



## Victoria Theatre, Salford • Feasibility Study • Executive Summary

Prepared for Salford Victoria Theatre Trust



theatresearch



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# 1.0 Introduction

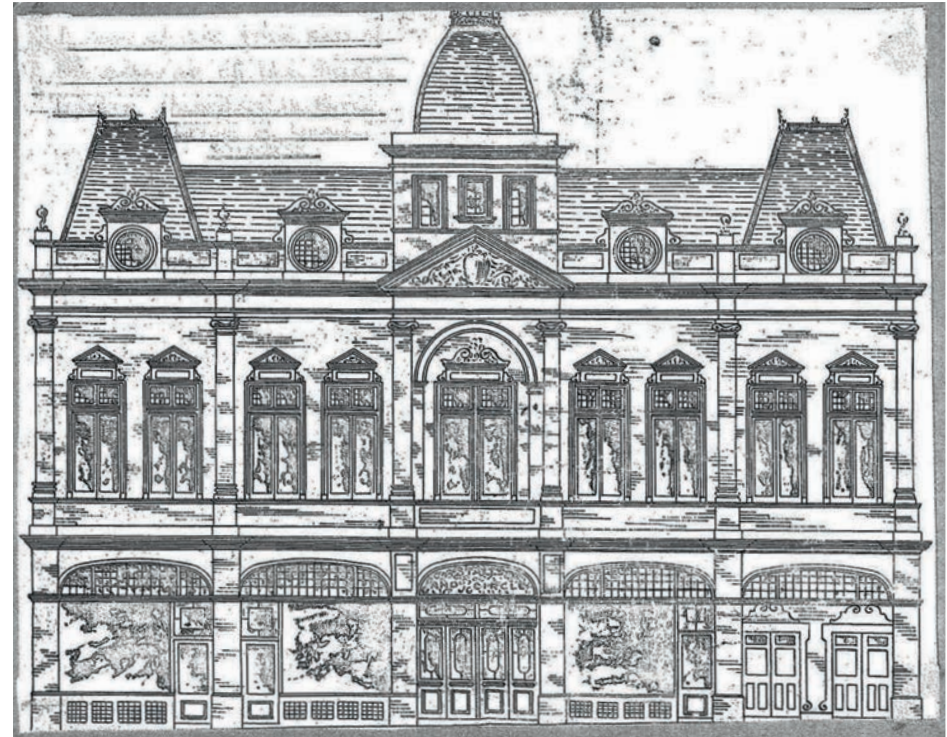
This is a summary of a report that has examined whether there is a viable option for restoring the historic Victoria Theatre in Salford.

It has been commissioned by the Salford Victoria Theatre Trust (SVTT) with funding from the Theatres Trust.

The theatre is of national significance. It is one of few remaining buildings designed by the renowned theatre architect Bertie Crewe. It opened, with a fanfare, in 1900. It has a beautiful and unusual interior. It retains Victorian stage equipment, elements of which are unique. The terracotta façade is fine and, with restoration, would be a major adornment to the area. The building does not require major change to become useable again.

It is Grade II listed, but probably warrants Grade II\* listing. It has been given a 3- star rating by the Theatres Trust in their gazetteer 'Guide to British Theatres 1750 - 1950'. This is the highest grade of importance, indicating a very fine theatre of the highest theatrical quality.

It is in poor and deteriorating condition, largely because of holes in the roof. It is on the Theatre Trust's register of theatres at risk. It was purchased by a local businessman in late 2018 who has so far taken no action to stop the damage.



Top: Bertie Crewe's Original Main Elevation Drawing (from The Victoria Theatre Trust);  
Opposite: Great Clowes Street, Lower Broughton, c. 1910 (from theatreresearch archive)

Salford is a place of rapid change. Much regeneration activity has taken place in the vicinity of the theatre. Development is fast spreading from central Manchester towards the Irwell, where it is located. A large proportion of the residents within walking distance are now young people, either students or people in the early stages of their careers. People of that nature like leisure opportunities close to where they live and work. There are currently no such leisure opportunities in the Lower Broughton area. The impending redevelopment of Mocha Parade, opposite the theatre, to contain a supermarket and health centre will improve the ambience and bring more people to the location. There is potential, in the longer term, for large scale development around the theatre.

The report outlines a four-stage strategy for restoration:

1. Repairing the roof, clearing the building and making it safe, externally and internally, and unblocking windows. This is estimated to cost about £2.42 m plus VAT<sup>1</sup>, of which urgent priorities are estimated to be c. £273,000 plus VAT.
2. Restoring the basement, ground and first floors of the front of house section; the stalls; the ground floor of the stage; the dress circle lobby, front dress circle seating and the dress circle bar. This is estimated to cost about £2.43 million plus VAT.

<sup>1</sup> At current prices, as is the case with all estimates provided.

Top: View from Great Clowes Street c. 1978 before the removal of the original roof and canopy (photo Victor Glasstone Collection). Opposite: View from Elton Street and Elton's Yard, 2019



3. Restoring the upper and lower levels of the stage house. This is estimated to cost about £963,000 plus VAT.
4. Restoring the upper levels of the front of house and auditorium. This is estimated to cost about £5.8 million plus VAT

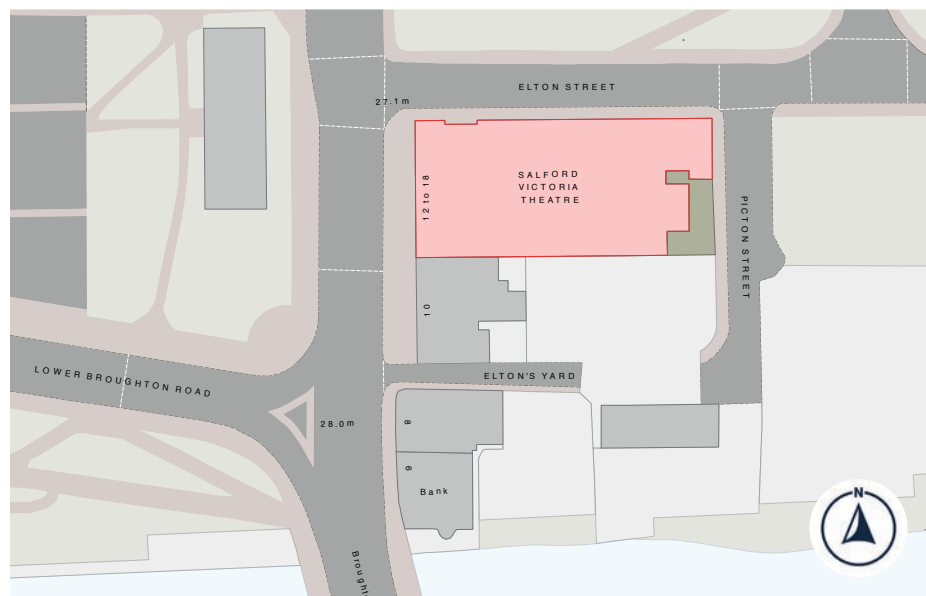
The cost of fully restoring the theatre is estimated to be about £11.64 million plus VAT at current prices.

There would be additional cost if the property is to be acquired by SVTT or another organisation. It is believed to have been purchased by the current owner for about c.£320k - £350k in 2018.

It is not necessary to restore it fully, however, for a viable business to operate in it.

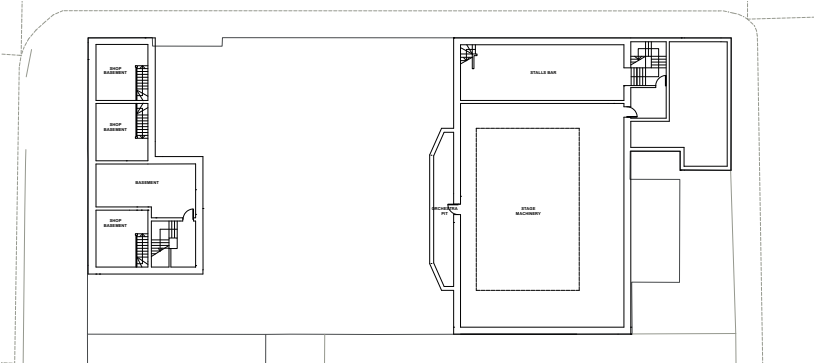
While it may be desirable in the long term to fully restore the building to be an operational theatre again, this is unlikely to be deliverable or sustainable in the short-medium term. This is partly because of the cost, but also because, given the many other performing arts venues in Manchester, it would struggle financially, probably requiring subsidy, for which there is currently no obvious source.

The building has the advantage, however, that the rake in the stalls is gentle and it has substantial front of house and back of house spaces. There are other options to create a viable business, therefore.

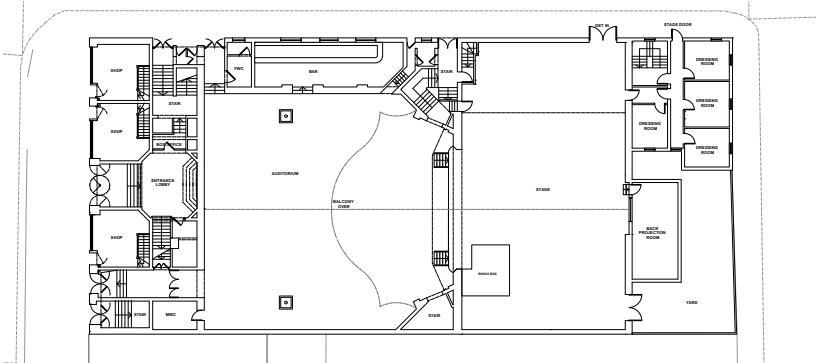


Top: Google satellite view 2019. Opposite: Existing Site Plan

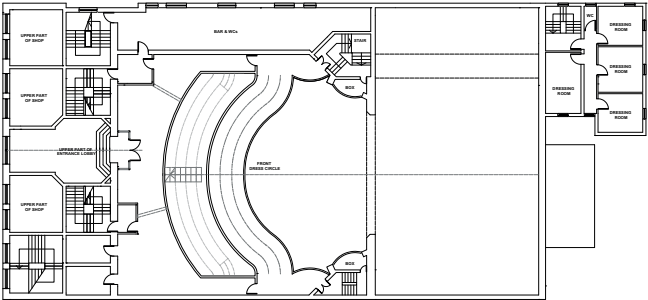
Existing Plans (accuracy to be confirmed by measured survey)



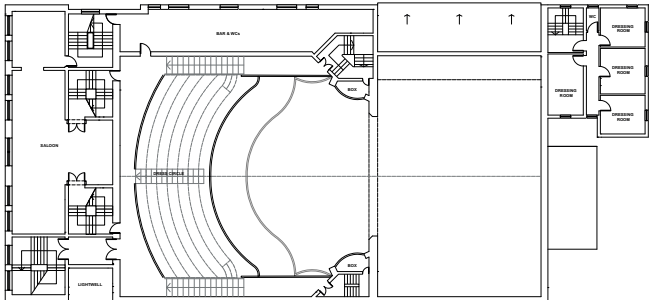
Existing Basement Plan



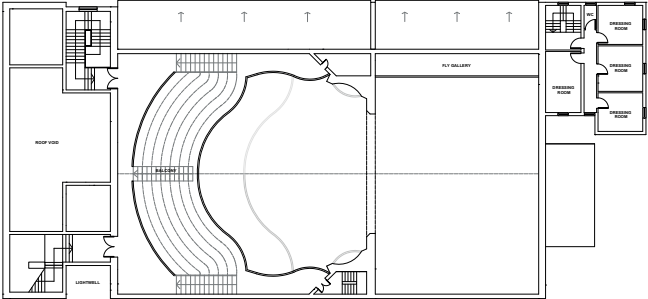
Existing Ground Floor Plan



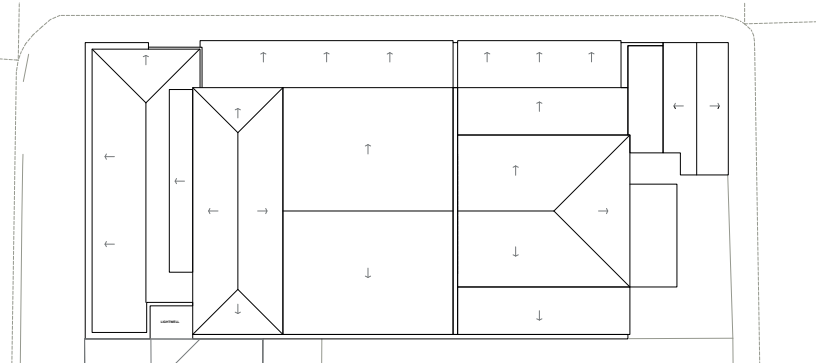
Existing First Floor Plan



Existing Second Floor Plan

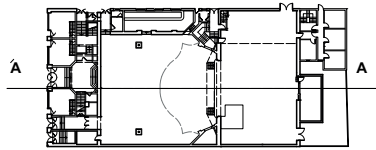
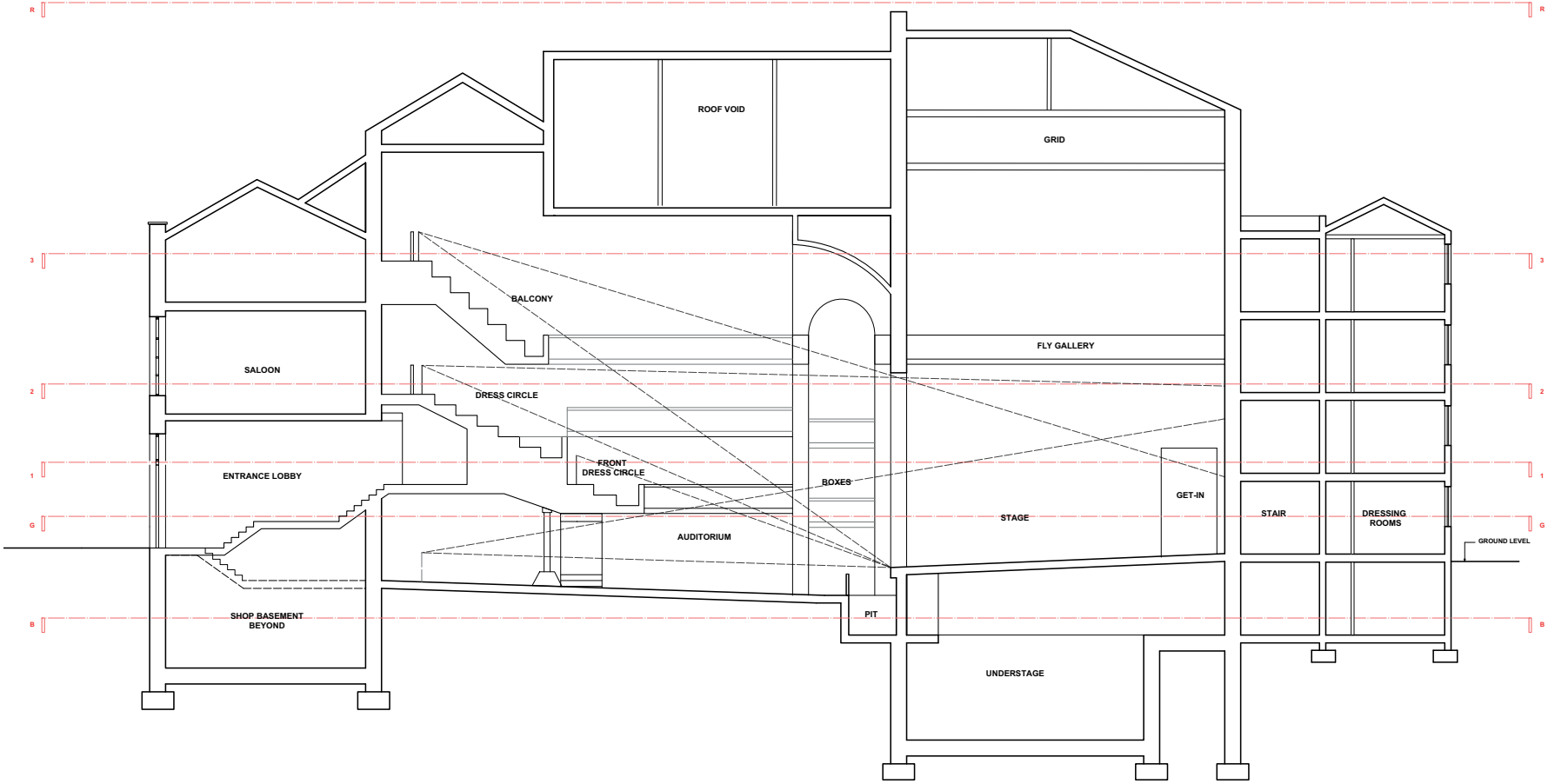


Existing Third Floor Plan



Existing Roof Plan

Existing Section A-A (accuracy to be confirmed by measured survey)



Existing Front Elevation (based on elevation from Salford archive - see p.2)





The short-medium term plan would be to achieve stages 1 and 2 of the restoration strategy. The upper floors would be mothballed until the building is operating successfully and further funds can be secured.

The interior of the auditorium would be treated as “arrested decay”, a formula successfully used, for example, at Alexandra Palace in London, Mackie Mayor food hall in Manchester and, further afield, “ruin pubs” in Budapest. This means that decorative features would not be restored in the medium term, with elements of decay used to create an ambience of “shabby chic”. Careful modern interventions and feature lighting would be used to create ambience.

There are options for how the building could be used in this form. It could, for example, be a destination brew pub plus entertainment venue.

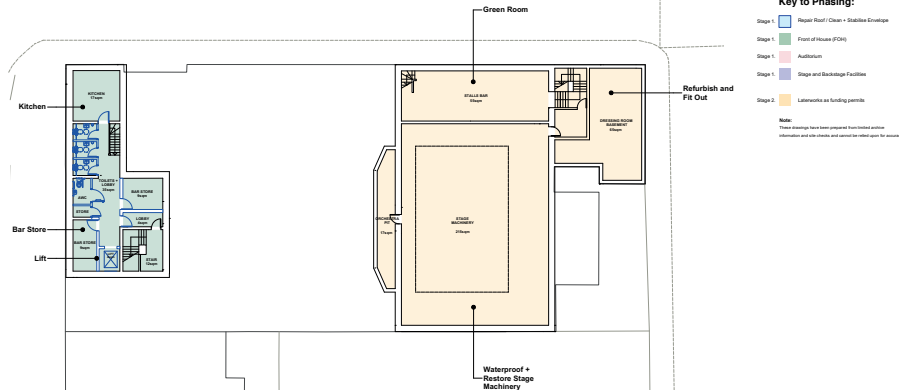
It is envisaged, however, that it would be operated as a flexible events centre and community hub.

There would be three elements of the business:

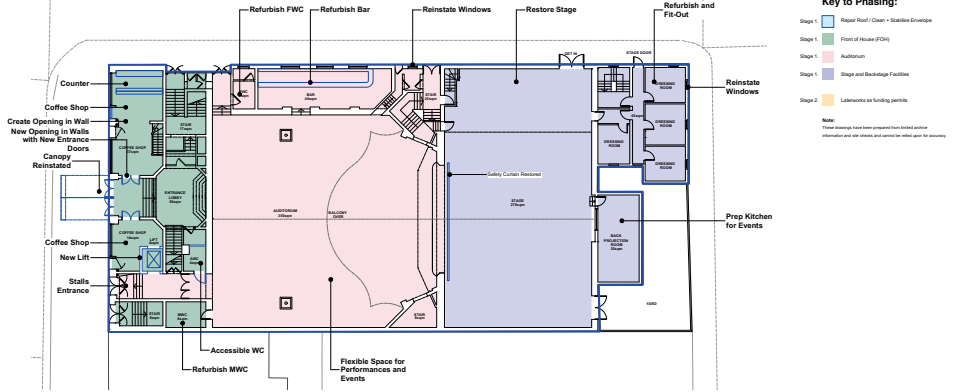


The auditorium 2019

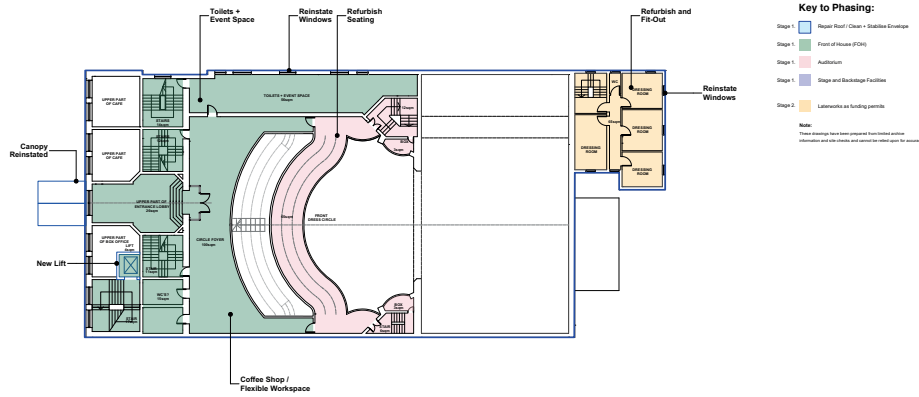
# Proposed Plans



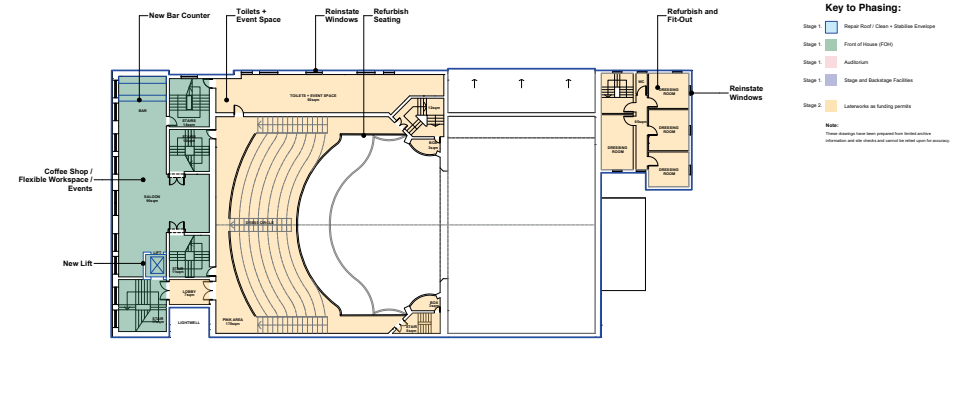
Proposed Basement Plan



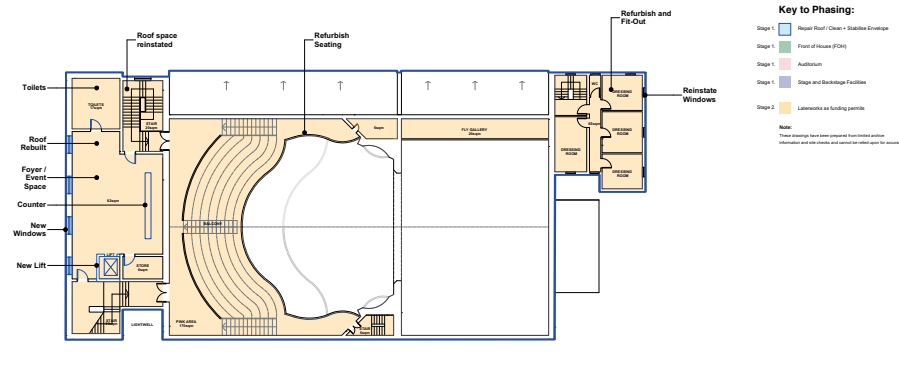
Proposed Ground Floor Plan



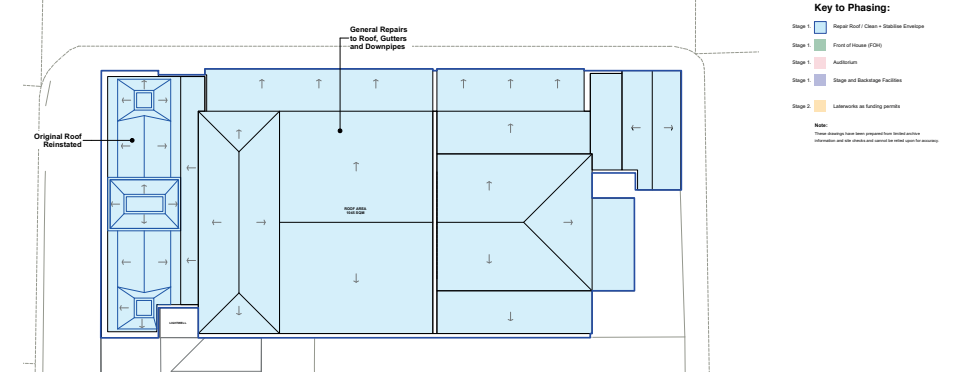
Proposed First Floor Plan



Proposed Second Floor Plan

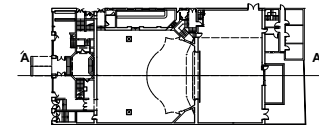
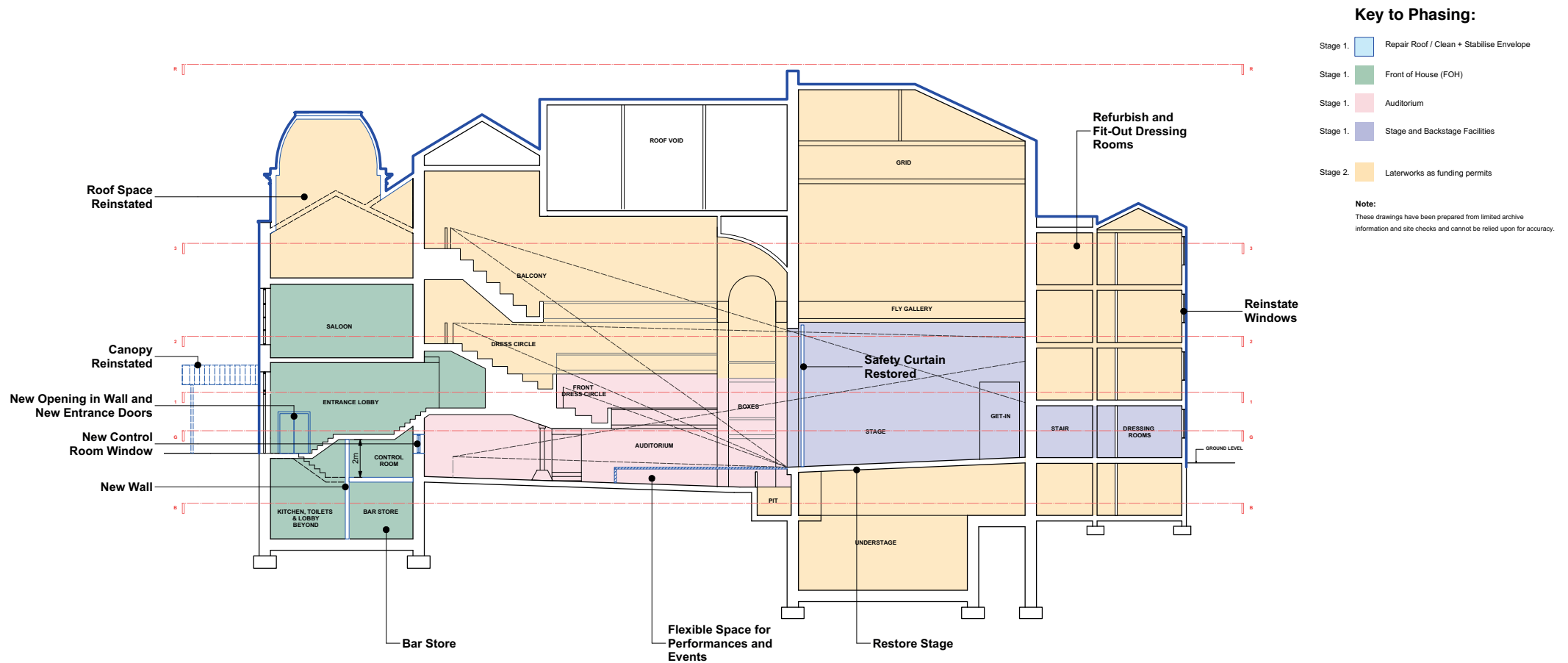


Proposed Third Floor Plan



Proposed Roof Plan

# Proposed Section A-A



## 2.0 Front of House

The front section of the building, which has sizeable and attractive spaces, with high ceilings and large windows, would be used to create a vibrant community hub, open from early morning until late at night. It would feature:

- An espresso bar in the ground floor shops units and main entrance lobby, which would be combined. The basement would be storage, toilets and kitchen.
- A flexible managed work centre in the saloon at first floor, with desks that can be rented by the hour, week or month, aimed at students, independent workers and start-up businesses. It could include equipment like 3-D printers and laser cutters that can be hired by creatives.
- A studio in the dress circle bar which would be hired to individuals and organisations for classes of different type.
- An exhibition about the history of the building in the dress circle lobby, with two large meeting tables that can be hired for informal meetings.



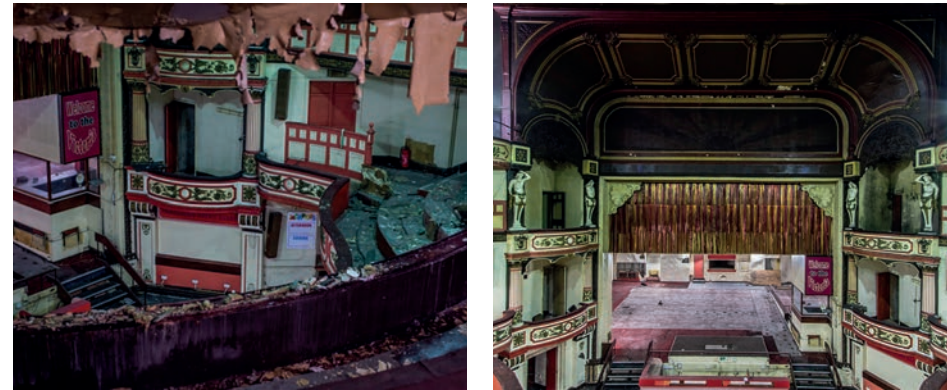
Opposite: A selection of photographs of the Front of House and Bar areas throughout the recent past

### 3.0 Auditorium

This would be the stalls and the front dress circle. It would be available for hire for a wide variety of different types of event. This would include events that take place in the hall, such as weddings, parties, product launches, exhibitions, markets and festivals (e.g. food and drink). It would also include performance events that are either in the round or use the stage, including live music, theatre, comedy, cinema, event cinema, conferences, graduation ceremonies, church services etc. The proposed alternative auditorium layouts, on the following page, shows how it could be configured for different events.

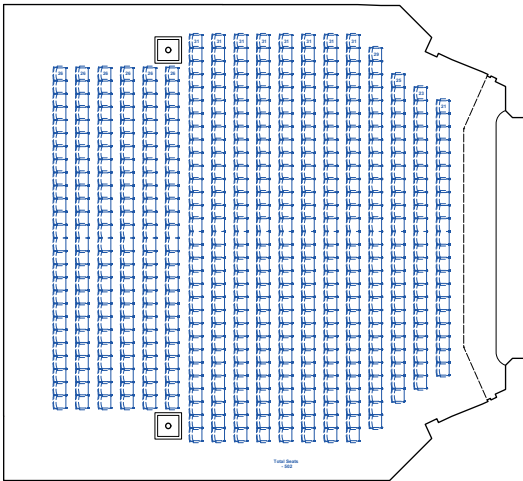
### 4.0 The Stage

This would be separated from the auditorium by a safety curtain and have independent access. It would be hired for regular classes, in similar manner to the studio, and used as a studio theatre and rehearsal space.

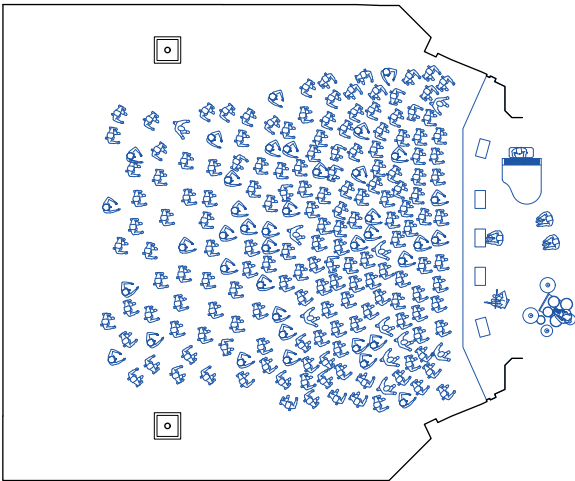


Opposite: A selection of views of the Auditorium throughout the recent past

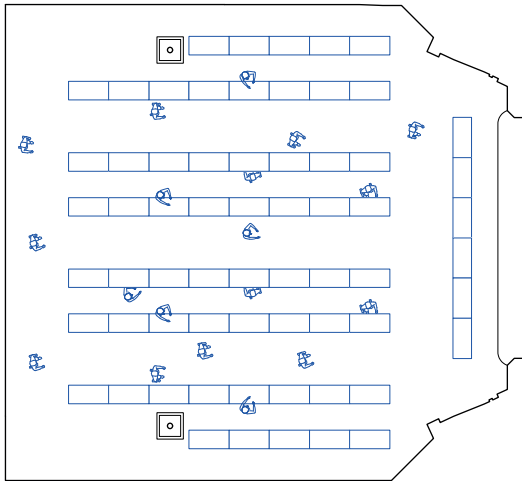
# Proposed Alternative Auditorium Uses



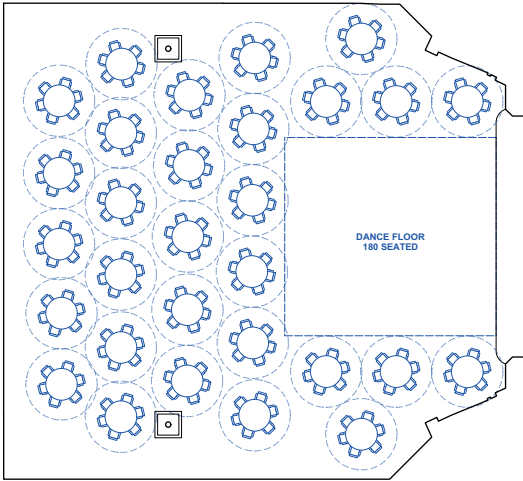
**1. Performance/Meetings Total Seats - 607**  
**Stalls - 502**  
**Front Circle - 105**



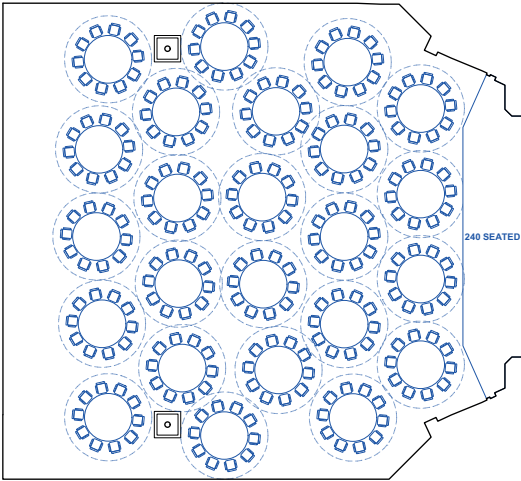
**2. Gig with Standing Audience - 780**  
**Standing (0.3m2 pp) - 675**  
**Front Circle Seated - 105**



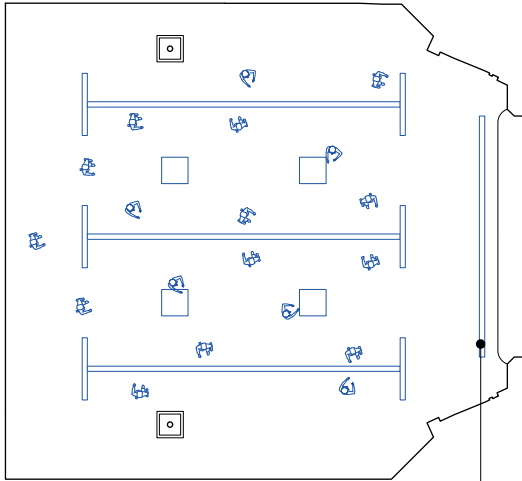
**3. Market Stalls**



**4. Dinner / Dance - 180 Seated**

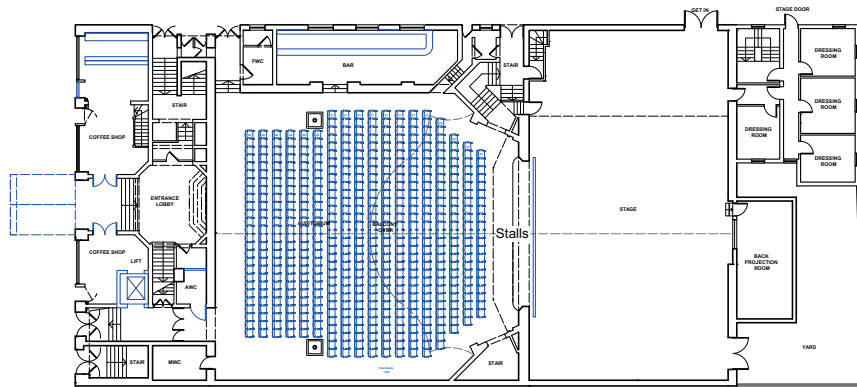


**5. Cabaret/Awards - 240 Seated**

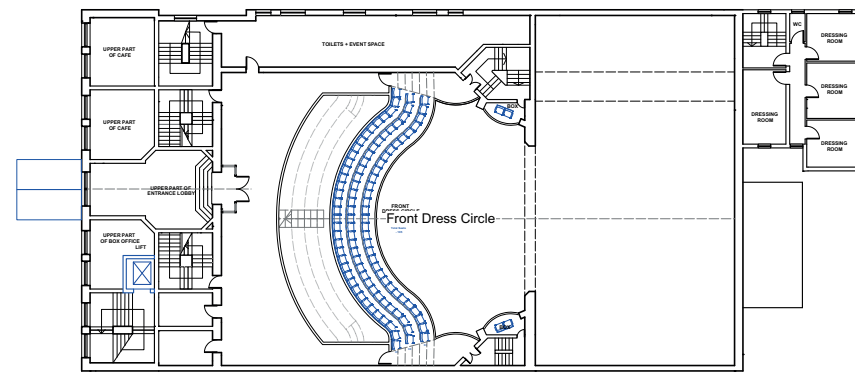


**6. Exhibitions**

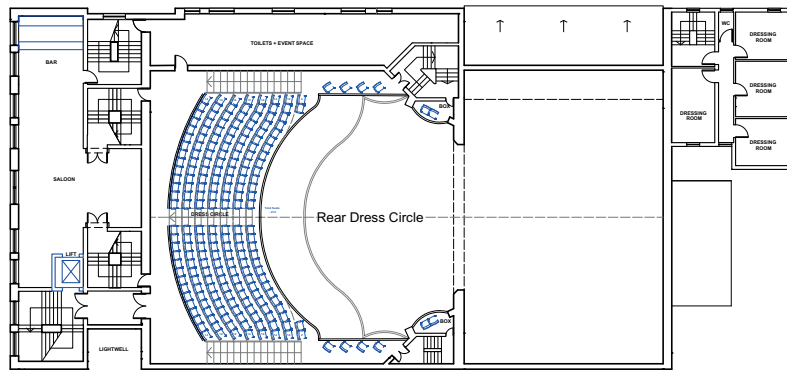
# Anticipated Seating Capacities for Fully Restored Theatre



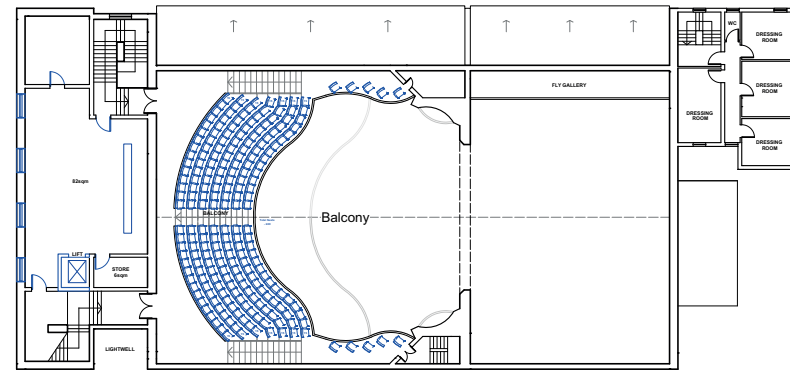
**Stalls - Total Seats - 502**



**Front Circle - Total Seats - 105**



**Rear Circle - Total Seats - 212**



**Balcony - Total Seats - 220**

Capacity Table	
Stalls	502
Front Circle	105
Rear Circle	212
Balcony	220
<b>Total</b>	<b>1039</b>

## 5.0 Summary

It is estimated that the operation could make a surplus of about £250,000 per annum once established.

It is estimated that it would cost in the region of £5 million plus VAT to restore the building in this way, including fixtures and fittings, plus cost, assuming necessary, of acquisition and allowance for inflation. It may be prudent to assume £6 million.

Core funding for this would be sought from the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF). The project would be well positioned because of their current focus on buildings at risk and because it would deliver many of the outcomes they ask for.

The application would preferably be made to NLHF's Heritage Enterprise Fund, which focuses on projects that have a commercial dimension and allows private sector companies to generate a commercial return from investing in the project. It would ideally be made by a partnership between SVTT and either the current owner or other private sector companies.

SVTT could also seek grants from a wide range of grant-making foundations.

The main conclusions, in summary, are:

- The building is outstanding and, with restoration, could form an attractive and vibrant hub for Lower Broughton.

It is unlikely that any other project could bring such large benefit to the area.

- The optimum viable use in the short-medium term is likely to either be a flexible multi-use events venue plus community hub or a more food and beverage-orientated business. The former is probably the best for SVTT to pursue, although it could be sensible to test if there is interest in the latter from potential partners at a later stage. This would not preclude full restoration as an operating theatre in the longer term.
- It would be a direct fit with policies in the Draft Local Plan and with the development plan for the Irwell City Park.
- Bringing the building back into use is likely to require grant funding, but the amount required, while large, is of a scale that is achievable.
- There is no excuse for the building to be allowed to continue to deteriorate given its importance and potential for viable use. Demolition should not be considered an option

## 6.0 Feedback

SVTT welcomes any comments or queries about this report, especially from individuals and organisations that believe they may have an interest in using the building and other wise assisting SVTT to ensure its survival.

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