has once again been sponsored by the Association of British Theatre Technicians (ABTT). I thank them for their support which provides us with a lasting record of the conversations and important issues raised on the day.

My thanks also go out to all the contributors, attenders, sponsors and staff and trustees of The Theatres Trust who once again made our annual conference such a success.

Henry Bonsu

Conference Chair



"I suppose we can be a pretty dull lot," intoned the delegate, a lugubrious figure from the North of England. Had he told me this eight hours earlier, I would have been nervous. The last thing any MC or Chair wants to hear is that he's got a difficult, unresponsive audience.

But standing in the Leeds Grand among the demob happy die-hards of Conference 14, I quaffed the wine and nibbles, safe in the knowledge that this eighth annual Theatres Trust summit had been anything but dull.

As we were meeting in the City Varieties Music Hall bestrode by the late Leonard Sachs, I'd been determined to channel the great man's spirit by providing some 'delight and delectation'. But as Theatres Trust director Mhora Samuel reminded me, there was also a serious goal. Could we meet the challenge set by last year's conference Chair Vikki Heywood? Could we define community theatres, their funding dramas, the opportunities of localism, and future developments?

Peter Stark, the ebullient chair of the Voluntary Arts Network, also wanted to see a robust 'authentic debate' that would channel the spirit of arts activists throughout the decades. So, how did we do? Well, from Telford to Doncaster, Stockport to Taunton, from large regional venues to small touring companies, delegates heard what can happen when a community gets mobilised. Arts Council England Chair, Sir Peter Bazalgette and communities minister Stephen Williams MP were all ears. While the former stressed his commitment to ACE funding programmes, the latter celebrated the Localism Act 2011, saying it was a radical piece of legislation that would empower communities for generations to come. Although they both got a warm hearing, I detected mutterings of scepticism among the ranks.

That's because alongside inspiration there was also indignation – particularly in John Caldwell's story. He had led a group of amateurs from Stourport in a bid to take over the civic centre from their local council – a quest frustrated time and again by local officers. Bill Graham from the Clifton Community Arts Centre in Wellington described his project as an 'acorn' that badly needed help to grow. But where would this support come from? Ben Greener from the Heritage Lottery Fund aimed to please but some things were frankly outside his remit, even if all delegates felt their project deserved funding.

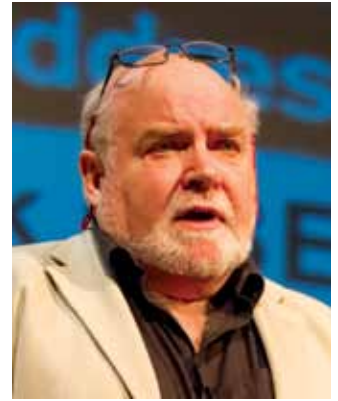
Where was this all leading? Had we properly defined a community theatre? Should it give the people what they wanted, or as Kully Thiarai from *Cast in Doncaster* suggested, occasionally what they needed? I wracked my brains for words that would send the delegates away ready to double their fight to champion community theatres.

But I needn't have worried. Because in a final session, David Jubb of the Battersea Arts Centre, Sheena Wrigley from the West Yorkshire Playhouse and Deborah Bestwick of Ovalhouse, sketched a vision of their respective theatres, and a wider arts community that respects the people it serves, and is given the tools to do so. Out of all this a cutting edge theme will emerge for Conference 15.

With our country's ethnic make-up changing fast, perhaps we might ask whether our theatres should be doing more to reflecting modern diverse British culture, or should they be keeping traditional work at their heart? Over to Mhora and her crack team in Charing Cross Rd who are already plotting their next move!

Opening address

Peter Stark OBE



"We should have an authentic debate in this country"

Peter gave what began as an ebullient, informed trip down memory lane, taking in his own formative creative experiences, and then developed into an overview of the journey that the provision of cultural opportunities across the UK has gone on – culminating in a provocative assertion that we have reached a crossroads.

"I last stood here in 1966 in a Leeds student union rag revue," he said, by way of opening gambit, joking: "This place has got smaller and better, I've got larger and possibly more diffuse as time has gone on." Having just returned to Britain after 12 years of working in South Africa, he suggested that he had acquired a fresh perspective on his own past, and the issues facing us in the present: "It's important for us to look back before we begin to chart our way forward."

He grew up in the Newcastle neighbourhood of Heaton, and realised in hindsight how fortunate he was to have a strong 'infrastructure' for a cultural life on his doorstep in the form of a local church hall, St Gabriel's. He sang in its choir, and with its light operatic society, acted in plays as a teenager, and even rehearsed there in his own rock band. "Looking back I can see that there were generations before me that had the vision of how the arts worked at a local level in society which feeds me now when I look forward," he said, citing the working men's clubs movement and related educational programmes of the 1920s and '30s.

Three of those who supervised at his local youth theatre (People's Theatre, founded in 1911 as The Clarion Players to raise funds for the British Socialist Party) had worked with Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop – "I thought that every person in this country had something like that at the bottom of their road," he confessed.

Continuing this train of thought, he elaborated on his involvement in the setting up of the Birmingham Arts Laboratory (circa 1968). "Who comes along to help us but the Birmingham Settlement?... I didn't know that the Settlement Movement was the first recipient of public funding for the arts in this country in response to the depression of the 1930s."

Again, he was only 'dimly aware' of Jennie Lee's white paper *A Policy for the Arts* (1965), which helped to 'loosen up' the Arts Council. In 1972, he moved to Bracknell, as founding Director of South Hill Park Arts Centre – "without any knowledge of the history of the new town movement" and its aspiration that development corporations should be equipped with funds that would enable them to "build amenities before the communities they served were large enough to justify them".

He cited in detail the 1974 'Beaford Declaration', named after the village in Devon – a collective statement from the first meeting of art centre directors and community arts group leaders in which "it was unanimously agreed that the Arts Council was not useless but inadequate... The idea that a public policy for the arts should begin with the human experience of the 60-odd million inhabitants of these islands which belongs to the thinking of our own time has not become part of the Arts Council's interpretation of its charter..." This sense of opportunities lost could be traced back to John Maynard Keynes's rejection of the mass development of arts centres in 1946. "A future that could have happened... didn't happen."

"We reach a point now, a year to go 'til the General Election," he concluded, "where the questions are open again." He urged an authentic debate, shocked at the new timidity he found in the arts sector after his return from South Africa: "People were saying one thing in private, they were saying other things in public – they were scared." His conclusion? We can't believe that "local government in the future can be the provider... They will continue to be critically important but they can't be the solution. We have to find new ways of working between a newly self-confident civic activism and a newly self-confident cultural activism."

"The Arts Lottery should be working with us on the ground... to assist us in our realisation of the creation of new hybrid organisations that can bring local government, local private sector, local civil society and local committed creative citizens together in a way that I believe gives us for the first time in a very long time the opportunity to create a national policy framework that can support what we would all aspire to achieve... the kind of local society we want our children and grandchildren to live in."

Peter Stark is internationally acknowledged as a leader in cultural policy research, leadership and management. From 2000, he was based in South Africa, working principally in Inner City Johannesburg and the Eastern Cape founding Sihlanganiswa Ziinkonjane/The Swallows partnership. From 1985, as director of Northern Arts, he initiated the policies that led to the Gateshead Quays developments and the culturally led transformation of his native Tyneside – including the Gateshead Millennium Bridge, the Baltic Visual Arts Centre and The Sage Gateshead. His earlier career was in experimental and community arts, as a cultural management teacher and founding Director of South Hill Park Community Arts Centre. He was awarded the OBE in 1990 for his work at Northern Stage, a Chair at Northumbria University in 2000 and an Honorary Professorship at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in 2010. Now based in Northumberland he is chair of Voluntary Arts and one of the authors of Rebalancing our Cultural Capital and The PLACE Report.

Keynote speech

Stephen Williams MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
for Communities and Local Government



"We need your help and enthusiasm"

In common with Peter Stark, Stephen Williams opened with some reflections on his upbringing and the role his local environment in a mining village in South Wales had in shaping his appreciation for the arts. Referring to *The Good Old Days*, he revealed that he was old enough to have watched the variety show when it was broadcast from the City Varieties. In order to get a hot bath on Friday night – 'bath night' – he went round to his grandmother's, who possessed an immersion heater. "The penalty was having to watch *The Good Old Days!*"

"We are here to talk about community rights," he declared, warming to his theme. "There is a danger [with] these sessions that you dwell on the problems rather than the fantastic opportunity available to us all. I think the Localism Act of 2011 will be one of the pieces of legislation this Government has put in place that will be talked about... in decades to come." Only since becoming a minister has he come to appreciate "how revolutionary they are in terms of democratic empowerment".

He made a direct appeal to those working in arts provision at a council level: "I do emphasise that these are rights that belong to your citizens, your constituents, your voters, electors, tax payers. They are not rights that belong to the council." He promised a "quiet revolution as these rights are really grasped by local people and are put into place".

Dwelling on the Community Right to Bid, he emphasised its radical nature – "a major interference in property rights". Around 900 buildings have been listed as Assets of Community Value to date, he suggested. "It is an important right. You won't suddenly read in the newspaper that a building that is important to you and your village or your city has been sold – and there was nothing you could do about it. Now if a building is listed as an Asset of Community Value, the owner has to give the public notice of their contemplation of selling it, so that you have the opportunity to put forward your own bid. You have six months to do that."

Turning to Neighbourhood Plans, he suggested that 800 plans had been designated so far – "The exciting thing is that it does have to involve local people. People have to turn up and vote on whether they want to adopt that Neighbourhood Plan." They have all been passed, he noted, the turnout higher than we are likely to see at the 2014 European Parliament elections.

On the subject of the Right to Challenge, he recapped its essence: "That's an opportunity for people to say 'We think we could do a better job at running this part of the public sector'. It hadn't as yet much taken off, he recognised.

How could a local community find the funds to improve its cultural lot? "One thing that's exciting is the development of community shares and crowd funding to bid for a Community Asset." He cited Hastings Pier – "not only saved by the legislation but by the local people in Sussex putting their hands in their pockets." He described the advent of these forms of DIY funding as every bit as revolutionary as the use of Lottery money. "These community rights will only take off if we have your help and enthusiasm... It's over to you. We need your help and enthusiasm. Realising you do now have the tools in your hands to protect the assets that are important to you, I hope you now grasp that opportunity."

Stephen Williams was appointed as Communities Minister in October 2013. He entered Parliament in 2005 as the Liberal Democrat MP for Bristol West.

Session #1

What is a Community Theatre?

The conference opened with the question – what is a community theatre? Other questions flow from that, among them: Does the community need to be in control? What level of community engagement makes a community theatre? And what responsibility do they have to community benefit and well-being?

Session chair: Henry Bonsu

Kully Thiarai

Executive Director, Cast, Doncaster

Kirstie Davis

CEO/Artistic Director, Forest Forge Theatre Company

Louise Lappin-Cook

Director, Tacchi-Morris Arts Centre, Taunton

Gary Trinder

Vice-Chairman and Technical Director, Stockport Plaza Trust

Kully Thiarai, Executive Director of Cast, Doncaster

“If theatres aren’t community theatres, what are they for?”

Kully talked about Cast, a new £22m performance venue in the heart of Doncaster, which opened last September, as part of a £300m regeneration project. She gave a brief overview of Doncaster, a town with a population of 300,000 and some pressing social issues – on average, household incomes are 20 per cent below the UK average and only eight per cent of Doncaster residents have been through higher education. Arts infrastructure is limited – “All of this makes our communities less likely to value and engage in the arts”. Out of 282 authorities, Doncaster lies seventh from bottom in terms of engagement with the arts. Why build a new venue? “Precisely because those levels are low.”

She showed images of the new building – which has been used to present “home-produced shows, touring productions, national and international work, comedy, dance, amateur hires, conference meetings, award ceremonies, even a wedding reception”. The open, inclusive architecture reflects the artistic and social ambition: “To be a catalyst to unleash the creative voice of the town”, to become Doncaster’s ‘cultural living-room’.

The launch season – an outdoor opening ceremony, the opening production of Richard Cameron’s *The Glee Club* and the ‘open house’ weekend, which allowed the building to be explored – some 6,000 people coming through the doors – had a major impact in galvanising public opinion. “In six months, we’d sold 53,000 tickets, not bad for a town where no one is engaged or interested in the arts.” Negative assumptions have been overturned.

Finally, a rhetorical question: “Sometimes the label of community theatre seems to diminish what it is. It’s as if it’s something that other people do but is not the proper stuff of theatres. But if theatres aren’t community theatres, connecting and working for and with their communities, building an understanding of the uniqueness of the place and the people, what are they for?”

Kirstie Davis, CEO/Artistic Director, Forest Forge Theatre Company

“It is their space, not yours”

Kirstie was delighted at the focus of the conference. “It’s amazing to have community theatre front and centre stage.” She gave an overview of three broad ambitions for Forest Forge – engagement, participation, empowerment – principles that go to the heart of community theatre.

Set up 33 years ago to serve rural communities in Hampshire, Wiltshire and Dorset, the company now works from a purpose-built studio on an industrial estate, where everything gets made, then taken out on the road. “You should know your place, know who the people are”, she advised. Specialising in new writing, the company – only seven staff in total – connect with 42,000 people a year, including 13,000 in the creative learning programme. They run over a thousand educational workshops: “There is not this sense of creative learning being bolted on – the education side of our work is at the core of our work.”

She outlined three strands of their work: ‘Ignite’ is work for young people and families; ‘Galvanise’ strengthens the touring infrastructure of Hampshire and goes into unusual types of venue; and ‘Forge’ is for national touring, with an emphasis on cross-arts forms and pushing the boundaries.

What really brought home the challenges facing the company was when she walked the audience through a week in the life of the recent winter show, an adaptation of *Anne of Green Gables* that achieved 91 per cent capacity in the venues it toured to. She showed the village hall at Hanging Langford – its width the same as the set size, the tallest actor having to bend under a beam to move around. On Christmas Eve, with flooding having caused a loss of power at the next venue – King Edward’s Hall, West Tytherley – they had to do a shortened version so the audience could get home by daylight. At the Brixham Theatre, Torbay, the set had to be lugged up a vertiginous metal staircase. At Gussage All Saints, the space was so constricted that the costume changes, 47 in total, had to be done with the actors coming through the auditorium into the kitchen, rendering it out of bounds during the interval. “That is the reality of rural touring – however, we embrace it,” she concluded cheerily and triumphantly.

A guiding principle is that “If the community has already invested in it – they will come and see the play”. The freedom in rural touring, despite its rigours, is that audiences trust you, so fear of new writing isn’t an issue – “If they trust the company, they don’t even consider it as a piece of ‘new writing’”. Wherever the company went, they always had to remember: “It is their space, not yours.”



**Louise Lappin-Cook, Director,
Tacchi-Morris Arts Centre, Taunton**

“We are always an arts centre, we are never a school hall”

“At the heart of everything we do is a sense of community,” Louise explained, setting out the background to this 250-seat arts centre, based in a county – Somerset – that was the first to issue 100 per cent funding cuts to the arts.

The centre is more supported than most and has the unusual distinction of having been brought into being on the back of a production – *Peace Child*, presented by Heathfield Community School, which adjoins the centre. The brainchild of the local equality and peace campaigner Kathleen Tacchi-Morris, it was enabled by a trust set up in her name after her death in 1993 and the centre opened in 2000. The involvement of the school lends a strong degree of sustainability. It relies on a volunteer base of 50 adults, and 100 youngsters.

“We’re extremely fortunate to be part of a school and college where the arts are valued,” she said. Proof of engagement? There were 14,000 ticket visitors in 2009; that figure reached 27,500 in 2013 – over the past five years, the number of evenings of performance staged has increased by 43 per cent. They run 21 community classes a week. Taunton is growing in size, some 4,000 homes will be built over the next 10 years. Over the next five years, “We want to see far more people and professional companies making work in Somerset”; they plan to launch an associate artist scheme that will open up the rehearsal facilities.

“We are always an arts centre, we are never a school hall, an exam room or an assembly hall, we are a space where art is created and made by students, by professionals, by amateurs and by community groups.” She signed off with the following: “We want to provide a space where people can grow, experiment and explore – and where professional, community, amateur and educational arts can mix, and where everyone feels part of our community.”

**Gary Trinder, Vice-Chairman and Technical Director,
Stockport Plaza Trust**

“We’ve been in it for the long-haul”

Gary took us through the period-faithful restoration of the Plaza cinema in Stockport, a building that opened in 1932 and which, after some years of commercial success, wound up becoming a bingo hall in the mid-1960s, before finally closing in 1998. Concerned locals lobbied the local metropolitan council for funds to procure the building. It was bought from the Rank Organisation in 2000 and took seven months to convert into a theatre and cinema. In 2009, it closed for 10 months for further restoration.

The organisation is run by the Stockport Plaza Trust, limited by guarantee, with seven in the directorate, and a friends’ organisation, comprising 1,500 members – around 100 of them serving as active volunteers on site: “The money they generate through subscriptions all comes back to the trust.” The first wave of funding came from HLF, North West Regional Development Agency, Stockport council and the Trust itself amounting to £3.2m. Subsequently they have generated £570,000 for spending on refurbishment of the seating (£3.77m figure overall).

The building operates a programme some 270 days a year, theatrical productions make up 65 per cent of activity, the rest is film – which includes live theatre screenings from NT Live, Glyndebourne and similar initiatives. This flagged up early on a dominant new trend in cultural provision that many other delegates referred to: a sense that for the first time in history, audiences living far from the capital and other major sites of theatrical production are now able – thanks to live broadcast and online streaming – to see the best work that’s on offer. This has raised audience expectations as to the quality of theatre it should be exposed to, opened up scope for regional work to find a wider audience and greater viability and restored a sense of occasion to cinema-going during the week.

Some interesting points to note: these projects take time and a good working relationship with the council has been essential. “We’ve been in it for the long-haul,” Gary explained. Their architect has been with them since the outset, his role to serve the vision, not put his own stamp on the building. The financial value of the volunteers has been put at £400,000: “If we didn’t have that input, the project wouldn’t fly because we don’t have any revenue grants.”

Session #2

Funding community theatres

The session looked at a range of new and existing models for the capital and revenue funding of community theatres, from Arts Council England and Heritage Lottery Fund programmes through to using commercial assets to generate income and community share offers.

**Session chair: Gwilym Gibbons, Director,
Shetland Arts Development Agency**

Sir Peter Bazalgette

Chair, Arts Council England

John Lewis

CEO, Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation

Ben Greener

Programme Manager Heritage Enterprise, Heritage Lottery Fund

Bill Graham

Chair, Clifton Community Arts Centre, Wellington, nr Telford

Sir Peter Balzquette, Chair, Arts Council England

“Some of the best theatres are community theatres”

The Arts Council's urbane head, 15 months in the job, began by suggesting that attempting “definitions of community theatre” was “a bit like pinning jelly to the wall.” Nevertheless he stressed that involvement and participation were crucial: “We don't want the idea to end up being about ‘us’ watching ‘them’.”

He outlined some of the ways Arts Council England supported the participatory model with £4.3m of funding last year, helping projects such as Collective Encounters on Merseyside (using theatre to engage with those on the margins of society), the RSC's Open Stages (which worked with 100 amateur theatre groups) and Pilot's city-wide project in York Blood and Chocolate (involving 200 locals taking part in WW1 tableaux).

In addition: there was £8m of funding if youth theatre was included. In terms of buildings, he cited the £16m of Lottery money that went into the refurbishment of the Everyman in Liverpool, a venue “bound up with its people and locality”. Partnership was at the heart of the Arts Council's approach. He outlined the way its funding stream – National Portfolio Organisations, various strategic funds and the open-ended Grants for the Arts programme – is harnessed to this end.

“We want an arts sector that reflects contemporary England,” he argued. “That can only be achieved by arts organisations that are rooted in their communities.” Local communities must take charge – “We want to help them to build the resources and infrastructure”. He mentioned the £47m Creative People and Places Fund, designed to reach those “cold spots of least engagement round the country.” Just over £34m has been invested in 18 consortia – among them organisations based in Kirklees and Stoke on Trent. The pot for Grants for the Arts, to which community organisations have access, has been increased – the figure stands at £70m for 2015-2018.

What else has helped? The Catalyst scheme for match funding, which has helped local theatres like the Roses Theatre in Tewkesbury. The introduction of tax relief – “an incredibly significant move by the Chancellor” – “will bring millions and millions into theatre production in the next decade.” Support for the 2011 Localism Act – and an emphasis of the development of partnerships – ran alongside this. He concluded: “The mission is bring great art and culture to everyone. All of our funding is directed ultimately to communities. And where there isn't as yet wide arts provision or

audiences for arts, we're looking to build those creative communities so they can make quality applications in the future.”

John Lewis, CEO, Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation

“Our model is repeatable”

John explained the rare, arts-enhancing properties of his organisation, a self-funded charity, established in 1995, that is directly descended from the private sector company that set up Letchworth Garden City in 1903. The town, which now has a population of some 33,000 people, can boast over 650 social groups and networks – an “incredible” figure.

That state of affairs can be attributed to a rare act of foresight 110 years ago, which saw the establishment of an endowment – based on a property portfolio – that could support a range of activities. The fund – £120m approx – yields “£7.5-8m of income every year... roughly 50 per cent of that goes back into the town to benefit and supply activities people can enjoy.” Others – particularly new towns coming into being like Ebbsfleet – could learn from Letchworth's example. “If people think now about capturing value to share long-term you've got a fantastic model – it doesn't have to be on a grand scale.”

The Foundation has recognised that “town centres are not going to stay the way they were”. A period of research and planning has taken place to assess potential arts provision. “We haven't just said ‘Let's have a spangly new arts centre.’ Instead the mission has been to bring new life to existing buildings.” An old grammar school is now being used to house a new school for the creative arts, part of an urban creative hub. Plans are afoot to transform the town's four-screen art deco cinema – the Broadway – into an arts centre.

How did they know that there would be an audience? “Rather than build and hope people will come, in the manner of '80s-'90s development, we thought ‘Let's get people active already.’” The adoption of digital cinema technology to reap the benefits of external initiatives like NT Live and the Royal Opera House's broadcast programme, has demonstrated ample public appetite for the performing arts: “People have been booking to come to the cinema two to three months in advance.” That has emboldened the Foundation to plan the transformation of one cinema auditorium into a 378-seat theatre, which should open early in 2016.



Ben Greener, Programme Manager Heritage Enterprise, Heritage Lottery Fund

“If you can make a strong enough case, we will listen to you”

Ben got straight down to facts. The HLF has £375m a year to distribute. Because of the tough overall funding climate, the number of applications for funds has surged, resulting in a lower success rate for bids than ever (around 50 per cent are approved). There are still grounds for optimism, he suggested.

The current strategic framework – “A lasting difference for heritage and people” – runs through to 2018. Among the programmes of funding he instanced:

- 1) Start-up grants, lending support of £3-10,000 at an early stage to help the assessment of potential bids.
- 2) Transition funding [£10,000 to £100,000] for applicants who have already received HLF funding, “to make them look at how they resource themselves” – ie checking sustainability.
- 3) The Catalyst programme – [£3,000 to £10,000] supporting members of staff to explore fund-raising from other sources (now closed for applications).
- 4) The funding of private ownership up to £100,000, given that two thirds of listed buildings lie in hands of private owners, to open up access and engagement.

The Heritage Enterprise programme – launched in 2013 – is based on a piece of research called “New ideas need old buildings”. “It demonstrated that historic buildings and quarters are exactly the kind of places where new ideas can be fostered and where economic growth can happen. It’s all about... empowering local communities to understand what they’ve got, to develop plans they might have for it, then embedding a sustainable use in that building.”

Every project has to be predominantly community run. One example he dwelt on in detail was The Globe Theatre in Stockton on Tees – initially a cinema that went on to host live stage shows, before decades of decline and finally closure in 1997. After extensive research, plans are afoot, supported by £4m HLF money, to redevelop it as a 2,500-seater venue specialising in music and comedy. The overall aim is to move away from past cycles of “degeneration to regeneration”. “If you can make a strong enough case we will listen to you.”

Bill Graham, Chair, Clifton Community Arts Centre, Wellington, nr Telford

“People want a place where they can gather”

Bill took delegates through the history of the Clifton cinema, built in 1938 and closed in 1983, at which point it was converted into a supermarket and ancillary warehouse. He outlined the bleak cultural offer for residents in Telford – around 170,000 – at present: “There is one town hall which puts on an unashamedly populist programme – there’s no adult arts provision.” After the supermarket closed, a small group of interested locals, with no arts programming experience between them, tried to put the interest shown at an ‘ideas farm’ in finding a future cultural life for the building into action.

The plan is for a 400-seat flexible theatre auditorium and at circle level a high quality 100-seat digital cinema – drawing inspiration from the Old Market Hall in Shrewsbury. Additionally, and crucially from a commercial point of view, there would be three multi-purpose rooms, exhibition areas, work spaces and a public café bar – “There’s nothing in that part of Telford for the public that is not alcohol led – people are interested in a place where they can gather... and find artistic and creative expression.”

How to fund this redressing of the ‘arts deficit’? They have gone down the avenue of issuing community shares. This relied in the first instance on the Clifton action group becoming a registered entity, which was enabled with assistance from Co-operatives UK. He outlined the basic mechanism of a community share issue.

Positives? “We’ve had widespread support, lots of positive local media coverage.” Notably, the Clifton has hired a local hall to put on film shows “to prove there was demand. We sold out.” Problems? “We can’t get registered as an Asset of Community Value as it has been registered A1 use, retail, since 1987.” Well past the five year rule. Other issues include lack of funding from the local authority, an underdeveloped strategic plan at the outset, the inadequacy of the initial website, an insufficient marketing budget and a feeling that the minimum share purchase was too low. He was realistic about the work ahead: “This project is still very much an acorn.”





Session #3

Community Rights

The Localism Act of 2011 created opportunities for communities to plan and develop the future of their local areas. These included the listing of Assets of Community Value under Right to Bid, Neighbourhood Planning and creating more incentives for Community Asset Transfers. These changes, challenges and opportunities informed the experiences relayed by the third panel.

**Session chair: Ruth Eastwood, CEO,
Blackpool Grand Theatre**

Sophie Michelena

Development Manager, Locality

John Caldwell

Chair, The Civic Group, Stourport-on-Severn

Eileen Collier

Chair, Brampton Arts Centre

Alan Williams

Director, Brampton Arts Centre

Kevin Spence

Chair, Little Theatre Guild

Sophie Michelena Development Manager, Locality

“We’re here to help. I wish you all the best”

Locality is a movement of over 700 community-led organisations and 200 associate partners that “aims to help neighbourhoods and communities”. Sophie outlined the changes that are helping to foment a new climate of localism: the Right to Build, the Right to Bid and the Right to Challenge. “Development and planning is about places where people live, work, play etc, culture is part of that.” Local criteria are now taking priority in planning decisions. She outlined the value of Neighbourhood Plans. “Those areas that have a Neighbourhood Plan will be able to have access to 25 per cent of the Community Infrastructure Levy that local authorities are able to raise from developers. If there is a plan you have access to extra sources of funding.”

The Right to Bid offers no guarantees but acts as a welcome brake on unwanted developments and changes of use, allowing community-led plans to be developed for assets registered as being of community value. “You have to demonstrate those assets have community value – their principal use should be for cultural and social well-being.” She mentioned Bexhill Community Playhouse, which is aiming to bring the Bexhill Cinema back into use, but suggested theatre-interested parties haven’t so far much taken up the legislation. “Why do we believe in community owned assets? Across the UK, we’ve seen how having something that is local helps generate local wealth and pride of place – it can galvanise people.” What is the cost of doing nothing? High... “We have seen too many buildings falling into disuse.”

John Caldwell, Chair, The Civic Group, Stourport-on-Severn

“If you don’t know where you’re going, how do you know when you get there?”

John gave an inspiring resume of the arduous labour of love that has gone into enacting a Community Asset Transfer of the Civic Stourport-on-Severn, so that it moved from being council-run into local use rather than being sold off to help pay for new council headquarters. When the news that the Civic would close first broke, “local groups weren’t happy”. They protested and petitioned. The council offered a new facility to the tune of £1m but this was felt to be inadequate compensation for a space that can seat 400 people. “The option of transferring the building into community ownership” was recognised and a small group of concerned locals decided to take an asset transfer plan forward.

He divided the challenges into two categories: “those faced because of who we are” and “who we’re dealing with”. In the first instance, “we are all amateurs – none of us have professional experience of running a venue or events programmes”. The result has been a steep learning curve – “half of us didn’t even know the proper technical terms for stage equipment”. It’s essential to keep focused: “If you don’t know where you’re going, how do you know when you get there?” He lamented the fact that there isn’t “a Theatre Management for Dummies” book. The budget grew from a single donation of £30, the starting-point for their fund-raising activities. “Taking an underused building and trying to change the perceptions of the local community is very time-consuming and energy-consuming but worth it every step of the way.” There were 30 bookings a year when they took over, last year that had risen to 300. In 2013, over 12,000 people paid to attend an event, a further 5,000 attended the venue for free.

Developing a healthy working relationship with the relevant local authorities – for complex reasons three in this case – has proved testing. “The same local authority that has given us the opportunity has at times been the biggest obstacle” – issues included withholding information and the addition of unexpected strings and demands. “This isn’t sour grapes,” he gently observed, “These are the kinds of challenges other people going down this process will come across... [Community] Asset Transfer is a fantastic tool. Is it simple? No. Is it easy? No. Is it worth it? Every step of the way.”

**Eileen Collier, Chair, Brampton Arts Centre
and Alan Williams, Director, Brampton Arts Centre**

“Successful nominations should be given right of first refusal”

Eileen Collier, a parish councillor in Brampton, Cambridgeshire, took us through the work of the social enterprise company she chairs, Brampton Arts Centre, aimed at saving a redundant RAF theatre due for demolition as a result of the Ministry of Defence’s decision to sell the land.

Giving a quick illustrated introduction to the building, she explained that: “It does reflect its RAF history. It’s small, functional and typical of military establishments. The magic happens inside the theatre.” The 98-seat space is so loved by locals that more than 1,600 signed a petition to save it; quite some tribute to the venue given that there are only 2000 households in Brampton.



RAF Brampton was located in the grounds of Brampton Park, a former stately home, and its closure was announced in October 2010. Since then she has been supporting two local arts groups – Brampton Park Theatre Company and Brampton Choral Society – seeking to save the theatre for continued community use; both groups had made it a base for activity for 50 years until its closure in January 2013. The Theatres Trust put it on its at-risk register.

“We hoped the lifting of security restrictions after the closure of the base would make the theatre more accessible to the village and engender social cohesion at a time of considerable change,” she continued, explaining that the site is part of a bigger development of 400 homes. “We hoped that changes in the planning system and the community rights inherited in the Localism Act, especially the Right to Bid, would help us acquire the building from the MOD.”

It hasn't been straightforward. As Alan, a local district councillor, went on to outline, while the district council assessment panel recognised it had value, the attempt to get it listed as an Asset of Community Value was unsuccessful owing to objections from the MOD – which claimed that its use as a social centre was ancillary to its use as a briefing facility. The MOD prevented access to the building by a surveyor to assess refurbishment costs, so they eventually decided against pursuing the listing. “We are currently pinning our hopes on the planning changes inherent in the National Planning Policy Framework [NPPF] and its emphasis on sustainable development,” he added. “As a district councillor, I am embarrassed to say I have seen little evidence of Huntingdonshire District Council planning officers' willingness or ability to take this on board.”

Eileen stepped back into the limelight with some observations about what had been learned and how things could be improved. Firstly successful Asset of Community Value nominations should be given right of first refusal, as in Scotland, and local planning authorities should be given stronger guidelines to comply with the sustainable development criteria of the National Planning Policy Framework where cultural assets are concerned. On a possibly positive note the site has now been sold to a developer, who the group intends to meet with. “The struggle to save the theatre continues,” she concluded with a fiery flourish.

Kevin Spence, Chair, Little Theatre Guild

“Having buildings gives us problems and freedoms”

Kevin gave a brief description of the genesis and growth of the Guild, which began in 1946, with nine theatres coming together. By 1988, the number had risen to 30, and there are now 110 theatres, staging over a thousand productions a year – “occupying buildings that would have gone to wrack and ruin. You name the dilapidated building, our theatres have taken it on.”

“Take heart, it can be done,” he advised, “but the road to that success is a long and arduous one.” A key requirement is that the groups have to own and / or have a long lease on their theatre. “Having buildings gives us problems and freedoms – we can make the theatre we want in response to our community.” The oldest is Chesil Theatre in Winchester which dates its activities back 150 years. “All of them grab opportunities, they can see – generally people have come in and learnt on the job.”

Not quite as small as it might sound, the Doncaster Little Theatre – which Kevin helps to run – enjoyed a renovation boost thanks to a Big Lottery award of £400,000; it puts a premium on taking work out into the community as well as trying to draw audiences in – recently presenting a production of *Brassed Off* using two local community brass bands.

Other theatres mentioned in his whistle-stop tour of the Guild's members included: The Questors in Ealing, which has a big emphasis on education: “They have eight spaces they hire out... think of the possibilities there”; the Cotswold Playhouse in Stroud, a converted Methodist chapel that has been successful at raising funds from supporters – reaching a target of £500,000 and supplementing income with rental fees brought in by mobile phone masts; also the Crescent Theatre in Birmingham, which helps to provide a commercial outlet for touring artists; the Riverhead Theatre in Louth, Lincolnshire – “Boy oh boy, a nice theatre”; and Robin Hood Theatre in Newark, which was closed for health and safety reasons, but carried on making work in the community and has recently reopened, with the assistance of a small capital grant from The Theatres Trust.

He finished by saying “We do support the community rights agenda but we have been doing this for years. A lot of our theatres aren't in-the-know about what the agenda is – our job to advise and support.”

Session #4

Community theatres – the future...

The final session looked at a range of exciting and ambitious projects that aim to markedly improve the community role and value each panellist's theatre offers.

Session chair: David Jubb, Artistic Director, Battersea Arts Centre, London

Sheena Wrigley

Chief Executive, West Yorkshire Playhouse

Philip Thomson

Treasurer, Saltburn Community & Arts Association

Deborah Bestwick MBE

Director, Ovalhouse

Sheena Wrigley, Chief Executive, West Yorkshire Playhouse

"We want a building that is active and lively"

Sheena began by picking up the comments made earlier in the day by Peter Stark, about the need to look back in order to move forward. She discussed how West Yorkshire Playhouse (WYP) had begun to review its *raison d'être* over the past five years, "looking at ways we could re-engage with the communities we serve", and how that engagement could be reflected in its range of activities and its architecture.

Reminding delegates of its communal origins, she explained that "The Playhouse as we know it came out of a campaign by local people to found a producing theatre... in the city of Leeds." It was eventually sited at the university before the push came, some 25 years later, to bring it closer into the city centre. What was envisaged as happening next – the WYP taking its place amid a new cultural quarter on the former site of a major housing scheme at Quarry Hill – didn't quite go according to plan, leaving the building as a solitary cultural destination.

Some of the virtues enshrined in the conception of the venue – that it wouldn't look like a theatre, that "it would be approachable and unintimidating" – were later held up as vices. Public feedback began to suggest an organisation that was "invisible, closed off and insular, having its back to the city, not porous."

It was important not to let go of the need for bricks and mortar: the building "provides a gathering space, a democratic space – we want a building that is active and lively". But there are means of enhancing it so that it becomes more opened up, providing not only an artistic environment but also a social and business centre and a learning space all in one. There's now an acknowledged need for the building to reach out better to the local artistic community, she continued – "giving generously and democratically things we do have – spaces and expertise and some of our resources". The WYP has also recommitted itself to strands of work that have 'a specific local accent', whether that be a local story like *The Hounding of David Oluwale* or Chris Goode's *Nine*, which used local people's stories and performers in a 'professionally supported production'.

She showed slides of a possible renovation produced by local architects – "The desire to make it look unimposing [has] made it look bureaucratic", she asserted. It needs to look more like a theatre and be reoriented to face towards the city. "Metaphorically and physically" it needs to be porous – more glass, walls taken

down, a more human scale, a better use of space inside and out. "The building may never be funded" but what they've learnt "will be woven into our future".

Philip Thomson, Treasurer, Saltburn Community & Arts Association

"It's not enough to say a building is deteriorating"

Saltburn Arts is based in a converted 1910 Methodist church in Saltburn-by-the-Sea, North Yorkshire. In 2007 a limited company replaced a charitable association that had been operating in various guises since 1968 to manage the building, after the church's congregation numbers declined. "The local drama group has spent 40 years trying to turn it into a theatre," with evident success, Alan noted. The venue boasts a 149-seat proscenium arch performance space.

In terms of tips, he reminded the audience that if your company is a registered charity you can get 80 per cent off your rates, can apply for Gift Aid, raising revenue by 25 per cent, and need only pay five per cent VAT on utility bills.

Saltburn has been the beneficiary of money allocated by The People's Millions – the partnership between Big Lottery Fund and ITV, where the public help decide which local community projects get up to £50,000 of Lottery funding. Last year the centre wanted to refurbish its seats and install sound equipment; thanks to its good relations with its community, enough viewers phoned in to secure victory.

"If one was going to consider acquiring a Community Asset – what is the benefit of doing so?" he asked, advising: "Think it through – it's not enough to say a building is deteriorating. Unless it has a function, there is little point in organising a Community Asset Transfer. You should have a group that is properly constituted. These are fundamental points. Governance is of the essence... Is there a sustainable business plan? Without that all these aspirations mean nothing."

Considering the wider questions, he asked: "Buildings – are they the *raison d'être*? No, they allow the facilitation of drama." Open spaces, too, should not be forgotten – "We should be guarding them as much as we do buildings". Among other suggestions he proposed that amateur groups from further afield should be made to feel welcome too: "One point of assistance we could give is to share assets, invite other groups to perform".

Closing thoughts

Henry Bonsu

Deborah Bestwick MBE, Director, Ovalhouse

“The community have fed into this all the way along”

Deborah began by conceding: “We never describe ourselves as a community theatre”, but stressed: “We have a strong relationship with community [and] our work is based often on community.” She talked through the ‘unlikely alliances’ that had brought Ovalhouse into being, the missionary zeal of the settlement created by Christ Church, Oxford in the 1930s who enabled young people from disadvantaged areas of South London to access sports and leisure activities through membership of an outreach club. There was a marked change in direction in the 1960s, when warden Peter Oliver placed an emphasis on drama, becoming the artistic founder of Oval House Theatre and staging its inaugural production: Shelagh Delaney’s then contemporary *A Taste of Honey*. This transformation heralded the work of waves of radical artists, a point she nicely illustrated with a photo series that even featured a shot of a young Tim Roth.

The ongoing ambition has been to maintain “a dialogue with audiences, supporting artists who have a local resonance, a regional impact and an international reputation.”

The theatre’s home up until this point has reached the end of its viable life: it’s too small and doesn’t work financially. A new base beckons a mile and a half away in Somerleyton Road, Brixton, as part of Future Brixton, a multi-million pound regeneration scheme for the area. Deborah talked through the process of this relocation, which will see the local council taking the existing building, developing it and putting the value earned into the new space.

People recognise that change needs to happen in Brixton, she said. She consulted the Brixton Business Forum; among the first people to stand up and say “That’s exactly what’s needed” were the Brixton Market Traders Federation.

The proposed deal is a good one – a 999-year lease at a peppercorn rate – part of a mix of new housing, other enterprise initiatives and a health centre. “The community have fed into this all the way along,” she declared. “It’s not a traditional developer-led initiative.” Lambeth council will retain the freehold of the land and the equity in the new housing, but will turn management over to a third-party co-operative. There will be two theatres, seven rehearsal spaces, and a minimum of 16 work-units for creative organisations which will serve to bring in rent and keep things going. “It’s a business plan, an ideological plan and an operations plan.”

“We’ve discussed what community theatres are, how they might be funded,” Henry reflected as he wrapped up, “how they’ve got to be new, dynamic and imaginative, the opportunities and challenges at the local level. David [Jubb] talked about the spirit of Joan Littlewood and I think it’s here. Whether you’re static or you’re touring, whether in a big building or a small one, these entities are all hubs of community – which is why it’s impossible to define exactly what a community theatre is.

“What sticks out in my mind is that if you don’t do it, then it may not happen organically – nobody else will do it. You’re vitally important but succession planning is [also] very important – who is going to take over, how do we make things attractive for the next generation coming through, making them feel welcome? They have to feel part of these buildings, this burst of energy, that you all represent and when you return to your respective areas, you’ve got to fire the imaginations of these people, whether you live in Brixton, as I do, or elsewhere. Think long term, think about the enabling properties of the legislation, even if it is not perfect. The minister said that in years to come – he may be right – we will see this as truly radical legislation.”

Summing up:

Conference Reporter,
Dominic Cavendish

After a full day of exploring a range of subjects under the banner heading – Community Theatres – were those who attended the City Varieties much clearer as to what they were looking at and looking for? In a way the success of the occasion was to make us realise how broad and complex the term 'community' is, and how open-ended some of the questions are that arise from trying to discuss its place in the wider theatre ecology.

Sir Peter Bazalgette captured the difficulty best when saying that reaching for a catch-all description is "a bit like pinning jelly to the wall". Perhaps the initial reticence of delegates to offer comments from the floor and preference for sharing their practical concerns stemmed from the feeling that we 'know' a community theatre when we see one; and there's almost a gut instinct that tells us when a theatre is failing to connect and engage fully with the community it is supposed to serve. This could be a major regional hub like the West Yorkshire Playhouse, which is now scrutinising every aspect of the way it speaks to people across Leeds, or a more out-of-the-way venue, such as the Milton Rooms in Malton, 45 miles away, representatives of which were at the conference seeking advice on how to become more artistically self-sufficient.

It may be a weakness at times of the UK theatre-making and theatre-enabling world that it doesn't like to dwell too much on abstract argument, but just as good art often grows from a grassroots level, so a sophisticated understanding of major issues can also arise from the facts on the ground.

What came across strongly time and again was a counsel of caution. Unless you're sure you're aiming to cater to the needs of your locality – and create a dynamic relationship in which local artistry, business, education and volunteer supporters form a virtuous circle of participation – you should pause before embarking on schemes to transform disused or under-used buildings.

In general, the conference captured a spirit of opportunity. For Peter Stark, we are at a potentially momentous time when a new framework might be established that delivers a better, broader deal for the population's social and cultural needs. As keynote speaker Stephen Williams MP emphasised, the fruits of the Localism Act of 2011 are there for the taking – whatever one's politics, and however cynical one might be, the invitation to artistic entrepreneurialism contained in such mechanisms as the Right to Bid and Community Asset Transfers is plain.

Whether these rights are yet sufficiently strong is open to question; what we heard from the supporters of the Brampton Arts Centre,

unable to get a former RAF theatre listed as an Asset of Community Value in the face of Ministry of Defence intransigence, suggested otherwise. What's also lacking is a reliable, one-stop-shop for advice for the uninitiated (the very people bound to get involved in heart-on-sleeve passion projects like these) – but all told this could be the best time for DIY cultural provision in a generation.

There were plenty of insights that emerged during the four principal sessions that were acknowledged by many delegates as useful and certainly as a theatre critic, well used to trawling the regions for the Daily Telegraph, there were some genuine points of newsworthy interest, alongside inspiring instances of endurance and vision. It is now clear that screening and broadcasting initiatives like NT Live have had a transformative effect in unexpected ways: serving to stimulate interest in live theatre, they have drummed up trade at newly established arts centres like the Mareel at Lerwick, Shetland but have also indicated that there's an appetite for live performance in Letchworth and Clifton, nr Telford, emboldening groups to undertake major capital projects.

The difference in arts funding outlook for Letchworth and Clifton – the former benefiting from a long-standing urban endowment, the latter reliant on a community share issue to raise money – flagged up how diverse the monetary challenges are. Can property development pave the way for funding – assuming, as all those taking part seemed to, that council budgets will remain too tight to be of much use going forward? If building and regeneration schemes can be harnessed to the advantage of local communities that will require local authorities to be as proactive as possible. As the conference gleaned, through the testimony of John Caldwell, Chair of the Civic, Stourport-on-Severn, some councils really need to raise their game.

But Caldwell summed up the inspiring can-do attitude that panel chair David Jubb alighted on in the closing session. Describing the labour of love, the set-backs, the steep learning curve, Caldwell asked himself, and us: "Is it simple? No. Is it easy? No. Is it worth it? Every step of the way." You wanted that on a T-shirt, really, but of countless observations, it was 2014's take-home message.

As a PS to all this: inevitably tens of thousands of words were uttered at this conference. I have had to edit and excise and now apologise to anyone who felt the views they aired weren't reflected or have been too truncated. Those wishing to get as complete a sense as any of what was discussed, each session of the way, can visit theatrevoice.com and listen to the bulk of the material, as it was recorded, warts, coughs, laughter, applause and all.



Voices from the Conference

"People from around the country have been sharing for the first time in a long time local stories on a national stage about a huge range of projects and learning from them. There are hundreds more projects and we've got to build those national connections, so we can reach the whole of the population."

Peter Stark, Chair, Voluntary Arts

"I'm interested in anything people have to say about how communities really participate in running theatres because I come from a place where things are top-down."

Tim Saward, London Borough of Hillingdon

"One way of really understanding who you are and what you do as an organisation is stepping out from where you are. That's something that's been really useful today – talking to people about what they're doing. There are some extraordinary elements of innovation that you can pick up on."

Gwilym Gibbons, Director, Shetland Arts Development Agency

"I don't think there is 'a community'. What you have are multiple communities – people who make up those communities move between them, and people may not even place themselves within a community – the relationship is fluid."

Sheena Wrigley, Chief Executive, West Yorkshire Playhouse

"Whether you're a building or an arts organisation, the question is: How do you create a relationship that allows you to be responsive and provocative – so that there's a two-way conversation between what you're trying to do and the community you're trying to serve. That community is incredibly complex so our thinking has to be robust and complex, too. It's not about binary arguments."

Kully Thiarai, Executive Director, Cast, Doncaster

"What we have achieved by coming here was to find out about making a couple of buildings that are local to us Assets of Community Value in the hope that we might get a foot in the door with them and to hear about other people's experiences. The stories we heard from

Stourport-on-Severn and Clifton were particularly fascinating."

Sarah Ley, Tower Theatre Company

"It's been a valuable day in realising where we fit in, and getting the word out in terms of the work. Predominantly, community theatre is part of what theatre is trying to do to engage new audiences and make sense of the world it's in."

Kirstie Davis, Artistic Director, Forest Forge Theatre Company

"When you look at the funding that comes in other than the Heritage Lottery money – a lot of it comes from local councils and from Section 106 agreements. We're in a relatively rural area, where it's difficult for the council to negotiate 106 agreements because there are no big developments. I wonder if the HLF can look at some areas outside the big cities more favourably for that reason."

Gregor McGregor, Grand Pavilion, Matlock Bath

"There needs to be a better explanatory framework of how the major potential funders fit together. You can sit down and write three different bids to three organisations – that's a lot of work. Can there not be a main arts development fund to which you apply so there's only one door to knock on, instead of three?"

Bill Graham, Clifton Community Arts Centre

"I've been struck by the emphasis on buildings and structures. When Wales and Scotland decided to set up their national theatres they didn't set up a building, they went for a more fluid structure. I'm intrigued by that."

Dr Alison Jeffers, Lecturer, University of Manchester

"One of the big problems in the voluntary sector is the provision of volunteers to keep these places running. Pressures in the workforce mean there are fewer volunteers coming forward. We need to motivate people to come in and do the work that needs to be done."

Brian Stoner, Little Theatre Guild

Resources

Links to some of the buildings and topics discussed at Conference 14

Contributors

Arts Council England

artsCouncil.org.uk

Brampton Arts Centre

bramptonlittletheatre.co.uk

Cast, Doncaster

castindoncaster.com

Civic, Stourport-on-Severn

thecivicstourport.co.uk

Clifton Community Arts Centre, Wellington

theclifton.org

Forest Forge, Ringwood, Hampshire

forestforge.co.uk

Heritage Lottery Fund

hlf.org.uk

Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation

letchworth.com/heritage-foundation

Little Theatre Guild

littletheatreguild.com

Locality

locality.org.uk

Ovalhouse, London

ovalhouse.com

Saltburn Arts, Saltburn-by-the-Sea

saltburnarts.co.uk

Stockport Plaza Trust

stockportplaza.co.uk

Tacchi-Morris Arts Centre, Taunton

tacchi-morris.com

West Yorkshire Playhouse, Leeds

wyp.org.uk

For further information, resources and advice visit theatretrust.org.uk.

Policy

Localism Act 2011

gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/5959/1896534.pdf

Neighbourhood Planning

Neighbourhood Planning Regulations made following the Localism Act 2011.

gov.uk/government/policies/giving-communities-more-power-in-planning-local-development/supporting-pages/neighbourhood-planning

Community Asset Transfer

mycommunityrights.org.uk/community-asset-transfer/

Definition: Local authorities are empowered to transfer the ownership of land and buildings to communities for less than their market value. This is known as 'discounted asset transfer' or 'asset transfer'.

Community Right to Bid

mycommunityrights.org.uk/community-right-to-bid

Definition: Mechanism to 'pause' the sale of buildings or land communities care about. If something has been registered as an 'asset of community value', if it is then offered for sale, communities have up to six months to prepare a bid.

Community Right to Build

mycommunityrights.org.uk/community-right-to-build

Definition: an enabling right supporting local people to undertake development so that communities are collectively owning, developing and/or managing their own land and developments; a way for communities to choose where and when to build homes, shops, facilities and businesses.

Community Right to Challenge

mycommunityrights.org.uk/community-right-to-challenge

Definition: enables communities to challenge to take over local services that they think they can run differently and better; applies to services being delivered by local authorities.

Community Infrastructure Levy

gov.uk/government/policies/giving-communities-more-power-in-planning-local-development/supporting-pages/community-infrastructure-levy

Definition: a new levy that local authorities in England and Wales can choose to charge on new developments in their area.

Attendees

Stephen Abbott	Sweett Group	Bill Graham	Clifton Community Arts Centre	Mike Philpott	Unusual Rigging Ltd
Naomi Alexander	Battersea Arts Centre	Joan Graham	Clifton Community Arts Centre	David Popple	Bonington Theatre
John Allen	Northern Light			Mark Price	The Theatres Trust
Ross Anthony	The Theatres Trust	Steve Green		Mark Priestley	Unusual Rigging Ltd
Tim Atkinson	Entertaining Sustainability	Ric Green	Opera North	James Pullan	Guiseley AOS Theatre
Sir Peter Bazalgette	Arts Council England	Ben Greener	Heritage Lottery Fund	Mark Rasmussen	British Harlequin plc
Darren Beckley	Stage Electrics	Rebecca Hall	Artifax Software Limited	John Riddell	Theatre Projects Consultants
Lesley Bell	Child Graddon Lewis	Martin Halliday	Marina Theatre Trust	Stephanie Rolt	The Theatres Trust
Anne Besford	Middlesbrough Council (Middlesbrough Theatre)	Mark Hammond	Purcell UK	Nicky Rowland	The Theatres Trust
Deborah Bestwick MBE	Ovalhouse	Nick Harrison	Stage Electrics	John Ryan	Oxford House in Bethnal Green
Bo Bettens	ShowTex	Andy Hayles	Charcoalblue	Mhora Samuel	The Theatres Trust
Paul Bhakar	Stage Electrics	Richard Heath	Momentum Consulting Engineers Ltd	James Sanderson	Purcell UK
Vicky Biles	York Theatre Royal			Tim Saward	London Borough of Hillingdon
Simon Birchall	SAB Sound Light	Duncan Hendry	Festival City Theatres Trust		The Theatres Trust
Sandy Blair	Creative Scotland	Andrew Henry	The Kings Theatre Trust	Andy Shewan	Joseph Rowntree Theatre
Adam Blaxill	Stage Electrics	Laura Highton	Purcell UK	Dan Shrimpton	Foster Wilson Architects
Jessica Blease	University of Chester	Candy Horsbrugh	Chats Palace Ltd	Jonathan Size	State Automation
Tony Blench	Ludlow Assembly Rooms	Nick Humby	NWH Consulting	George Slaney	Purcell UK
Henry Bonsu		Christopher Ingram	NODA	Elizabeth Smith	
Paul Braddock	Wigwam	Rebecca Innes	University of East Anglia	Ian Smith	
Suzie Bridges	Suzie Bridges Architects	Jeremy James	Greenwich & Lewisham Young People's Theatre	Simon Smith	RHWL Arts Team
Michael Brooksbank	Chauvet Europe			David Somner	The Stanley People's Initiative
Kay Burnett	Northern Broadsides	Leila Jancovich	Leeds Metropolitan University		Tiverton High School
Alan Butland	Tyne Theatre & Opera House			Jon Sowden	Little Theatre Guild
		Alison Jeffers	University of Manchester	Kevin Spence	The Theatres Trust
Steve Byrne	Interplay	Stephen Jolly	Buro Happold	Anna Stapleton	Voluntary Arts Network
Jo Caird	The Stage	Nick Jones		Peter Stark OBE	Little Theatre Guild
John Caldwell	The Civic Group	Albert Joyce	DCLG	Brian Stoner	NODA
Kate Carmichael	The Theatres Trust	David Jubb	Battersea Arts Centre	David Streeter	Haworth Tompkins
Dominic Cavendish		Louise Lappin-Cook	Tacchi-Morris Arts Centre	Joanna Sutherland	Arts Council England
Neil Chandler	The Woodville	Ashley Lewis	Robe UK	Ian Tabbron	Fisher Dachs Associates
Judy Cliffe	The Milton Rooms	John Lewis	Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation	Flip Tanner	Leeds City Council
Lola Cloquell	The Theatres Trust			Linzi Tate	Alexandra Palace
Eileen Collier	Brampton Arts Centre	Mark Lewis	Levitt Bernstein	Melissa Tetley	Cast, Doncaster
Mike Cook	GVA Acuity Ltd	Sarah Ley	Tower Theatre Company	Kully Thiarai	Saltburn Arts
Carole Coyne	South London Theatre	Stephen Ley	Tower Theatre Company	Philip Thomson	Plann Limited
Devon Cox	The Theatres Trust	Sean Linnen	Sheffield Theatres	Jack Tilbury	ABTT
Jacqui Dale	Marina Theatre Trust	Graham Lister	Cheshire West and Chester Council	Robin Townley	Stockport Plaza Trust
Rebecca Dallman	Nottingham Playhouse		GDS	Gary Trinder	Luton Culture
Neil Darlison	Arts Council England	Matthew Lloyd	Haworth Tompkins	Ellen Waghorn	Page / Park Architects
Paul Davidson	Abbey Theatre	Imogen Long	The Grand Pavilion Ltd	Nicola Walls	RHT Management
Kirstie Davis	Forest Forge Theatre Company	N.Gregor Macgregor	Arts Council England	Darren Weir	Mind the Gap
		Chris Mellor	The Theatres Trust	Tim Wheeler	Theatreplan LLP
Rob Dickins CBE	The Theatres Trust	Judith Mellor OBE	Locality	John Whitaker	ETC
Barrie Doggett	Suzie Bridges Architects	Sophie Michelena	Anne Minors	Mark White	Brampton Arts Centre
Graham Dowling	Artifax Software Limited	Anne Minors	Performance Consultants	Alan Williams	
Ruth Eastwood	Blackpool Grand Theatre	Keith Mitchell	Northern Light	Stephen Williams MP	Theatresearch
Murray Edwards	Theatre Royal Wakefield	Rebecca Morland	The Theatres Trust	David Wilmore	York Theatre Royal
Barbara Eifler	Making Music	Lucy Nash	University of Chester	Liz Wilson	Sadler's Wells Theatre
Simon Erridge	Bennetts Associates	Pat Nelder	Clwyd Theatr Cymru	Emma Wilson	Foster Wilson Architects
David Eve	Stockport Plaza Trust	Jason Osterman	Theatre Projects Consultants	Edmund Wilson	Kent County Council
Martin Fairs	The Woodville			Sarah Wren	West Yorkshire Playhouse
Mark Foley	Burrell Foley Fischer LLP	Cliff Parkinson	Insurance & Risk	Sheena Wrigley	Buro Happold
Tim Foster	The Theatres Trust	Libby Pearson	The Milton Rooms	Andrew Wylie	ShowTex
Gwilym Gibbons	Shetland Arts Development Agency	Anne Pegg	The Milton Rooms	Suzanne Wynne	

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