

2025

Year in Review



Theatres
Trust

Welcome message from CEO Josh McTaggart

2025 marked my first full calendar year as Chief Executive of Theatres Trust, and I could not be prouder of our commitment to ensuring theatres up and down this country are equipped to navigate the unexpected challenges they face on a daily basis.



Joshua McTaggart
Photo: Rich Lakos

Theatres Trust's work spans the full life of a theatre, from our statutory role in the planning system, to grant-giving and expert advice on capital works and business models, through to campaigning to bring closed theatres back into public use.

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Across the year, I was often struck by the commitment, expertise and care shown by our small but mighty team as they continuously put the needs of our theatres at the heart of every decision. As theatres continued to face acute financial pressure and capital investment became harder to secure, the Trust's team continued to guide the sector with calm, credible expertise, often behind the scenes and without fanfare. Against a backdrop of uncertainty, this tireless work laid the solid foundations for our theatres to thrive over the next decade.

I am pleased that in 2025, those foundations have been reinforced by government commitment to capital investment in our theatres. The announcement of the Creative Foundations Fund, unveiled by the

Secretary of State for Culture, Lisa Nandy, at the Royal Shakespeare Company, marked a significant opportunity for our theatres. Attending the launch of this fund, I was privileged to hear Nandy speak of how she loves "the sound, smell and feel of a theatre." I, too, share this love of being in a theatre, watching a story unfold onstage, and leaving the auditorium with a renewed perspective on the world. Long-term capital funding has been a core campaign for Theatres Trust, and I am proud of the way our team shaped a compelling case to the government that helped secure this vital investment in the sector.

Much of our campaigning is long-term and behind the scenes, but in 2025 we saw our impact as two high-profile theatres on

our Theatres at Risk Register reopened beautifully revitalised venues. In London, Soho Theatre Walthamstow brought new life to the former Walthamstow Granada, becoming a cultural anchor for Waltham Forest Council's town centre regeneration. In West Yorkshire, Bradford Live transformed the former Bradford Odeon into a state-of-the-art venue, fit for the future and shaped around the needs of its audiences. Our work with both venues spans nearly 25 years, a reminder that the celebrated reopening of a theatre is often decades in the making.

Alongside these celebrations, the year has also brought significant challenges. Reforms to England's planning system mean our statutory consultee role is under review, while proposals for the National Planning Policy Framework risk removing specific protection to cultural infrastructure altogether. In 2026, we will continue to work closely with government to make a clear, robust case for the planning system as a vital tool in protecting theatres nationwide. Whatever the outcome of future policy changes, we remain firmly committed

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to championing the role of theatres in their local communities, particularly in planning decisions taken by local authorities.

Amid this evolving policy landscape, with increased investment in theatres but also growing pressures on the sector, Theatres Trust approaches a significant milestone. This summer, we will mark our 50th anniversary by celebrating five decades of protecting and championing theatres across the country. More importantly, it will be a moment to reaffirm our commitment to ensuring theatres remain resilient, relevant and fit for the future.

Later this year, we will set out our vision for the next chapter of Theatres Trust, and I hope you will join us as we take our work forward with renewed confidence and purpose.



Hoxton Hall
Photo: Sean Pollock

2025 in Numbers



300+

theatres benefitted from Theatres Trust services

120+

organisations given advice

4

theatres reopened that we've supported

Responded to
163

local planning applications and listed building consents

Commented on
61

local and neighbourhood plans and local planning policy consultations

£420K

of grants awarded

62

projects received funding

320+

people attended our webinars

60+

theatre site visits

600+

press mentions of our work

Advocacy and campaigning

Theatres Trust takes every opportunity to talk about how brilliant theatres are, and what is needed to create the right environment for them to thrive.

We make the case for the importance of theatres to national governments, reminding politicians and civil servants of the positive contribution theatres make to our national culture and the UK's soft power, to local economies and sense of place, and to the happiness and wellbeing of so many people.

Theatres Trust is a respected voice for the theatre sector, providing expert commentary on issues impacting theatres in the media and contributing to events within our sector and beyond.



Blackpool Grand
Photo: Martin Bostock

In 2025 Theatres Trust:

Gave evidence to the Culture Media and Sport Select Committee inquiry on Protecting Built Heritage, making the case for every local authority to have a cultural strategy to protect its buildings and access to the arts

Secured specific reference to theatres and cultural venues in the new licensing framework, through conversations with the Department for Business and Trade and Department for Culture, Media and Sport

Contributed to more than 20 sector conferences, events and networks

Featured on 15 TV news programmes, including CEO Josh McTaggart appearing on BBC Breakfast

Collaborated with partners including Society of London Theatre/UK Theatre, Music Venues Trust, Arts Marketing Association, Night-time Industries Association, Culture Counts and others on shared interests

Soho Theatre Walthamstow, London

We were delighted that former Theatre at Risk Soho Theatre Walthamstow opened in May 2025 offering a mix of comedy with theatre, music and community activities.

Walthamstow Granada, as it was previously known, was added to our Theatres at Risk Register due to deteriorating state of the building. Theatres Trust worked closely with Waltham Forest Council, helping to realise its ambition to purchase and revive the theatre as a live performance venue. We also supported the appointed operator Soho Theatre Company throughout the capital project to restore the building.

With thanks to Waltham Forest Council and many others, the 'stunning art deco gem' Soho Theatre Walthamstow has opened to wide acclaim.

Unused since 2003, it is now filled with delighted audiences and contributing to the growth of the local economy, working to a vision that respects the 100-year old heritage of the building while reinventing it for the future.

Achieving this was a long and complex process and Theatres Trust were highly valued partners and collaborators throughout. They offered expert advice and pragmatic solutions, always rooted in real world experience and their passionate commitment to the sector.

Mark Godfrey,
Soho Theatre Company



Theatres at Risk Register

The Theatres at Risk Register is our flagship campaign, shining a light on the theatre buildings across the UK under threat of closure, redevelopment or severe decay, but which all have the potential to be revived for their local communities with the right support.

The campaign raises the profile of these special buildings within their communities, with local politicians and with the theatre-going public, and our team of Sector Specialists provide ongoing and intensive support to organisations and individuals trying to revive their local Theatre at Risk.

Burnley Empire
Photo: Burnley Empire Trust



In 2025:

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theatres we supported through the Theatres at Risk Register reopened - Bradford Live, Soho Theatre Walthamstow and Epstein Theatre in Liverpool.

35

organisations working to revive their local Theatre at Risk received in-depth support throughout the year, including five organisations taking part in business development training through Resilient Theatres: Resilient Communities programme.

225

people attended the online launch event for the 2025 Theatres at Risk Register, which featured guest speakers Sir Chris Bryant MP, Minister for Creative Industries, Arts and Tourism at the time and Theatres Trust Trustee actress/director Tracy Ann Oberman.

Positive progress was made during 2025 for several Theatres at Risk with our help including:

- Leith Theatre secured a National Lottery Heritage Fund grant to develop its capital plans
- Reigate and Banstead Borough Council agreeing to fund removing 'crumbling concrete' RAAC from the Harlequin Theatre
- Save the Amulet reached the target for its community share offer

Morecambe Winter Gardens

Morecambe Winter Gardens has been on our Theatres at Risk Register since we started the campaign in 2006, but huge progress has been made in recent years with our governance and business planning support unlocking c£5million of investment.



The journey that the Morecambe Winter Gardens has been on over the past five years would not have been possible without the continuous support of the Theatres Trust.

From guidance on planning to help with funding applications to being a constant mentor, they have been the bedrock of our support system. The Resilient Theatres: Resilient Communities grant scheme has enabled vital work that nobody else funds to be done and they are the first and often only point of contact for small voluntary groups in the heritage sector who try to save a theatre.

With the help of the Theatres Trust our dream of restoring and bringing back to use our wonderful Grade 2* listed theatre is becoming a reality.

**Professor Vanessa Toumlin,
Chair Morecambe Winter Gardens**

Photo: Theatres Trust



Advice and knowledge sharing

Theatres Trust's team of Sector Specialists give expert and impartial advice on the design and management of theatres that are resilient, environmentally sustainable, inclusive and contribute to vibrant places to live.

Our guidance ensures organisations can operate their buildings more effectively, save and raise money, build strong relationships with stakeholders – and ultimately keep their doors open so they can continue playing a vital role in their communities.



Storyhouse
Photo: Mark Carline

In 2025 Theatres Trust:

Provided advice to 121 organisations on topics including fundraising, operational viability, design and sustainability

Commissioned 455 hours of professional expertise through our Sector Skills Bank

Undertook more than 60 site visits to theatres across the UK to better understand the challenges they face

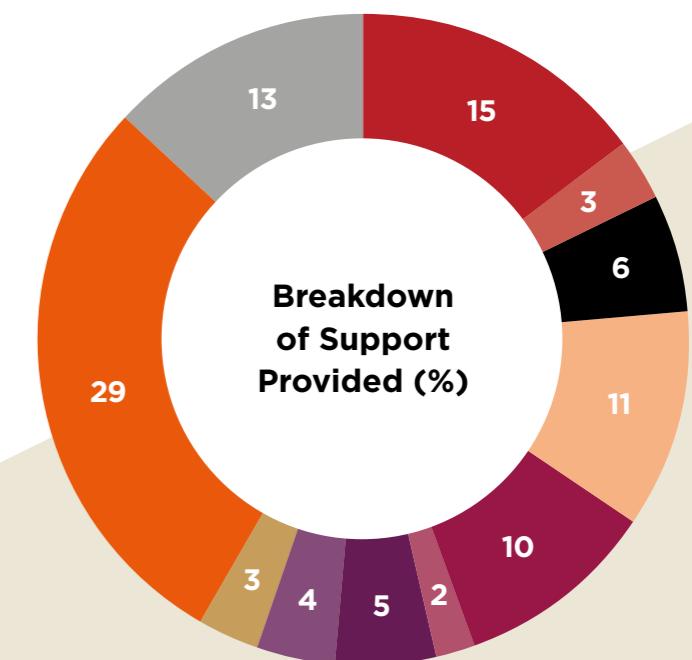
Coordinated an Advisory Review panel of technical experts and creatives to guide the future development of a major theatrical space

Welcomes the reopening of Citizens Theatre in Glasgow who we had supported throughout its redevelopment project

Supported Morecambe Winter Gardens, St George's Guildhall in King's Lynn and Spilsby Sessions House to secure significant funding from Historic England's Heritage at Risk Capital

Upskilled 324 theatre professionals on topics including community engagement, evaluation, building maintenance plans and Martyn's Law through our Resilient Theatres: Resilient Communities webinar series

- Business Models and Fundraising
- Organisational Governance
- Theatre Operations
- Capital Project Viability
- Theatre Design and Sustainability
- RAAC (Crumbling Concrete)
- Planning
- Heritage
- Property
- Theatres at Risk
- Other



Citizen's Theatre, Glasgow

Glasgow's Citizens Theatre reopened in August 2025 after a decade long major capital project, which Theatres Trust has been involved in from the beginning.

Citizens Theatre commissioned us to carry out an Advisory Review on its initial designs. Bringing together Theatres Trust's in-house experts with experienced theatre industry professionals and conservation specialists, the Advisory Review examined whether the proposed scheme would meet the organisation's aspirations to create a more welcoming, inclusive and environmentally sustainable space with improved facilities. Feedback from the review helped inform and refine plans, and we were happy to endorse the subsequent planning application.

We've continued to support the project, including awarding funding a Changing Places toilet. The statues of Burns, Shakespeare and the Muses are back in the rightful place on top of the theatre, and the Citizens Theatre is back in its rightful place at the heart of its community.

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Photo:
Theatres Trust



Bethnal Green, London Working Men's Club

Bethnal Green Working Men's Club, which predominantly serves the LGBTQ+ community and provides an important stage for the drag and cabaret sector, was under threat of being sold to developers.

We gave advice to Friends of Bethnal Green Working Men's Club, a group formed of performers, customers, programmers and trade union members, on how its current and historic use could give it protection under planning legislation. This played a significant role in Tower Hamlets Council confirming the venue's lawful use as a performance venue, nightclub and members club, making it difficult for it to be converted into other uses. We also provided

fundraising and grant advice to the group, which will be vital if the venue is to return to community ownership.

The campaign is not over, but Theatres Trust brought this iconic venue a step closer to being saved.

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Photo:
Theatres Trust

Placemaking and the Planning System

Through our role as a statutory consultee and through our wider planning advice, Theatres Trust protects theatres and ensures theatre buildings are fit for purpose and contribute positively to their local areas.

In 2025 Theatres Trust:

Responded to:

87

Planning applications

76

Listed building consents

12

pre-applications

Commented on:

50

Local plans

4

Neighbourhood plans

7

Other local planning policy consultations

Contributed to:

Key placemaking and planning events including CEO Joshua McTaggart speaking at the Creative Industries Property Summit.

Selsey Pavilion
Photo: Fred Howarth



King's Theatre, Southsea

Theatres Trust has been actively engaged with the King's Theatre in Southsea on the project to integrate neighbouring shop units to improve the front-of-house space, make the theatre more accessible and create a second performance studio.

The original Victorian shop frontages will be retained and restored, but everything behind will be demolished to create the space for a much-expanded theatre foyer with a new bar and box office, additional toilets including an accessible toilet, and a lift. This will provide level access, meaning that wheelchair users and people with reduced mobility will be able to use the primary audience entrance for the first time. We visited the theatre in 2024, provided detailed feedback on the

initial proposals and supported the subsequent planning application. Portsmouth City Council responded positively, granting full planning permission and listed building consent.



King's Theatre, Southsea
Photo: Ian Grundy

Grants and in-kind support

Theatres Trust provides funding and other support so theatres make the most of their buildings, meet the expectations of modern audiences and productions, and make a meaningful contribution to their local areas.

Our grants fund projects that improve the business resilience, accessibility and environmental sustainability of theatres, and support Theatres at Risk to take the next steps towards revitalisation. We also partner with leading industry suppliers to provide in-kind support to theatres, using our sector knowledge to identify where this can have the most impact.

In 2025 Theatres Trust:

Awarded 62 grants
totalling c£420,000 across three grant schemes

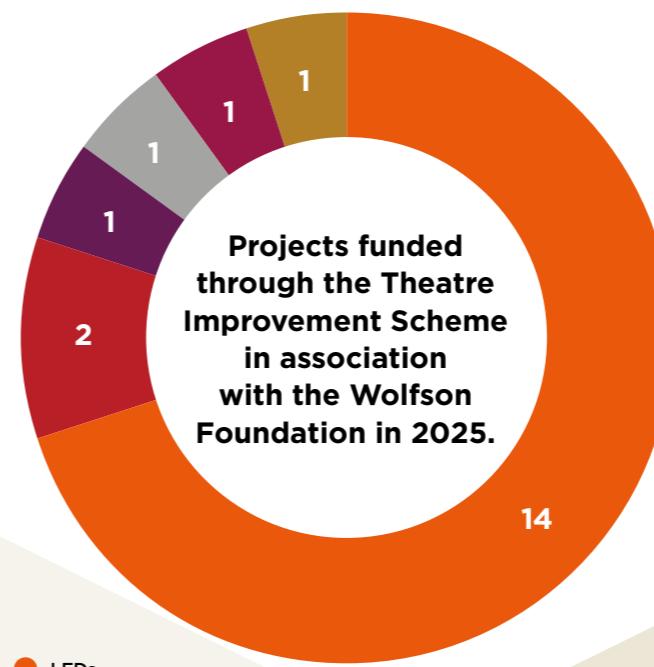
Funded 20 environmental sustainability projects through our Theatre Improvement Scheme in association with the Wolfson Foundation

Supported 32 theatres with vital projects through our Small Grants Programme with The Linbury Trust

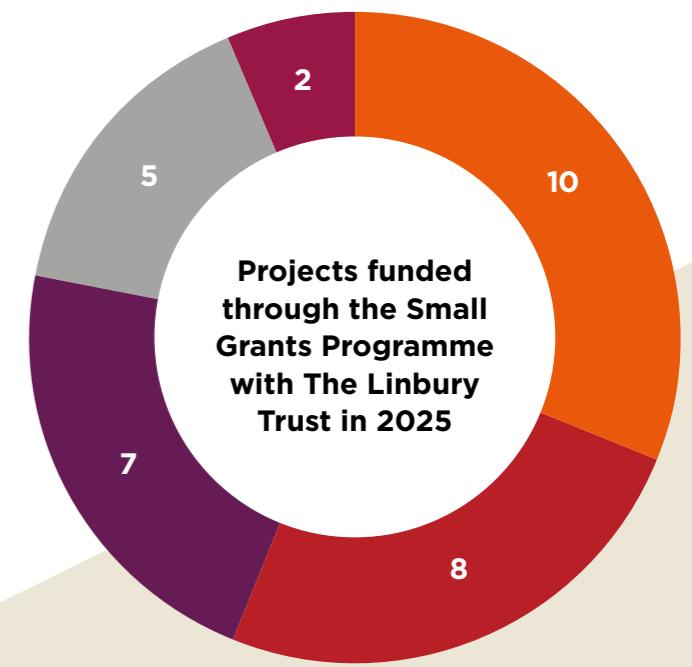
Provided strategic funding to commission expert support for 10 Theatres at Risk through our Resilient Theatres: Resilient Communities Grants Programme

Partnered with Race Furniture on Seating's Second Act to refurbish the seating in one deserving community theatre, the Unity Theatre in Liverpool

Linked up with Southerns Broadstock Interiors to rehome surplus furniture from University of Oxford to Gatehouse Theatre in Stafford



- LEDs
- Roof insulations
- Building Management System
- Air source heat pump
- Insulation and green wall
- Repairs to sustainability features



- Environmental sustainability
- Access and inclusion
- Building improvements
- Repairs and safety
- Digital technology



Courtyard Centre for the Arts, Hereford

We awarded the Courtyard Centre for the Arts a £20,000 grant through the Theatre Improvement Scheme with the Wolfson Foundation towards its project to replace all its dimmer and tungsten lighting with energy-efficient LEDs.

“

Across the year, we are expecting up to 90% reduction in electrical energy usage in these areas, aligning with our environmental goals to move towards Net Zero.

The new lighting rig in the Main House is forecast to save up to 14 tonnes of carbon per year, averaging just 36kgs of carbon use per performance.

Overall, we are estimating £7,500 (10%) savings on our utility bills per year, as well as up to £6,000 per year savings on additional lighting hires no longer required.

**Melanie Denning,
Head of Fundraising, Courtyard**

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Photo:
Theatres Trust

Macrobert Arts Centre, Stirling

A £5,000 grant from our Small Grants Programme with The Linbury Trust funded Macrobert Arts Centre to install screens to provide captioning to enhance the theatre-going experience of the d/Deaf and hearing-impaired community and others who require additional text support.

“

It is estimated that around 35,000 people in Forth Valley are deaf or hearing-impaired.

The installation of the TVs both inside and outside our theatre spaces makes our venue much more inclusive. People from the d/Deaf or hearing-impaired community can come to enjoy captioned performances while also benefitting from seeing pre-show information front and centre without adding any extra barriers such as the need to ask staff for the information, or not being able to see notices obscured by other people.

We are so grateful that this funding from Theatres Trust Small Grants Programme supported by The Linbury Trust will enable us to increase accessibility in our venue, ensuring that diverse audiences can enjoy our offering at Macrobert.

**Lisa Robertson,
Development Manager, Macrobert Arts Centre**

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Arthouse

Playhouse

Toilets

Thank you

Thank you to all Theatres Trust's supporters who make our work possible, in particular our major funders:

Charles Michael Holloway Charitable Trust
Historic England
The Linbury Trust
The Mackintosh Foundation
National Lottery Heritage Fund
Pilgrim Trust
Swire Charitable Trust
The Tolkien Trust
Wolfson Foundation

Thanks to the Theatres Trust Board of Trustees and staff team for their hard work and dedication.

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Mast

Photo: Stuart Martin