

PRESS RELEASE 5 February 2019

Theatres Trust awards 100th grant to Greater Manchester theatres consortium to improve access for the local D/deaf community

Seven projects have been awarded a total of more than £100,000 by the Theatres Trust Theatre Improvement Scheme, in partnership with the Wolfson Foundation, for projects focusing on improving the accessibility of theatres.

Theatres Trust has awarded its **100th grant** to HOME in Manchester, who will work in partnership with the Royal Exchange Theatre, The Lowry, Z-Arts, Contact, Oldham Coliseum and Bolton Octagon, to purchase and share captioning equipment. Our capital grant giving role is made possible because of our funders, who enable us to run multiple grant schemes that address improvements and urgent repairs to theatre buildings via our Theatres Protection Fund, set up in 2012.

Thanks to vital Theatres Trust funding this collaborative consortium approach will provide deaf and deafened audiences across Greater Manchester the opportunity to attend more captioned productions and performances in a greater variety of theatre styles, and access to see shows at theatres that haven't previously offered them.

The other six projects funded by the Theatres Trust **Theatre Improvement Scheme** improve accessibility by installing leading technologies and offering solutions to the challenges historic theatres face when looking to improve the audience experience:

Audience members at the **Stephen Joseph Theatre, Scarborough** and **Gulbenkian in Canterbury** will have the latest leading assistive listening systems installed that will allow customisation as well as audio description of performances.

Wheelchair users, ambulant visitors, and those with pushchairs will soon have independent access to **Pitlochry Festival Theatre**, whose heavy front door will be fitted with an automatic opening device.

For the first time in its 200-year history wheelchair users will be able to directly access the box office at the Grade II* listed **Old Vic in London**. Similarly those who attend the **Oxford Playhouse**, also Grade II*, will be able to fully use the ground floor, including the box office ticket desk and the hire space for meetings and functions, thanks to funding from the Theatres Trust. Meanwhile disabled audience members at **Newcastle's Tyne Theatre and Opera House**, one of the few Grade I listed theatres in the country, will have better access to front of house, toilet and Grand Circle facilities, improving all-round access to this important community asset.

Tom Stickland, Theatres Trust Theatres Adviser said: "Everyone should be able to enjoy the full experience a trip to the theatre offers, regardless of their access requirements. With this funding, in partnership with the Wolfson Foundation, we are able to support seven great projects and 13 theatres around the country, who, by working with their audiences, have found meaningful solutions that allow better access - and that show other theatres how they

Theatres Trust

22 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H 0QL

T 020 7836 8591

F 020 7836 3302

E info@theatrestrust.org.uk

W theatrestrust.org.uk

Chair Tim Eyles **Director** Jon Morgan

Trustees Richard Baldwin, David Blyth, Pam Bone, Paul Cartwright, Paddy Dillon, Ruth Eastwood, David Ian, Richard Johnston, Gary Kemp, Dara Ó Briain, Simon Ricketts, Peter Roberts, Ann Skippers, Anna Stapleton

The National Advisory Public Body for Theatres

The Theatres Trust Charitable Fund co-operates with Theatres Trust, has the same Trustees and is registered as a charity under number 274697

too can better cater for their audiences' needs and make theatre going more accessible.”

Alan Ayckbourn Theatres Trust Ambassador, playwright and theatre director said: “For me it took a major stroke in 2006 to make me aware of the appalling lack of provision for people with disabilities in many of our public buildings. Naturally, in my case this applied to most theatre buildings. Since then, much progress has been made. The recent initiative by the Theatres Trust with its Improving Accessibility scheme will enable seven theatres including (naturally closest to my heart!) Scarborough’s Stephen Joseph Theatre to do exactly that. I do hope other theatres will follow suit, so that soon talk of improving accessibility is a thing of the past - I look forward to that day.”

Paul Ramsbottom, Chief Executive of the Wolfson Foundation said “Wolfson has a strong commitment to supporting people with disabilities, and removing barriers to their participation in all elements of society. We also have a long term commitment to the performing arts, including through our fruitful partnership with the Theatres Trust. I am delighted that this year’s funding partnership brings these two elements together, and we are enormously grateful to the Theatres Trust for their expertise in administering this programme so adroitly.”

This annually themed Theatre Improvement scheme challenges arts organisations to implement innovative and pioneering improvements, whether front of house, or behind the scenes. The scheme will distribute £100,000 each year for the next two years with awards of up to £20,000 per project. The theme for the next round will be announced later this year.

Further details on the scheme can be found: theatretrust.org.uk/grants

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS

Justine Harvey, Marketing and Communications Manager or Kate Carmichael
Communications Coordinator: press@theatretrust.org.uk

Download: [images for press use](#).

Theatres Trust is the national advisory public body for theatres. We believe that current and future generations should have access to good quality theatre buildings where they can be inspired by, and enjoy, live performance.

We champion the future of live performance by protecting and supporting excellent theatre buildings which meet the needs of their communities.

We do this by providing advice on the design, planning, development and sustainability of theatres, campaigning on behalf of theatres old and new and offering financial assistance through grants

theatretrust.org.uk

Wolfson Foundation is an independent charity that aims to improve the civic health of

society by supporting excellence in the fields of science, health, education and the arts and humanities. Founded in 1955, it has awarded over £900 million (£1.9 billion in real terms) to some 11,000 projects across the UK, all on the basis of expert peer review. The Foundation's existing funding programme for the performing arts aims to support and promote excellence in the sector.

Wolfson Foundation has long been providing capital funding to the cultural sector, supporting museums and galleries, historic sites, educational institutions and performing arts organisations. Since the beginning of the 2017 Theatres Trust has been working with the Foundation to develop a scheme focusing on smaller, regional theatres, complementing its existing funding programme and building on the knowledge and expertise of Theatres Trust. Our partnership continues with the **Theatres Improvement Scheme**.

wolfson.org.uk/funding/arts-and-humanities/performing-arts/

More about the Theatre Improvement Scheme grant recipients

HOME, Manchester | £20,000

HOME is Manchester's centre for international contemporary art, theatre and film, which opened in 2015. HOME will lead a consortium of major venues and producing companies in Manchester, including Bolton Octagon, Contact Theatre, Oldham Coliseum, Royal Exchange, The Lowry and Z Arts, to purchase equipment for captioning performances which will be shared between the venues. The Theatre Improvement Scheme Improving Accessibility grant will unlock the exciting and innovative programme across the consortium for deaf or deafened audiences who couldn't previously access these performances. This project is in receipt of the Theatres Trust's 100th grant awarded via its Theatres Protection Fund.

The Old Vic, London | £20,000

The Old Vic in London, a remarkable Georgian theatre which has a global reputation, will make the box office area accessible to wheelchair users for the first time in their 200-year history thanks to the Theatre Improvement Scheme Improving Accessibility grant. This is a good example of a Grade II* listed theatre making necessary changes to its building to improve the audience experience.

Stephen Joseph Theatre, Scarborough | £16,500

The Grade II listed Stephen Joseph Theatre is a producing theatre with a recently renewed focus on new writing. Thanks to the Theatre Improvement Scheme Improving Accessibility grant the theatre will replace the current hearing loop system, which has failed, with an industry-leading assistive listening system that allows customisation for audience members as well as the ability for audio description. This will complement recent front of house access works, making the theatre's productions even more accessible.

Oxford Playhouse | £13,454

The Grade II* Oxford Playhouse is a regional producing theatre with a strong reputation

which opened in 1938 as a repertory theatre for professional and student productions. The Theatre Improvement Scheme Improving Accessibility grant will make the theatre's box office and function space accessible to wheelchair users through the manufacture of a new desk, the widening of doors and installing an access ramp. This will complement recent auditorium access works, creating a front of house experience to match.

Tyne Theatre and Opera House, Newcastle | £12,695

Newcastle's Tyne Theatre and Opera House is one of the few Grade I listed theatres in the country, a Victorian gem, owned and operated by the Preservation Trust, and is an important asset for the community. Thanks to the Theatre Improvement Scheme Improving Accessibility grant they will carry out a small package of works to improve accessibility, including a lowered box office, refurbishment of the stalls' accessible toilet, and works to provide access to additional existing toilets and the Grand Circle. This will improve disabled audience members experience of the theatre and will also support the theatre's viability.

Gulbenkian Theatre and Cinema, Canterbury | £11,239

The Gulbenkian Theatre and Cinema in Canterbury is an arts centre based on the campus of the University of Kent and a recognised leader in work with children and young people. The Theatre Improvement Scheme Improving Accessibility grant will allow them to replace the current hearing system with the latest leading assistive listening device, that allows customisation for audience members as well as the ability for audio description, and the project will be used as a case study about the barriers to engagement in the arts.

Pitlochry Festival Theatre, Scotland | £7,624

Pitlochry Festival Theatre opened in 1951, moving to its current purpose built building in 1981. It operates a unique daily repertoire which means visitors each summer can see six different plays or musicals in as many days. You have to travel to Canada to find its nearest equivalent! As well as being Scotland's premier producer of musical theatre, there are festivals, concerts and events which attract over 100,000 visitors per year, all year round. Pitlochry theatre will fit an automatic door opening device to the heavy front doors, thanks to the Theatre Improvement Scheme Improving Accessibility grant, which will allow wheelchair users, ambulant visitors, and those with pushchairs independent access to the theatre.