



# T M

**Theatres  
Magazine**

Winter  
2024

**Theatres at Risk Register 2024**

**Brighton Dome**

**Crown Wharf Theatre, Stone**

**Resilient Theatres: Resilient Communities**

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### Theatres Magazine

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## In this issue

# 15

Brighton Dome

Photo: Richard Chivers

1  
Director's welcome

2  
Theatres at Risk  
Register 2024

7  
Make or break – the  
importance of local  
authority support

10  
Changes to the  
Theatres at Risk  
Register

12  
Resilient Theatres:  
Resilient Communities

15  
Showcase:  
Brighton Dome

23  
Crown Wharf  
Theatre, Stone

27  
Our work

30  
Thanks to our  
supporters

# 7

Epstein Theatre

Photo: Ian Grundy

# 12

Heritage Open Day tour  
of Burnley Empire

Photo: Burnley Empire Trust

## Director's welcome

**Theatres Trust  
Director Jon Morgan  
introduces the first  
issue of Theatres  
Magazine in 2024.**



Investigative work at Leith Theatre

Photo: Leith Theatre

**Welcome to the winter edition of TM, published to coincide with the announcement of the Theatres at Risk Register 2024.**

As is customary at this time of year, we have published our Theatres at Risk Register, the list of the theatres across the UK that are most under threat, but which we believe could be revived for their communities (see page 3 for the full list). While last year, we were pleased to remove three theatres from the list as their futures were secured, this year there are no headline stories to celebrate. We have added two more theatres to the list, Abbeydale Picture House in Sheffield and Epstein Theatre in Liverpool and sadly we've removed Dudley Hippodrome as it was demolished last year (page 10).

A key theme that we return to in relation to Theatres at Risk (or any theatre for that matter) is the importance of local authority support. Where theatres have been removed from the Register for positive reasons, there has invariably been strong council support or close involvement in the project. However, with more local authorities facing financial difficulties, the impact of this on Theatres at Risk is a real concern. We take a further look at this issue on page 7.

While it is too soon to remove them from the Theatres at Risk Register just yet, there are nonetheless a number of theatres where steady progress is being made. Theatres Trust continues to provide support to community groups, building owners and local authorities who want to protect and revive their local theatre. Our Resilient Theatres: Resilient Communities

programme is a key part of that, offering targeted support, grants and training to Theatres at Risk as well as training for the wider sector. The project is just coming to the end of the first of its three years – read an overview of the story so far on page 12.

In this edition we also highlight two very different but equally interesting theatre capital projects. Our Showcase feature is Brighton Dome, where a major refurbishment project encompassing the Regency Corn Exchange and 1930s Studio Theatre buildings, has enabled significant improvements to be made ensuring it can continue to be a vibrant part of the local arts scene (page 15). At the other end of the scale, is the Crown Wharf Theatre in Stone, a brand-new theatre built with support from a local brewery and a lot of hard work by the community (page 23). Although a new building, the story of the theatre's creation can offer a lot of inspiration for groups working to revive Theatres at Risk.

Whether old, new or somewhere in between, Theatres Trust has a vital role supporting theatres through our advice service, planning work and grants programmes. Our planning work helps to protect theatre buildings from detrimental redevelopment and supports beneficial changes that help theatres to thrive – we've rounded up some recent cases on page 27. This work would not be possible without the ongoing commitment of our funders, partners, Corporate Supporters, Friends and Patrons (page 30).

Thanks to everyone who helps us in our mission – we look forward to working together in 2024.



# Theatres at Risk Assessment Criteria

**Theatres are assessed based on three criteria – Community Value, Star Rating and Risk Factor. Buildings are scored between 0 and 3 in each category, these are added together to give a total score. A minimum total score of 4 is needed to be included on the register and must not score zero in any category.**

Where the total score is the same, Community Value is given precedence, followed by Star Rating, then Risk Factor. If all criteria scores are equal, the buildings are listed alphabetically.

The theatres at the top of the list are not necessarily most at risk but are those whose loss would be considered a greater tragedy because of their unique character and / or have a real opportunity to be used for live performances.

**Community Value** establishes the local support and demand for a theatre, including the viability of the building as a performance venue.

**3 points:** clear community demand and viability for the building to be used as a theatre

**2 points:** possibility and demand for returning the building to performance use, which could include community performances / music

**1 point:** potential for the building to be brought into use as a community facility with no/minimal community performance

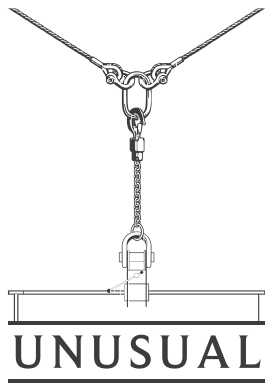
**Star Rating** judges the building's architectural quality, workability as a theatre, cultural and social heritage, and geographical uniqueness.

**3 points:** a very fine theatre of the highest quality

**2 points:** an excellent example of its type

**1 point:** a live performance venue that is of some interest or quality and has specific cultural and social value

**Risk Factor** assesses the level of threat to the building. This could be at risk of demolition, alteration to another use, local development adversely affecting the theatre, change of ownership, decay of the building, or capital/revenue concerns.



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# Theatres at Risk Register 2024

Theatre Name	Grade Listing	Community Value	Star Rating	Risk Factor	Total Risk
Brighton Hippodrome	II*	3	3	3	9
Theatre Royal Margate	II*	3	3	2	8
Winter Gardens Morecambe	II*	3	3	2	8
Hulme Hippodrome	II	2	3	3	8
Plymouth Palace	II*	2	3	3	8
Victoria Theatre, Salford	II	2	3	3	8
Groundlings Theatre, Portsea	II*	3	2	2	7
Spilsby Sessions House	II	3	2	2	7
Streatham Hill Theatre	II	3	2	2	7
Theatr Ardudwy, Harlech	II*	3	2	2	7
Winter Gardens, Blackpool Pavilion	II*	2	3	2	7
Abbeydale Picture House <b>NEW</b>	II	2	2	3	7
Burnley Empire	II	2	2	3	7
Garston Empire	-	2	2	3	7
Intimate Theatre	-	2	2	3	7
Mechanics Institute, Swindon	II*	2	2	3	7
Tottenham Palace Theatre	II	2	2	3	7
Leith Theatre	B	3	2	1	6
Epstein Theatre <b>NEW</b>	II	3	1	2	6
Joe Longthorne Pavilion, Blackpool	II	3	1	2	6
Roundhouse Theatre, Dover	-	3	1	2	6
Co-op Hall, Ramsbottom	II	2	2	2	6
Doncaster Grand	II	2	2	2	6
Garrick Theatre, Southport	II	2	2	2	6
King's Theatre, Dundee	B	2	2	2	6
Amulet Theatre, Shepton Mallet	-	2	1	3	6
Conwy Civic Hall (Cube)	II	2	1	3	6
Derby Hippodrome	II	2	1	3	6
Borough Hall, Greenwich	II	3	1	1	5
King's Theatre, Kirkcaldy	B	3	1	1	5
Thameside Theatre, Grays	-	3	1	1	5
Tameside Hippodrome, Ashton-under-Lyne	II	2	2	1	5
Globe Theatre, Plymouth	II	1	2	2	5
Imperial Theatre, Walsall	II	1	2	2	5
Regent Theatre, Great Yarmouth	II	1	2	2	5
Clair Hall, Haywards Heath	-	2	1	1	4
Netherton Arts Centre	-	2	1	1	4
Theatre Royal, Hyde	II	1	2	1	4
Theatre Royal, Manchester	II	1	2	1	4
<b>REMOVED Dudley Hippodrome</b>					

# Theatres at Risk

2024

-  Theatres at Risk
-  Theatres removed from Risk Register
-  New additions in 2024

King's Theatre,  
Dundee

King's Theatre,  
Kirkcaldy

Leith Theatre

Winter Gardens,  
Morecambe

Joe Longthorne Theatre,  
Blackpool

Winter Gardens  
Pavilion

Garrick Theatre,  
Southport

Epstein Theatre,  
Liverpool

Garston  
Empire

Burnley Empire

Doncaster  
Grand

Abbeydale  
Picture House,  
Sheffield

Derby  
Hippodrome

Spilsby  
Sessions  
House

Theatre  
Ardudwy  
Harlech

Conwy  
Civic Hall

Imperial Theatre,  
Walsall

Netherton  
Arts Centre

Dudley  
Hippodrome

Thameside Theatre,  
Grays

Mechanics' Institute,  
Swindon

Amulet Theatre,  
Shepton Mallet

Groudling's  
Theatre  
Portsmouth

Brighton  
Hippodrome

Globe  
Theatre  
Plymouth  
Palace

Co-op Hall  
Ramsbottom

Tameside  
Hippodrome

Theatre  
Royal

Victoria  
Theatre

Hulme  
Hippodrome

Theatre Royal  
Hyde

GREATER  
MANCHESTER

Regent Theatre,  
Great Yarmouth

Theatre Royal,  
Margate  
Roundhouse,  
Dover

Intimate  
Theatre

Tottenham  
Palace Theatre

Streatham  
Hill Theatre

Greenwich  
Borough Hall

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# Make or break the importance of local authority support

**As we publish the 2024 Theatres at Risk Register, we look at the role local authorities play in the survival, revival, or loss of Theatres at Risk.**



Exterior of Swindon  
Mechanics' Institute

Photo: Theatres Trust 2004

There are 39 theatre buildings on this year's Theatres at Risk Register. That breaks down as two new additions (**Abbeydale Picture House** and **Epstein Theatre**), one theatre removed from the list (**Dudley Hippodrome**) and 37 theatres remaining on the list with no significant changes since last year. Theatres are included on the list for a variety of reasons – threat of redevelopment, change in ownership, deteriorating building condition – and the solution to securing their futures will be different each time, but in nearly every case, the local authority has a significant role to play.

## Local authority subsidy cuts

**Epstein Theatre** has been added to the list this year following its closure in summer 2023 (read more about the theatre on page 10). The theatre had most recently been operated by Epstein Entertainments Ltd who were awarded the operating contract in October 2021 by the council which sub-leased the venue, the management agreement ending at the same time as the theatre lease. The terms of the management agreement included Liverpool City Council covering a proportion of the rent, service charge, utilities, and maintenance work. Unfortunately, pressures on the council's budget led to it not renewing the lease when it came up for renewal in 2023 and subsequently the associated management agreement with the theatre operator Epstein Entertainments was unable to negotiate more favourable terms with the landlord that would have enabled the venue to stay open.

While the Epstein is the only new addition to the list this year due to local authority funding cuts, it is by no means the only theatre facing this issue. Several local authorities have withdrawn or announced their intention to withdraw subsidy for venues in their area to help balance their budgets. This is a nationwide occurrence; examples including **Howden Park Theatre** in West Lothian, the **Marine Hall** in Wyre and the **Lighthouse** in Kettering. However, what sets these apart from the Epstein, is that other options are actively being explored to find new operators and/or operating models that will enable the theatre to continue. Finding viable models in a difficult financial environment is challenging, but wherever possible Theatres Trust is actively engaged with local authorities and other stakeholders to advise and support. We very much hope that these efforts will mean these theatres won't need to go on to the At Risk list. However, with each week bringing news of another local authority issuing a

Section 114 notice of financial distress, meaning that they are in effect 'bankrupt', it seems likely that we will see more theatres under threat as difficult funding decisions are made. A recent poll by the Local Government Association made for the gloomy reading that almost one in five councils in England believe it likely that they will issue a S114 notice either this year or next.

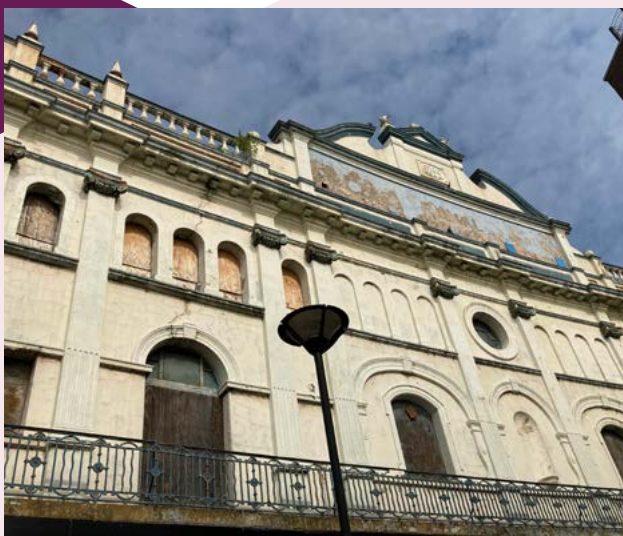
### Valuable assets for disposal

Several theatres on the list remain under threat as local authorities continue with plans to divest themselves of these assets. Theatres often occupy large plots of land in central locations that offer attractive redevelopment prospects. **The Borough Hall** in Greenwich was put on the market after Royal Borough of Greenwich rejected an offer from Selladoor to reopen it as a theatre. More than two years ago a preferred developer was selected to redevelop the **Conwy Civic Hall** site for residential use and the scheme was brought to public consultation in 2023, but to date there has been no planning application and the building remains an asset for disposal.

However, there are also instances which could provide positive results, where theatres may be able to benefit from community asset transfers to local groups keen to restore performance use to them. **Netherton Arts Centre** in Dudley had been suggested for disposal but with feelings running high about the loss of Dudley Hippodrome (see page x), Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council is keen to ensure that the building remains in community use. Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council has suggested that **Tameside Hippodrome** in Ashton-under-Lyne could be subject to a community asset transfer. Ashton Empire and Hippodrome (Building) Ltd, the local community group, that has been campaigning to save the building for years, has received support on governance through our Resilient Theatres: Resilient Communities programme to help prepare for a potential community asset transfer.

**Tameside  
Hippodrome**

Photo: Tim Abram Photos



**Doncaster Grand**

Photo: Theatres Trust

### Council support to purchase Theatres at Risk

More than half of theatres on our list are empty and many are in an increasingly deteriorating state, often neglected by private landlords. In these situations, local authorities can use enforcement measures for owners of listed buildings to try and unlock tricky ownership situations, with a view to potential Compulsory Purchase Orders. We are hopeful that this might be the route forward for **Swindon Mechanics' Institute** and **Derby Hippodrome**. Swindon Borough Council remains actively engaged and keen to see a positive way forward for the Mechanics' and is exploring a Compulsory Purchase Order, however, there remains a long way to go. Similarly, Derby City Council is scoping a repairs notice, funded by Historic England, which would be a precursor to a Compulsory Purchase Order.

A 2021 planning application for the **Amulet Theatre** in Shepton Mallet remains undetermined and the building's current private owner has suggested that they would be open to selling it. There is much support for returning the building to cultural use within the local community and the town council are likewise eager to see the building brought back into the community. We are working with the council and a newly formed community group to help them purchase the theatre.



**Amulet**

Photo: Karen Mercer



**Netherton Arts Centre**

Photo: Richard Clee

**Positive steps with council support**

As seen at Shepton Mallet, there are instances where councils are providing positive support for their theatres. Last year we reported on Levelling Up Funding including Towns Fund monies providing a means for local authorities to provide support to their Theatres at Risk venues. Spilsby Sessions House benefitted from the Levelling Up Fund in a bid through East Lindsey Council. Early stage works to enable the project are in hand with works due to start later in 2024. Thanet Council is supporting urgent repair works for the **Theatre Royal Margate** through the Towns Fund. The council has since recruited a Project Manager to drive forward a project that it is hoped will see not only the theatre repaired but a new performing arts hub created through links to the neighbouring 19 Hawley Square. The council, which has also received additional support from our Resilient Theatres: Resilient Communities grant programme, has recently launched a public consultation and market testing exercise to develop its vision for the performing arts hub.

In Doncaster, the council has been a key partner in driving forward progress at the **Grand Theatre**, from as early as 2021 when it was awarded funding for a viability study through our Theatres at Risk Capacity Building Programme. The study, part-funded by the council and carried out by a stakeholder group which included the council, the building owner, local campaign group Friends of Doncaster Grand and Theatres Trust laid the foundation for the council to press forward with future exploratory works. It is now a lead partner in a consortium created to drive forward plans for the theatre, which has included further viability works and the potential of support through the Towns Fund for redecoration works to the theatre's façade.

Theatres Trust recognises the enormous pressure that local authorities are under and that the arts are competing with funding obligations for statutory services. However, we encourage local authorities where there is a Theatre at Risk or theatre in danger of becoming 'at risk' to engage with us to explore solutions. We believe that theatres are worth support and investment, contributing to vibrant high streets and happy, healthy communities.

You can read more about the current situation at each of the theatres on this year's list on our website: [theatrestrust.org.uk/how-we-help/theatres-at-risk](https://theatrestrust.org.uk/how-we-help/theatres-at-risk)

**Theatres with Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete**

To date all the theatres that closed due to the potentially risky material Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) are local authority-owned venues. Despite concerns about the future of these buildings, especially the ones that remain closed, it is too soon to include them on the Theatres at Risk list. Although the long-term outcome for some of these theatres is uncertain, there have been some positive developments. **Derngate Theatre** in Northampton, Dixon Studio in the **Palace Theatre Centre**, Southend and the **Key Theatre** in Peterborough have carried out remedial works and were able to reopen in time for the festive season. **The Core Theatre** in Solihull and the **Brunton Theatre** in Musselburgh have been using alternative spaces to continue their performances, the **Orchard Theatre** in Dartford set up a temporary venue and the **Harlequin Theatre** in Redhill built a big top tent for its panto. We will continue to monitor the situation with theatres impacted by this issue.

# Changes to the Theatres at Risk Register

## Theatres at Risk

2024

**We've added two theatres to this year's list and removed one.**

### NEW ADDITIONS

#### Abbeydale Picture House, Sheffield

Built in 1920 the Grade II listed Abbeydale Picture House was originally constructed as a cinema and included a ballroom and billiards hall within the basement, and lounge and café above the entrance foyer. In 1928 the building was converted to cine-variety with the addition of a stage and dressing room spaces. The building remained in active cinema use until the mid-70's when it was used as a furniture showroom, a use that required little alteration to the venue. The furniture company ceased trading in 1991, leaving the building disused for a decade. In the early 2000s the Friends of Abbeydale Picture House restored the auditorium and built a new stage, reopening the theatre in September 2008. Operation ceased in 2012 and the building was sold at auction. It is currently in private ownership, leased to CADS, a Sheffield based charity committed to revitalising local buildings for the arts, cultural and creative industries. It has reopened the 'Fly Tower' located behind the original cinema screen as an event space, and a separate bar in the front of the building. Sadly, the issues with the main roof of the building has resulted in severe deterioration of the auditorium ceiling and the space is no longer safe for public use. Subsequently the operation of the venue has become unviable and the building's future uncertain. Urgent action to repair the roof and prevent further deterioration is required.



Abbeydale

Photo: Abbeydale  
Picture House

Epstein Theatre

Photo: Ian Grundy

#### Epstein Theatre, Liverpool

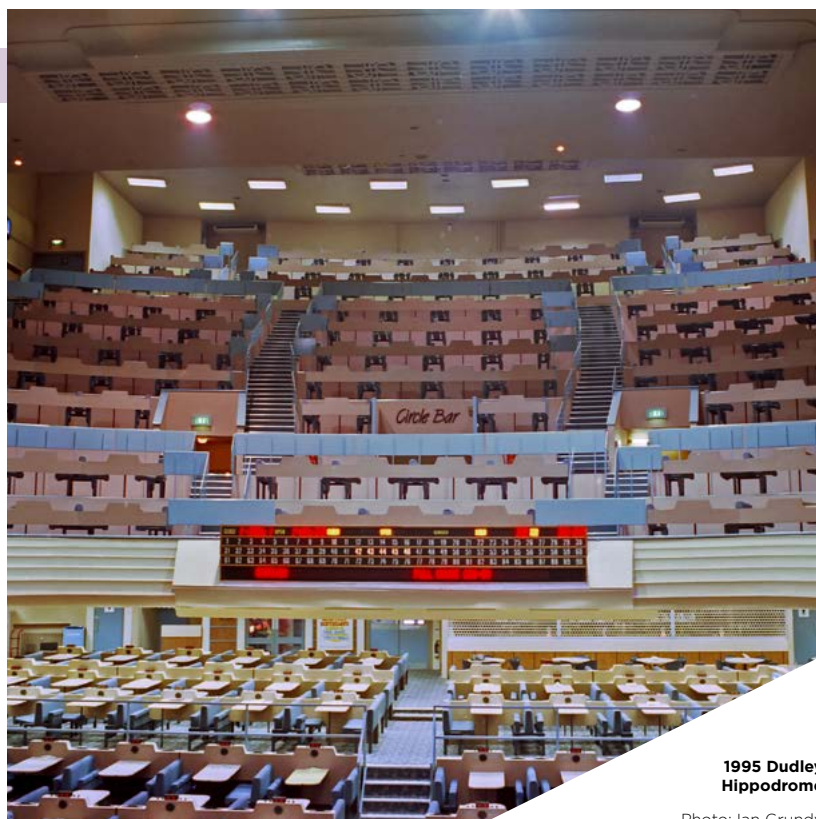
The 380-seat proscenium arch theatre closed on 30 June 2023 the council taking the decision not to renew its lease on the theatre and subsequently the associated management agreement with the theatre operator. There are no known plans for its revival / long-term future. Constructed in 1913, the Epstein Theatre was originally conceived as a concert hall (the Crane Hall) for instrumental recitals for the music shop it was built above, with upper levels of the 5-storey Crane Building containing associated offices. The hall was soon converted into a theatre through expansion and construction of a flytower and stage within a neighbouring building. The building came under threat of closure in the 1960s but was bought by the Liverpool Corporation, who wished to save it for the people of Liverpool. Following a refurbishment, the venue reopened as the Neptune Theatre and remained operating as such until closure in 2005 for works to address health and safety issues. There followed an extended period of closure, the renamed Epstein Theatre finally reopening in 2011 following a £1m refurbishment. While the council still owns the Crane Building (now Hanover House), the entire building is leased to a commercial property landlord, and there had been an arrangement in place for the council to sub-lease the theatre. Epstein Entertainments Ltd, the last operator, was awarded the contract to operate the theatre in October 2021 on a management agreement that ended at the same time as the council's lease of the venue. In June 2023, it was announced that Liverpool City Council would not be renewing its lease. Financial support of the venue through the associated management agreement was likewise not renewed.



## REMOVAL FROM THE LIST

### Dudley Hippodrome

Dudley Hippodrome was a late-1930s purpose-built variety theatre and the last remaining lyric theatre in the Metropolitan Borough of Dudley. It had been in use as a bingo hall until 2009 and was well-maintained, retaining a theatrical feel in its auditorium. It was added to the Theatres at Risk Register in 2010 when it was purchased by the council and first considered for redevelopment. A series of unsuccessful schemes were proposed for the site, with the vacant Hippodrome deteriorating. Theatres Trust, along with passionate local community groups, repeatedly requested that the council maintained the building and reconsidered its future as a performance venue. Unfortunately, a successful bid to the government's Towns Fund initiative saw the site earmarked for a new higher education complex. Theatres Trust strongly objected to the planning application to demolish the Hippodrome but permission was granted and an appeal to the then Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities was refused. The building was demolished in autumn 2023.



1995 Dudley  
Hippodrome

Photo: Ian Grundy

**PRECISELY THE SAME  
AS ABSOLUTELY  
NOTHING ELSE**

# Resilient Theatres: Resilient Communities

## The story so far...

**We are approaching the end of our first full year of delivery on Resilient Theatres: Resilient Communities, a three-year pilot programme aiming to enrich the knowledge, skills and confidence of the sector, specifically communities that have recently taken over a theatre building or are considering doing so.**

Generously supported by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, the Pilgrim Trust and Swire Charitable Trust, the programme is allowing Theatres Trust to extend our current advice-giving service to include more tailored and in-depth support to help groups build their capacity and resilience. Its three main strands – an annual round of grants, a bank of specialist advisors and consultants and a training programme – have already yielded results and an early assessment of participants' experience indicates they value tailored support from Theatres Trust.

### **A summary of key achievements include;**

- 76 consultants based across the UK and covering 22 specialisms ranging from conservation, business planning, and governance to capital works development have joined our network of consultant advisers, known as the Skills Bank. We had originally intended to bring in around 20-30 consultants, but the volume and quality of applications allowed us to expand the scheme to provide good geographical coverage and a wider choice of consultants across all specialisms.
- A total of £60,000 was awarded in grants to seven At Risk theatres, out of 13 grant applications. Grants

ranged from £5,000 to £12,000 to support a range of projects from oral history and archive digitisation, viability work to community engagement and audience development. **Derby Hippodrome** is using the grant for visioning work and holding stakeholder consultations, whilst **Salford Victoria** is embarking on trustee recruitment and has recently completed a governance review. **Burnley Empire** was able to open its doors to the public for the first time since 1995 for a Heritage Open Day, made possible after they used part of their grant for a health and safety risk assessment. The grant scheme is now open for year two with a deadline of 9 February 2024.



**Heritage Open Day  
guided tour of Burnley Empire**

Photo: Burnley Empire Trust





**Volunteers prepare for a Heritage Open Day outside of Burnley Empire**

Photo: Burnley Empire Trust

- A cohort of eight theatres (13-18 people) received training on governance over three half-day sessions in March, June and October. We held two online and one at **HOME** in Manchester, which also included a tour of the building and a chance for participants to exchange knowledge and network. In addition to the training, each group received additional one-to-one mentoring from the trainer, which enabled them to apply the training to their unique circumstances. Next year's cohort comprises six theatres across England and Scotland and they will receive training on fundraising.
- More than 200 people attended the webinar series which included Understanding Heritage Projects, Fundraising for Theatre Capital Projects and What is Good Governance for Theatres? Resources relating to each webinar were also created and shared, along with webinar recordings, with those who had registered and with the wider public via the website. Next year's webinars will cover the topics of audience development, sustainability and fundraising.

The bespoke support we are providing via this programme, has allowed for a new form of relationship to emerge with the groups we support - one that is more dynamic, responsive and with an emphasis on dialogue and engagement. The programme has created an opportunity for Theatres Trust to work with a wider range of professional colleagues from across the sector, which has expanded our networks and diversified our knowledge base and working practice. As with all pilot projects, it has given us an opportunity to design or update some of our practices and processes and create a culture of learning and knowledge-sharing within the team, as well as with the groups we work with. It has, for example, improved how we monitor and evaluate our work, embedded fairer working practices and introduced transparent decision-making, such as through the creation of a robust shortlisting framework for grant applications.

Resilient Theatres: Resilient Communities is bringing positive results for community groups, which we believe will make them better equipped to support their theatres in the long term. Working on organisational capacity, supporting people through change and understanding your community and audiences are key areas of support that have been highlighted so far. We will continue to develop the programme over the next two years to serve the needs of groups working to protect and support theatres.

**Find out more about the Resilient Theatres: Resilient Communities project on our website.**



**Resilient Theatres: Resilient Communities cohort training at HOME in Manchester.**

Photo: Resilient Theatres

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Visualisation of  
Brighton Dome

Photo: FCBstudios

## Showcase

# Brighton Dome Corn Exchange and Studio Theatre

**Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios explains how a treasured part of Brighton's arts scene, Brighton Dome's venues are refurbished, restored and ready to host audiences and artists again.**

Set in historic Regency gardens and adjoining the famous Royal Pavilion, Brighton's Grade I listed Corn Exchange and Grade II listed Studio Theatre have been refurbished by Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios for a 21st century audience.

Costing around £38million, the refurbishment project makes major technical and operational improvements to the venues, setting the stage for a suite of open and

welcoming venues that can bring more diverse acts and wider audiences to Brighton Dome and harnessing the excitement of seeing live entertainment along the way.

The work has united, restored and upgraded four existing buildings: the Corn Exchange, Studio Theatre, 29 New Road and the Church Street entrance, while a new link building captures a former courtyard space, providing a foyer and public and support



## Showcase

Performance in the  
Corn Exchange

Photo: Chloe Hashemi

facilities. Andrew Comben, Chief Executive of Brighton Dome & Brighton Festival explains: "Restoring these wonderful historic buildings to make them more useful to the city and its artists, more open to residents and visitors, and more creative and sustainable has been a labour of love for the project team and all of us at Brighton Dome & Brighton Festival. Together, we are preserving the city's world-renowned heritage assets in a way that ensures they can be used and enjoyed by everyone for the next 200 years."

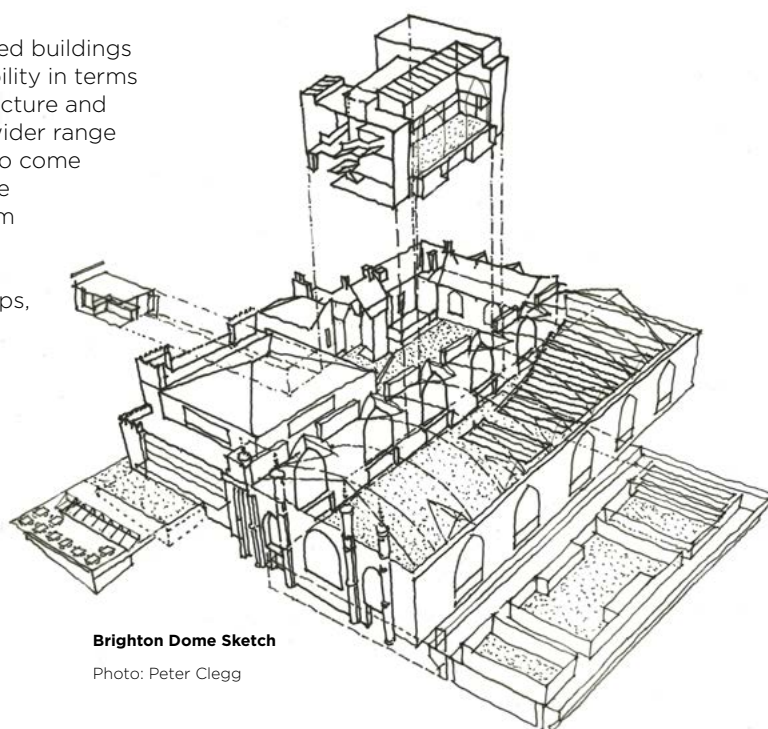
Essential conservation work to the listed buildings peels back the layers to restore historic spaces and reveal them to the public. The brand-new foyer, top lit bar and additional gallery bar and a restaurant that opens out onto New Road improve the visitor experience and new toilets and circulation provide better facilities and accessibility for visitors, performers and artists.

Brighton Dome's remodelled buildings give it much-needed flexibility in terms of layout, seating, infrastructure and accessibility – allowing a wider range of artists and performers to come to Brighton. A new creative space - called Anita's Room - will also be available for artists and community groups to use for workshops, meetings and rehearsals.

### From a palace for horses...

Brighton Dome's Concert Hall and Corn Exchange were the first Regency buildings in Brighton, heralding a new era for the town. From riding stables for a Prince, to a place of protest for Suffragettes, to a temporary hospital in World War I, to the stage that launched ABBA to global fame, Brighton Dome has had many lives. Having started its life as an elite space, it is now an accessible and open venue, committed to driving a thriving creative culture across the region.

Peter Clegg, Founding Partner at Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios led the project: "What appealed to us most when we started the project was the Corn Exchange. It was the first of the Regency Buildings in Brighton and as far as we know is still the widest single span timber framed building in the country."



Brighton Dome Sketch

Photo: Peter Clegg



The Corn Exchange was pioneering architecture from the outset. A column free timber structure, it measures 54m x 18m x 10m and can accommodate 505 seated (max. capacity) and 1291 standing (max. capacity) including performers and staff.

He continues: "Seeing the space now - fully restored, with all the layers that had been added over the years stripped out - you can see what an extraordinary building it is."

With the help of theatre experts and skilled craftspeople, the ceilings have been removed to reveal the original timber roof structure, and the original character of the building restored. "To some extent we didn't know what to expect when first investigating the 18-metre structural timber frame. Once the layers of paint were removed, we could better understand the condition of the original structure. We were able to find an engineering solution that meant the frame could be repaired and strengthened to make it structurally sound, as well as housing essential production equipment such as the lighting and audio rigs."

Original windows along the west side have had their mirrored coating removed and their original decorative timber linings revealed and restored using specialist craft skills and workmanship, conserving the character of the remarkable 1806 interior. Borrowed

daylight is introduced through the new public foyer and gallery bar and views into the Corn Exchange from the gallery and Studio Theatre foyer now create a dialogue between the audiences of the different spaces. "Very rarely do you get the ability to see from foyer to auditorium through a giant window. The public are welcomed into the double height entrance foyer and offered a glimpse of the drama of the Corn Exchange through the original but now refurbished windows." Peter said.

The better equipped Corn Exchange can now host a diverse range of uses, from dance and music performances to banqueting, exhibitions, meetings, graduation ceremonies and celebrations. Andrew added that "the practical interventions in the building are lifechanging for Brighton Dome. This was always a space that should be recognised as a jewel in Brighton's cultural assets, but it was incredibly expensive to operate, and manually intensive."

New interventions include new sub-floor storage, suspended rigging and to increase the seating capacity to 505, a new north-end balcony with 80 seats, concealing a 325-seat retractable bleacher seating unit, a pit lift and seating pit (100 seats). There is also an entirely new ventilation system using heat-exchange technology that optimises the re-use of energy within the venue.

# Showcase



**Corn Exchange**

Photo: Richard Chivers

## Showcase



Foyer to the  
Corn Exchange

Photo: Richard Chivers

The **Studio Theatre** is housed in a Grade II listed 1930s building, originally a supper room for the Corn Exchange, that hosts 225 seats for more intimate performances, spoken word and rehearsals.

What was formerly the Pavilion Theatre has been renovated and replanned to improve not only capacity in a more flexible arrangement, with the addition of side balconies, but to make it a fully accessible space for audiences and artists. A new lift and escape stair enable the theatre to have its own accessible foyer space with views through the windows of the Corn Exchange. New dressing rooms and technical infrastructure dramatically improve the usability of the facility.

Andrew Comben describes the changes: "The Studio Theatre had a litany of operational issues – there was no disabled access to the theatre, dressing rooms were two floors down in the

basement, and there was no loading – everything had to be 'humped' up the stairs manually. All of these operational issues have now been solved in our Studio Theatre, and a new balcony has been inserted, which makes for a much more intimate space."

Within the new fabric, a brand new dedicated creative space, called Anita's Room is conceived as an experimental and working space, it can accommodate up to 40 people and is fully equipped with a lighting grid and mixing desk and 5G connectivity. Supporting works in progress, small scale performances and events, Anita's Room will be made available to Brighton Dome associate artists, resident artists, visiting performing artists, community projects and creative learning organisations.

Peter, a strong advocate of creative education, commented that "It's important that organisations like [Brighton Dome] should have this kind of workaday spaces that have educational value. Places where groups can mess around, try things out and not be too precious. "

The space is named in memory of Dame Anita Roddick, the activist, entrepreneur, and founder of The Body Shop and is made possible following a generous grant from The Roddick Foundation.

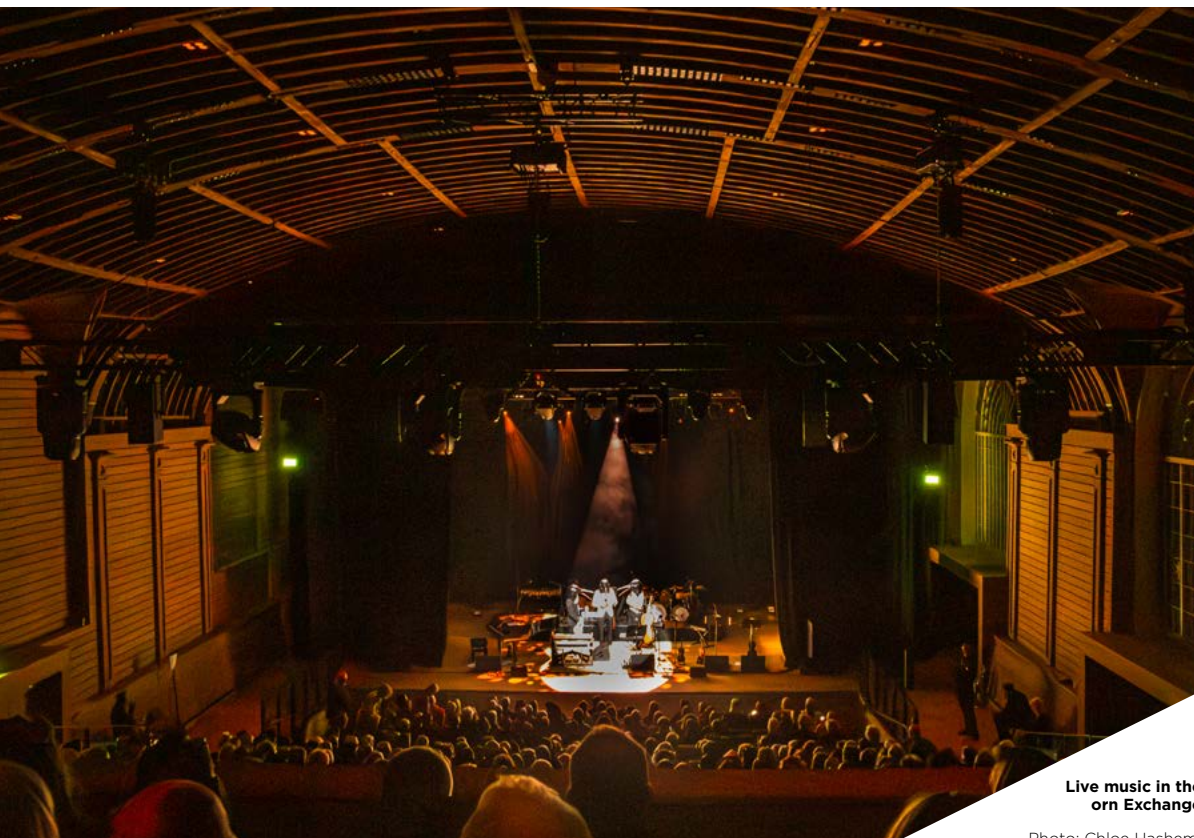
Andrew is passionate about what Anita's Room will provide to Brighton's artistic community. "We'd like the space to have some of Anita's energy about it. It is a neat paradox between the heritage of the building and the forward thinking of artists. To me it also somehow embodies the spirit of Regency – always wanting the new thing, sometimes eccentric, often frivolous and indulgent, but ultimately a really exciting and interesting inspiration for creativity. Anita's Room offers an opportunity for artists to be making work regardless of what is going on elsewhere in our spaces."



Studio Theatre

Photo: Nick Street





Live music in the  
Corn Exchange

Photo: Chloe Hashemi

## Connecting people and the arts

The new foyer and gallery bar connects the existing buildings while seamlessly adding important facilities for audiences and performers that unite the venues and improve the experience for all.

Peter Clegg explains that “This is the only bit of new building, but nobody sees it. It has no external walls. This space was a concrete courtyard with a shed on it, referred to as The Slope, a place for dumping things. Out of this redundant space we have managed to get two bars, Anita’s Room, two staircases and all the connections to access the theatres.”

Stitching together the four existing buildings, the central space gives rare opportunities for views between the venues, projecting a sense of occasion and excitement to being in the building for audiences and those visiting the building. The off-white brickwork to the west wall of the Corn Exchange forms an impressive backdrop to the new Gallery bar and the glazed roof to the gallery brings natural light not only into the public areas, but also through interconnections into the venues.

Comben clearly sees this as the lynchpin of the project. “When our audiences are in this space, they have a sense that there are other things going on. There is a sense of being within an artistic organisation, and it’s a different kind of conversation as a result. In our first month of performances, we’ve had chamber music, dance performances, charity dinners - it’s a really wonderful experience.”

New staircases at the north and south of the new build aspect complete a public route through the gallery bar, connecting the Corn Exchange and Studio Theatre, as well as Church Street and New Road. It feels like part of the city, with locals and tourists wandering in to see the new spaces.

Behind the scenes, new basements connect the spaces and provide much needed storage spaces. Services for the Corn Exchange, Studio Theatre and Anita’s Room, as well as Brighton Dome and Brighton Museum, are centralised. The services engineers, Max Fordham, have used a mix of retrofitted existing services and new additions, including heat recovery units that reduce the heating or cooling required, depending on the time of year. A central energy centre was kept online during the construction phase to maintain the operation of the existing theatre and museum that shared the same services. As a result, the operation of the venues is radically simpler, more flexible and more energy efficient, resulting in reduced running costs and the ability to present a fuller programme.

Having already played host to events of all kinds, markets and civic meetings, a specialist artificial limb hospital and women’s rollerskating football, Brighton Dome’s venues are now ready for their next hundred years or so of hosting remarkable events.

# Showcase

The project has been made possible by Brighton & Hove City Council, with the support of: Arts Council England, The National Lottery Heritage Fund, Coast to Capital and the many Trusts & Foundations, individuals and businesses who have played a vital part in bringing this project to fruition.

#### Anitas Room

Photo: Richard Chivers



### Project Data

Client

**Brighton Dome & Brighton Festival Ltd  
and Brighton & Hove City Council**

Architect

**Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios**

Landscape Architect

**LT Studio**

Structural Engineer

**ARUP**

Environmental Engineering Services

**Max Fordham**

Theatre Consultancy

**Charcoalblue**

Quantity Surveyor

**Jackson Coles**

Access

**All Clear Designs**

Fire Consultancy

**The Fire Surgery**

H&S advisor

**Baqus**

Location:

**Brighton Dome, Church Street,  
Brighton, BN1 1UE**

Project Cost

**circa £38m**

Funding:

**Brighton & Hove City Council**

**Arts Council England**

**The National Lottery Heritage Fund**

**Coast**

**Coast to Capital Local Enterprise  
Partnership**

**Trusts and foundations**

**Individual donors**

Gross internal floor area:

**3500m<sup>2</sup>**

Start on site:

**September 2016**

Completion:

**October 2023**

**Exterior of Brighton Dome**

Photo: Richard Chivers

Showcase



# Pass on something wonderful

**Imagine if your passion for theatres could last beyond your lifetime and enable future generations to share in your joy. After you have looked after your family and friends, please consider leaving Theatres Trust a gift in your Will.**

As the UK's only charity that supports all theatres, we have an in-depth understanding of the issues facing theatres and how best to target help to have the biggest impact. By leaving a gift in your Will to the Theatres Trust you could help us to keep theatres alive through our free advice service, small grants programmes and campaigning work. Your gift could help our overall mission or it could support a specific aspect of our work such as our work with Theatres at Risk.

## All gifts make a difference

As a small charity, gifts of any size really do make a difference to our work as was the case with the gift we received from a Theatres Trust Friend to directly support our work with Theatres at Risk.

Last year we were fortunate to receive gifts in two Wills.

- Life Friend Gerald Smith who had been supporting the Theatres Trust since 1991 left his estate to a number of charities close to his heart. We were delighted that Theatres Trust was one of them. The significant gift we received will be vital in ensuring theatres are kept alive and vibrant for all communities.
- Jane Leatt also left us a percentage of her estate divided amongst other charities that were important to her. Jane had a long-time love of theatre particularly in her home in Bristol and with her solicitor she identified the Theatres Trust as a charity that could keep her passion alive when she had gone.

## How a legacy helped a Theatre at Risk

In 2019 we received a gift from a Theatres Trust Friend that directly supported our work with Theatres at Risk. The gift enabled us to offer a grant to Morecambe Winter Garden to focus on governance and management. This has created a strong and resilient organisational structure, laying the foundations necessary for Morecambe Winter Gardens Preservation Trust to successfully apply for a number of other grants and begin vital repair work to this unique building.



Morecambe  
Winter Gardens

Photo: Theatres Trust 2023

## How to leave us a gift in your Will

There are two options for leaving us a gift in your Will:

- Pecuniary Legacy – a gift of a fixed sum
- Residuary Legacy – leaving the remainder or part of your estate to Theatres Trust after other gifts have been distributed

If you have already made a Will and wish to amend it, the simplest way to do this is via a codicil. Your solicitor will be able to advise you further.

We have a partnership with Guardian Angel who will write your will for free if you leave a gift to Theatres Trust. Simply go to the website [www.guardianangel.network](http://www.guardianangel.network) and type **THEATRETRUSTFREE**.

If this is something you would like to consider doing, Theatres Trust Development Director Kate Bierman would be happy to discuss how best to do this so your love of theatres can be commemorated in the best way possible. Contact Kate on **020 7836 8591** or by email: [kate.bierman@theatrestrust.org.uk](mailto:kate.bierman@theatrestrust.org.uk)

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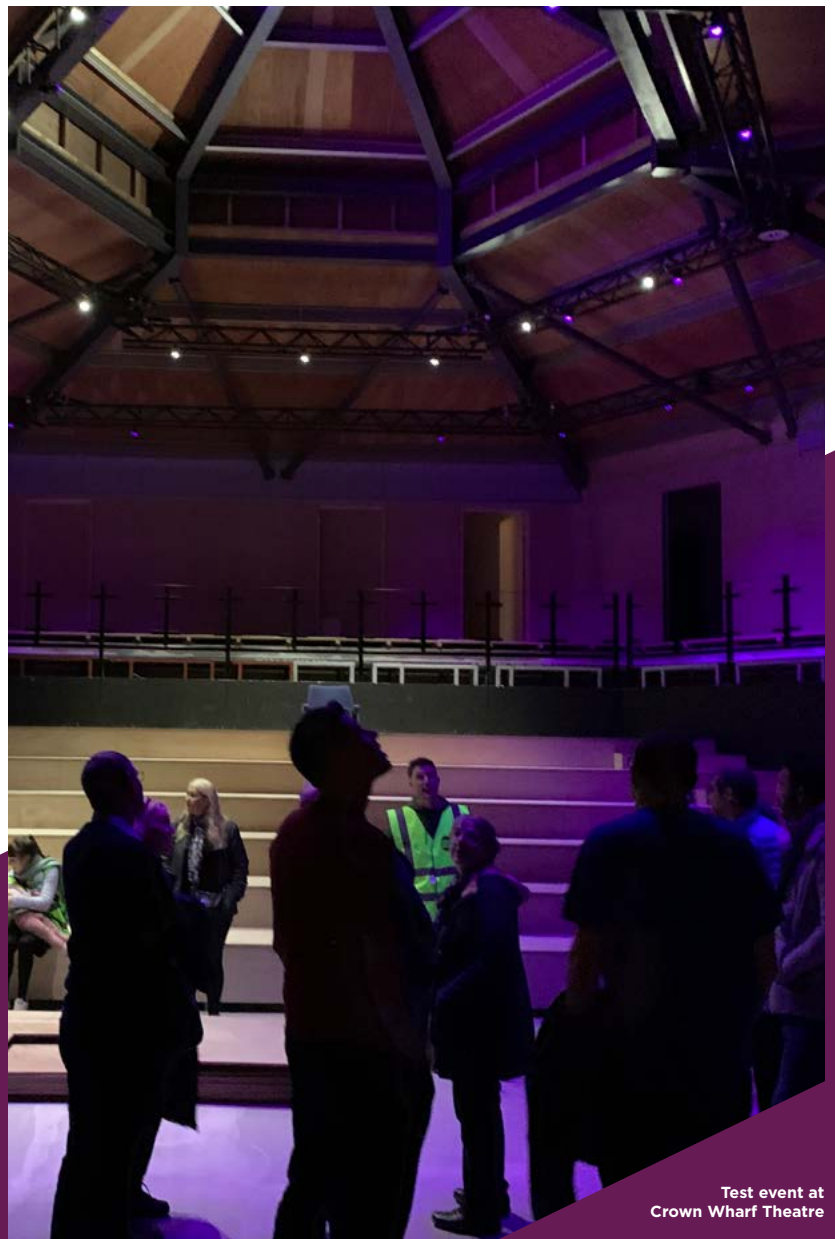


# Set in Stone

**Leo Capernaros, Trustee of the Crown Wharf Theatre in Stone, outlines the journey, unique partnership and community effort that has transformed a piece of waste ground into a brand-new theatre poised to open later this year.**

My wife and I are both members of a local theatre company Stone Revellers, which has been part of our town's fabric since the 1970s. It's that classic thing of an amateur theatre company operating out of a village hall, building and deconstructing a theatre first and then a set for each show, presenting a lot of demands and challenges. The town of Stone is growing and there are a lot of performance arts groups and a good music scene, but to showcase anything, people have to go 8 miles in one direction to Stoke-on-Trent or 8 miles in the other direction to Stafford. It just seemed a bit mad that the town didn't have anything itself that was fit for purpose. A town of 20,000 people and if you don't drive, you can't really participate in, or go and see anything in terms of live performance.

We started to have a look around town at empty spaces to see what might be available to convert into a studio theatre for the town. Our original ambition at that point was to try and do it independently, run a theatre as a business, with a café on the side.



Test event at  
Crown Wharf Theatre

Photo: Crown Wharf Theatre



**Roof of Crown  
Wharf Theatre**

Photo: Crown Wharf Theatre

One of the inquiries we made was about an abandoned fire station with a car park. I was emailing town councillors about it and at the same time, Joule's Brewery was talking to them too about the same site. Joule's started in Stone in the 1700s and was one of Stone's main employers. Over time the brewery has been through a few different phases, but Stone is its spiritual home and it wanted to return there. The town council just said "why don't you all get in a room together?" That was where it started.

At this meeting, back in 2017, we discovered that the old fire station site backed onto a scrap land on the town's canal frontage and Joule's was proposing to purchase the whole lot and build a large pub. But I think they saw the opportunities – business, community and planning – that if they added community facilities onto their proposal it was far more likely to be passed and actually be good for business in terms of integrating this new pub into the town and the community. It was smart from them but also Joule's was willing to invest quite a lot of money, which they had to...

By the end of that meeting, they basically said "we'll build you the shell of a theatre, you just need to tell us what you want". The way it would work was the brewery would build the shell of the theatre, would rent it to us for a peppercorn rent, but they would get all the beer money, all the food money, all the additional footfall.



**Constructing the auditorium**

Photo: Crown Wharf Theatre

We walked out of there a little bit dizzy. Our ambition for that personal little business was gone, but this new opportunity was great for us, for lots of people we know and for the whole town. So, we thought "let's go for it".

It meant moving quickly on a lot of things. First, we had to set up a charity, which is hard work. The next thing was to raise quite a lot of money quite quickly to employ specialist theatre architect consultants, Charcoalblue, who would help us articulate the requirements to the brewery's architects so the shell they built would be fit for us to then subsequently retrofit into a theatre.



The brewery had sketched the rough dimensions of the space we could have and Charcoalblue changed it from a box to an octagon. The new-build auditorium space is interconnected to two original buildings on the site, where people who worked on the canal once lived, these have been converted to a back-of-house changing room space.

The auditorium itself is built with steel with a marine ply timber vaulted roof to give extra height. It has a lot of drama for a new build. It can be used as a very traditional proscenium arch or we can do things almost in the round and, acoustically, it works brilliantly.

Capacity has been an important consideration – we needed to accommodate up to 60 performers to host schools shows or pantos. There was a lot of going backwards and forwards on technical issues about noise, sound and access. What Joule's built had a concrete screed floor, bare walls, no services – it was just an empty frame which we had to turn into a theatre.

We got charitable status in 2019 and began fundraising and community engagement. Then Covid happened. On one hand, it gave us more time to think about what we wanted and needed to do, but in terms of funding, it blew us out of the water. Trying to build a new theatre in Staffordshire, we weren't at the top of anyone's pecking order for funding, so we had to do things a bit differently – take on more ourselves, spend less on expert consultants, accepting that we'd make mistakes along the way.

As we moved out of Covid, we landed our first grant, £50,000 from Stone Town Hall Charity, a local grant giving organisation for our back-of-house fit. We held concerts to

raise money and offered different options for people to donate money – sponsoring seats, corporate sponsors, founding partners, all this together helped us raise around £300,000. We then started applying for bigger grants, getting £75,000 from HS2 Community Environment Fund and half a million pounds from the Shared Prosperity Fund, a large chunk of which has gone on buying LED light fixtures, which is a big deal for managing our energy usage.

Running potential user group engagement sessions has been a big part of getting people excited about the project, but also giving us more insight before we got too carried away with some of the practical requirements. We've done some audience building by running stand-up comedy nights in the pub until the theatre is fully finished and we've worked with schools and local community groups, showing them the space. We want to build up a good programme that meets our charitable objectives of furthering access and learning about the arts locally and that has helped us with our business model too – modelling how much it will cost to run the building, what mixture of amateur and professional tours we will host, and how much we will have to charge people.

It has been a real community effort, the process we've been through means that the town has ownership of the whole thing in a way that it would not have if we'd been able to raise more money and paid a company to project manage it all. It has been difficult at times but my advice to anyone involved in a similar project is to hold onto the sense of why you are doing it. But don't try to do it all at once, all you can do is the next thing and keep going.



**Test show at Crown Wharf**

Photo: Crown Wharf Theatre



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# Our Work

**We provide advice on the planning and development of theatres.**

## New theatres

Theatres Trust actively supports theatre owners and operators who plan positively for cultural use and much of our advice is around ensuring proposals for theatres offer the most viable solution. Cultural facilities are increasingly recognised as vital for arresting decline and encouraging activity within town centres because they generate footfall and spending in other businesses.

**The Gaumont** in Camden, designed by William E. Trent, was sub-divided in the 1960s with its stalls converted to bingo use and its foyer and circle level becoming an Odeon cinema. Following closure of the bingo hall in

September 2023 the stalls and stage house were taken on by the Secret Cinema group who put in a planning application for change of use to an immersive theatre. We supported this proposal (2023/4355/P), because it represented a return to its original function as a cinema and theatre and would minimise the building's vacancy. Some alterations are to be carried out, but these are minor in nature and beneficial because they will improve wheelchair accessibility and make the space more functional. They also maintain future reversibility of the Gaumont should another bingo operator come forward or should both parts of the building ever be reinstated as a single space.



**The Gaumont  
cinema ghost sign**

Photo: Jim Osley

## Restoration, redevelopment and refurbishment

Theatres Trust encourages theatre owners and operators to invest in their buildings to meet the needs and expectations of modern users and improve accessibility and sustainability to increase their viability and social value.

Planning permission was supported to construct an extension to the **Todmorden Hippodrome** utilising funding from the Todmorden Town Deal award (23/00922/FUL). The Hippodrome was built in 1908 as a theatre but by 1917 was almost entirely operating as a cinema. When this closed in 1956 it was taken on by a local group, the Todmorden Operatic Society, who operated it with the Todmorden Players. The proposed extension will provide additional space and facilities to the upper levels with alterations at ground floor level to provide a new more functional layout. The theatre will have new flexible studio/rehearsal spaces, an archive and an external terrace. There will be lift access and additional WCs. These new spaces will improve the theatre's function and flexibility as well as better allow for generation of income from external hires.

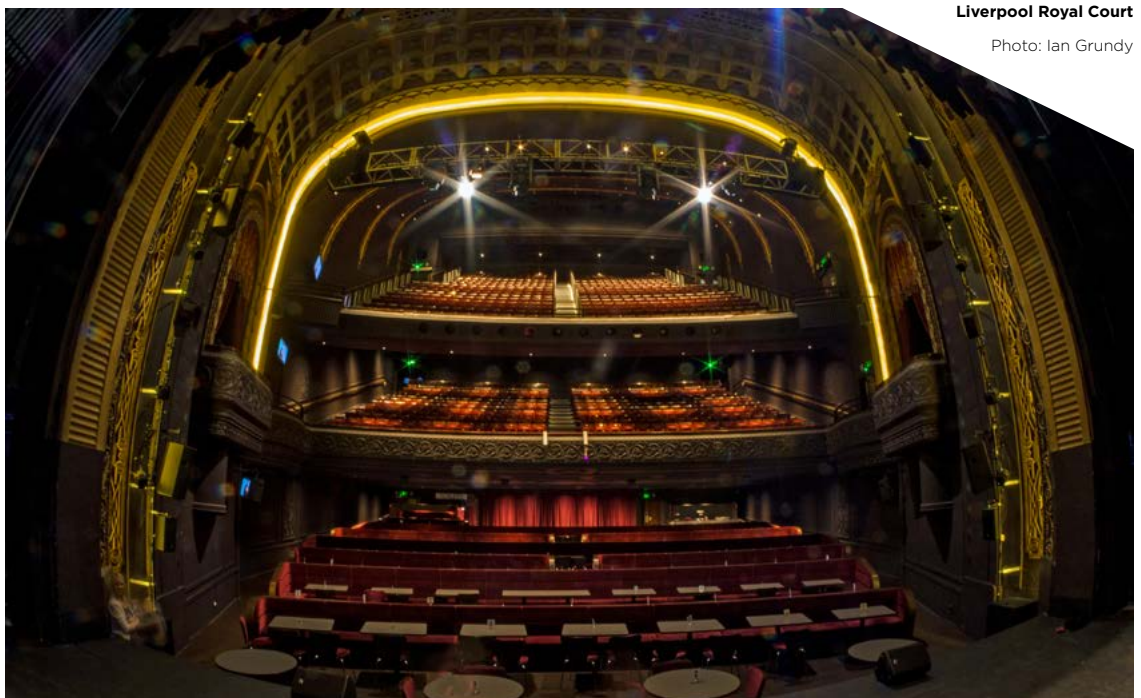
Plans were supported to redevelop the Courtyard Bar at **Liverpool's Royal Court Theatre** (23F/2966), which was formerly a pub purchased by the theatre in 2018. This represents a comprehensive revision of plans



**Todmorden Hippodrome**

Photo: Ian Grundy 2013

for an extension to the theatre supported in 2022. This part of the building will be distinct from the original theatre and will now be called the Sir Ken Dodd Happiness Centre. Dodd set the world record for the longest session of jokes at the Royal Court, telling 1,500 in three-and-a-half hours. Dodd's 'trademark' tickling stick will be represented with a large public sculpture to be placed within the public realm outside the theatre. Compared to the previous scheme there is now a revised layout for a café and restaurant with the addition of a Changing Places facility. There will be a studio space capable of hosting smaller performances, offices and additional dressing rooms with new openings into the existing theatre. The upper floor will be a Sir Ken Dodd museum hall helping to make the theatre more of an all-day destination and broadening its cultural offer for the city.



**Liverpool Royal Court**

Photo: Ian Grundy





**Courtyard at Liverpool  
Royal Court**

Photo: Theatres Trust

**Theatre Royal Margate**

Photo: Ian Grundy

Theatres Trust supported planning permission and listed building consent to redevelop a derelict former coal merchant's house next to the **Chesil Theatre**, in Winchester (23/01941/FUL). The theatre is small with limited facilities and has constraints on what it is able to do due to it being within a listed building. For example, currently there are just two WCs for audiences and one for performers, none of which are accessible WCs. There is no foyer space, with the current arrangement being for audiences to enter straight into the auditorium which means waiting outside until doors open. The house will be replaced by a new two-storey building, along with further additional floorspace achieved through infilling a passageway. The extension will provide a flexible foyer and rehearsal space, a second small performance space/ community room, and a meeting room with additional WCs, dressing rooms, office and wardrobe store. There will be lift access making the new facilities accessible. This scheme will significantly improve the function and flexibility of the theatre and address its challenges which detract from the experience of audiences.

We supported listed building consent for urgent repairs to the roof of **Theatre Royal Margate**, along with an access hatch into the roof void above its auditorium ceiling for inspections (L/TH/23/1411). Theatre Royal is currently closed and is on our Theatres at Risk Register, although Thanet District Council is currently undertaking public consultation on initial plans for its re-opening and development. The building is in a fragile condition and requires capital investment along with essential maintenance and repair work, so these works, which will facilitate efforts to reopen and ensure the ongoing conservation of the theatre, are welcomed. The roof works are necessary to help protect the building and prevent future water ingress and the hatch will allow for better and safer inspection and repair of fabric.



**Theatre Royal Margate**

Photo: Ian Grundy

## Our Supporters

# Thanks to all our supporters

**2023 saw the launch of our new three-year business plan which had four key themes at the heart of it: resilience, inclusion, environmental sustainability and placemaking. These themes have grown out of the challenging recent years for the theatre sector and directly supports them in the new landscape.**

We continued to work with theatres of all sizes around the country, ensuring they can provide welcoming spaces for their audiences to enjoy performances and take part in activities. Our work is only possible thanks to the generosity of our public funders, trusts and foundations, Patrons, Corporate Supporters, Friends and other donors.

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We would like to thank the producers, cast, crew and all of the staff at:

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Duchess Theatre – The Play That Goes Wrong  
Gielgud Theatre - Stephen Sondheim's Old Friends  
Gillian Lynne - Crazy For You  
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Lyceum Theatre - The Lion King  
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Sondheim Theatre - Les Misérables  
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