



**THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ALBANY THEATRE
AND "EAST WING" COMPLEX**

**CONSULTATION REPORT
WITH RECOMMENDATIONS AND COMMENTS**

SUMMARY DOCUMENT

**ALBANY THEATRE TRUST
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Appendices to this report are provided in a separate document.

- Appendix 1 – Vision, Mission and Objectives
- Appendix 2 – The history of the building and the Albany Theatre Trust
- Appendix 3 - Summary of policy and funding environment
- Appendix 4 – Detail of the On-Line Survey Results
- Appendix 5 - Survey Quotes
- Appendix 6 - List of face-to-face Interviewees
- Appendix 7 - Questionnaire design
- Appendix 8 – Café Questionnaire



Foreword

The Albany Theatre Trust (ATT), after a long struggle, has signed a lease securing the future of The Albany Theatre for the next 50 years. A potted history can be found at Appendix 2.

The lease covers the Albany Theatre building and the Courtyard Area situated between the Theatre and what is referred to as the “East Wing” (on a peppercorn rent), and the East Wing itself, which comprises over 1,000 square metres of the ground floor of the adjacent building at commercial rates.

ATT has plans to develop the East Wing, the Courtyard Area and the theatre building itself. As part of the lease the Landlord has provided almost £1 million pounds in funding but to deliver the plans much more money will be needed.

The Albany – the new title now encompasses the enlarged estate – is an important constituent of the arts scene both for the local community and city-wide. The buildings could be developed in many ways. How they are developed depends on how they will be used. That depends on what people want and need. This project is not about the buildings, it is about people.

The aim of this consultation is to explore those wants and needs so that ATT can be as sure as possible that what it is investing in will be well-used. ATT will only get one development opportunity. ATT is fully aware that the future cannot be predicted and that the outcomes of this consultation will provide information that may well be out of date in five years. Whatever emerges to guide ATT’s planning, ATT will aim to respond in as flexible a way as possible in order not to restrict future changes in use of the spaces that are created, but the commercial imperative remains: how the spaces are developed and used must generate sufficient revenue to sustain the project.

We have the benefit of reference to the Coventry Cultural Strategy 2017-2027, which provides valuable background and contextual information – The Albany does not exist in a vacuum. We also have the strong support of Coventry City Council, without which the lease would not have been possible.

ATT welcomes and encourages contributions and comments from anyone with an interest in the future of The Albany.

David Meredith

Chair, The Albany Theatre Trust

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This Report summarises responses to an initial consultation, responded to by 86 participants, the results of which will inform the Albany Theatre Trust's (ATT) strategic direction for the next five years.
2. The Report summarises the environmental context and discusses funding imperatives and constraints.
3. The Report identifies ten topics/overarching themes/ patterns of response/ preoccupations that are described as emerging themes and recommends their incorporation into the cultural and strategic focus of ATT.
4. The Report makes seven recommendations about the development of the theatre, east wing complex, walkway and outdoor spaces.
5. The Report continues with recommendations for the operational development of ATT, to include a review of the Artistic, Strategic and Operational Plans to incorporate the identified recommendations, operational needs and programming opportunities.
6. A series of further questions arising from the Report is set out. These are the questions ATT has to consider in drawing up the five-year strategy. These are the questions that stakeholders are now invited to consider and respond to (although they are a starting point and not intended to restrict responses in any way).

Appendices to this Report are provided in a separate document.



PURPOSE OF THE CONSULTATION

As explained in the Foreword, having secured a lease for the theatre buildings, the courtyard area and the additional space on the ground floor of the East wing, ATT has a one-off opportunity for development. The lease provides a platform for investment in the delivery of up-to-date facilities and innovative activities for a sustainable mixed economy arts venue.

With the right approach, ATT believes this new venue has the potential to provide a template for future arts and cultural infrastructure, and because of our commitment to volunteers and partnership working, the possibility of creating a new paradigm. ATT has survived and grown over five years with little reliance on public funding. That success has to be maintained and built on to ensure a long-term successful future.

Earlier this year, ATT initiated widespread consultation with arts, community and educational stakeholders in the Coventry City area and beyond. The purpose was to scope the potential demand for mixed-use professional arts, community and commercial spaces in Coventry. The information gathered through this consultation process (set out below) is intended to inform the restoration, development, refurbishment and activities planned for the new Albany. However, whilst the responses we have received are interesting – some of them surprising (in a very nice way!) - we do not believe we have reached all possible constituents, both users and stakeholders, so we are embarking on a second round of consultation.

ATT has been obliged to start work on the new space to meet a requirement of the Landlord to vacate the building foyer (the Landlord plans to build a wall to separate access to the theatre from the rest of the foyer). ATT has endeavoured to do the necessary works in such a way as to maximise the benefit of our spending and minimise restricting future possibilities. The expectation is that the theatre will be accessed from the new space (fronting onto Albany Road) in December 2017. This will give the opportunity for interested parties to get a much better feel for what might be possible, and the chance to see sketches of what could be achieved.

The second consultation will therefore run through to Friday January 19th. Concurrently, ATT will start to draw up a five-year strategy proposal with the aim of completion in February. The work will then begin to secure funding and develop the buildings, and most importantly our relationship with users, partners, stakeholders and constituents for the long-term sustainable future of ATT.

Have we listened to what you told us? Does this report reflect your ideas? Is there more to add? Please tell us what you think.

Thank you for your interest in this project.



PRELIMINARY WORKS

See full report.

PROJECT SCOPE

See full report.

Overview of Research, Methodology and Sample Size for the Consultation

See full report.

Participation in the Consultation

| | |
|---|----|
| Total respondents to the questionnaire | 55 |
| Total face to face interviews conducted | 31 |

TOTAL PARTICIPANTS IN THE CONSULTATION 86

SUMMARY OF CURRENT ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT

See full report.

FUNDING IMPERATIVES AND CONSTRAINTS

See full report.

EMERGING THEMES FROM THE CONSULTATION

A list of topics/overarching themes/patterns of response/ preoccupations, raised in the consultations by most potential stakeholders, is set out below. This list articulates what potential stakeholders generally consider either 'highly desirable', or 'essential', to the development of the Theatre and the East Wing complex. The list of emerging themes (below) is key to the successful operations, programming and fit out of both the East Wing and the Theatre. It is recommended that these themes be incorporated into the cultural and strategic focus of ATT.

Emerging themes

| No | Recommendation |
|----|--|
| 1 | create a place that brings people and ideas together |
| 2 | a safe and reassuring atmosphere, where everyone – regardless of age, social background or access requirements, is inspired, motivated, and challenged to explore, test, create and participate |
| 3 | flexible spaces that can be re-configured to meet multiple and emerging needs |
| 4 | an ongoing commitment to provision of the very best digital infrastructure to ensure capacity to support new and emerging technologies |
| 5 | broaden focus – meet the demand for emerging and hybrid forms that can engage with a broader constituency |
| 6 | provision of a 'cultural café' - a place to meet, conduct business, bump into other cultural practitioners - as well as providing a vibrant destination space for audiences and visitors |
| 7 | new income streams - support for new business models and business approaches through a shared creative space for resident micro, start-up cultural businesses and a space for these to experiment together |
| 8 | partner with cultural, educational and commercial organisations to deliver work with those currently disengaged audiences and communities and to partner on the development and delivery of future strategies |
| 9 | diversity – new digital forms and practices do not struggle with attracting diversity – it is already there – go where the demand and interest is – target diverse communities by partnering and understanding their interests, not by making programming decisions in isolation based on assumptions. |
| 10 | the galvanisation and leveraging of the overwhelming fondness, strong support and interest in both the theatre and the new East Wing emanating from previous students and performers |

BUILDING DEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations – Albany theatre, east wing complex, walkway and outdoor spaces.

ALBANY THEATRE

| No | Recommendation |
|----|--|
| 1 | prioritise the development of the East Wing and walkway to the Theatre before addressing the refurbishment of the auditorium and development of back stage |
| 2 | the refurbishment of the auditorium and the re-development of the rear of the Theatre to be more fully addressed under a separate – more focused - process that incorporates targeted contributions from technical and structural experts. Current and potential hirers should be part of this process |
| 3 | continue with the current operational and artistic focus of the Theatre as is: an asset that attracts income for the broader focus of the Organisation. Any future review of the theatre focus can be considered in line with future discreet consultation for the theatre and auditorium |
| 4 | further develop a current narrative for the Theatre as a heritage asset, community asset and development asset for Coventry |
| 5 | the covered walkway from the East Wing to the Theatre be developed in such a way so as it can also be used as additional seating/flexible outdoor space |
| 6 | black box/auditorium to be incorporated in the future re-furbished back stage area of the Theatre so that height and sound restrictions can be addressed more easily than housing this facility in the East Wing |
| 7 | review of Artistic, Strategic and, Operational Plans and organisational structure of the Theatre with respect to any potential adjustments needed to incorporate the East Wing complex as a partner element in the overarching Trust |

Recommendations – commentary

See full report.

OPERATIONAL DEVELOPMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

East Wing Complex

| No | Recommendation |
|----|--|
| 1 | review of Artistic, Strategic and Operational Plans - to incorporate recommendations, operational needs and programming opportunities identified through research and consultation |
| 2 | identify optimum business process and structure to increase potential to attract arts and philanthropic funding for the East Wing and then seek expert advice to identify the best model to support this. |
| 3 | large open areas that can be utilised for exhibitions/music performances/special events/ gaming hacks /comic-con/ etc |
| 4 | need for flexible dance/rehearsal/screening room |
| 5 | maximum sound insulation throughout the East Wing |
| 6 | shared creative working space |
| 7 | breakout/meeting rooms |
| 8 | café/bar to form part of the programming approach |
| 9 | marketing – ability to utilise young creatives, who occupy the venue, as promoters, able to use networks in a variety of social media channels – will require a social media policy driving a very different marketing approach to the East Wing |

Commentary - See full report.

THE NEXT QUESTIONS

Thank you very much for reading this far. So, what's next? What do we want to know from you? How can you help us finalise the plans for the new space?

Vera Ding has provided commentary on many of the recommendations. What do you think about each of these? We understand that you may need to get into the space and see the drawings to be able to visualise the development ideas, which is why this part of the consultation will run until Friday January 19th.

We are particularly interested in what you think about the identified emerging themes:

1. How do we create a place that brings people and ideas together?
2. How do we create a safe and reassuring atmosphere – how do we cultivate, inspire, create?
3. How do we achieve a broader focus? Vera used this diagram when she presented her report to the ATT Board. The inverted pyramid shows how our strategy should be informed – led even – by the needs of the audience and the community (including our volunteers).



Audience/Community

Artists

Employees

Management/Strategy

4. We have limited resources: how can we engage with a broader constituency effectively and successfully so what we do has the greatest impact? How do we partner with cultural, educational and commercial organisations to develop and deliver future strategies? Vera suggests we target diverse communities by partnering and understanding their interests. How do we achieve that?
5. In her presentation, Vera talks of an emphasis on next practice in arts-led engagement against audience and community need/demand and the need to embed significant research and evaluation frameworks that can quantify and demonstrate our outcomes and impacts against artistic excellence, health, wellbeing, inclusion and engagement. How do we achieve this?

THE ALBANY

6. Vera speaks of the overwhelming fondness for the building from previous students and performers, and about further developing a narrative for the theatre as a heritage asset (and community and development asset) for Coventry. If you read the history of the building (see Appendix Two) it is easy to realise how for many tens of thousands of people this building has played a very important part in their lives because of the experiences they had here. This very important heritage is all about people. How do we best acknowledge that heritage? How do we build a future that, whilst not dependent on the past, recognises, values and learns from it? The main theatre building has long been described as a “hidden architectural gem” but what really sparkles are the memories it holds. How can we create a future that builds on that heritage?
7. As far as the rear of the theatre is concerned, our interpretation of the initial feedback is that we should seek the funds to take it all down and rebuild. The new build should include:
 - on the ground floor – much improved dock, storage and workshop areas to support the stage
 - on the first floor, accessible dressing room and associated facilities to house large groups of performers. These rooms could be used flexibly when the theatre is not in use
 - on the second floor, a large area black box/auditorium that does not face sound restrictions

Have we interpreted what you have told us correctly?

8. One recommendation is that we “continue with the current operational and artistic focus of the Theatre as is: an asset that attracts income for the broader focus of the Organisation”. We have commented on this in the body of the report, but is this the right thing for us to do? Is there an alternative approach?

There are so many questions that are asked and implied in the Report, and so many more we could ask. This consultation is critical to the future direction of ATT. The ideal will be if you not only suggest something in response, but suggest how it can be achieved, and come forward to work with us to achieve it. This is all about you.

Please send your thoughts, comments and ideas to consultation@albanytheatre.co.uk. If you would like to talk to us directly, please let us know. If you would like to donate, or have skills or advice to offer, please don't hang back. If ever you felt moved to support The Albany, now is the time to do it.

Thank you.