



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

**CONSULTATION REPORT  
WITH RECOMMENDATIONS AND COMMENTS**

**ALBANY THEATRE TRUST  
October 2017**

**Author: Vera Ding**

**The Albany Theatre Trust  
55 Butts  
Coventry CV1 3BH  
Registered Charity No. 1151595  
Company No. 7929154**



## Contents

Foreword	3
Executive summary	4
Purpose of the consultation	5
Preliminary works	6
Project scope	6
Summary of current environmental context	8
Funding imperatives and constraints	8
Emerging themes from the consultation	9
Building development recommendations	10
Operational Development Recommendations	16
The Next Questions	22

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 (on page 6), 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 (on page 8).
3. The Report identifies ten topics/overarching themes/ patterns of response/ preoccupations (on page 9) 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 (on page 10).
5. The Report continues, on page 16, 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 (on page 22). 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 Foreward, 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 19<sup>th</sup>. 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

At the commencement of consultation, all the support facilities for the theatre – box office, bar and toilets – operate in and off the main Earlsdon Park foyer. On signing the lease ATT had only four months (from the Landlord agreeing to the plans) to vacate that foyer. This necessitated preliminary works that are not considered in this Report. In presenting their business case to Coventry City Council ATT postulated the inclusion of possible meeting rooms, a studio theatre/black box space, dance studio, rehearsal rooms, refurbishment of the Theatre and a new build of back-stage areas. These are further explored in this Report, where appropriate.

## PROJECT SCOPE

The Brief, by ATT, required that the Report should take into account/address the following:

- an updated “gap analysis” in terms of identified needs not adequately met within existing available venues in the Coventry area
- the exploration and recommendation of venue development options to meet the immediate and/or future needs of potential users and hirers
- a preliminary assessment of the on-going needs of ATT’s own programming potential
- the exploration and recommendation of economically and culturally sustainable options/models, to future-proof the venue for the period of 25+25 years, the period of the lease
- the exploration and recommendation of operational and organisational updates for consideration by ATT that may be required to implement any recommendations and findings in this report

### **Out of scope**

Although this report provides high-level evaluation of potential venue development, it does not include the following:

- discrete business planning for ATT regarding creation/analysis, based on the recommendations provided in this report
- projection of capital costs
- quantification of market demand, based on the recommendations in the Report
- a view or commentary regarding the overarching arts/community/business offer of Coventry



## Overview of Research, Methodology and Sample Size for the Consultation

Research undertaken by Coventry City Council to inform the development of the Coventry Cultural Strategy 2017-2027<sup>1</sup> provides an audit of existing cultural, heritage and public arts assets in the city.

Further desk research, however, failed to locate significant data to reflect any unmet demand for resources across the arts community, or any unmet demand for resources for commercial venues/spaces within the City's infrastructure.

Hence, to fulfil the Brief, it has been necessary to undertake some primary research to identify current unmet venue/space/activity needs that might inform ATT's planned infrastructure and activity development.

In addition to referencing the Cultural Strategy, research has included:

- an on-line questionnaire, targeted at community and cultural organisations, businesses and individuals
- face-to-face consultation with arts, university, community, business and government organisations and their representatives
- data in ATT's 2016 Lease Proposals - Development Plans and Proposal to the Coventry City Council and the 2016 Feasibility Study presented to Coventry City Council as part of the negotiations for securing the lease for the venue

### Participation in the Consultation

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

**TOTAL PARTICIPANTS IN THE CONSULTATION 86**

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www2.warwick.ac.uk/about/cityofculture/culturalstrategy>

## SUMMARY OF CURRENT ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT

- The Coventry Cultural Strategy was developed from research that provides a current audit of the cultural, heritage and public arts assets across the city. The Cultural Strategy also clarifies shared strategies and goals for delivery in Coventry by arts and cultural practitioners and the Council.
- At the time of writing this Report, Coventry has been shortlisted for consideration as the City of Culture host for 2021
- The Arts Council of England announced funding outcomes in July 2017 that deliver a significant uplift to 3 current NPOs in Coventry, as well as new funding for a fourth company. This announcement also includes a number of other funding uplifts that indicate growing support and recognition of Coventry as a place of significant arts and culture.

## FUNDING IMPERATIVES AND CONSTRAINTS

Identified traditional and new funding sources for culture, the arts and associated activities, provide a nexus between what ATT might 'wish' to achieve and what it might be 'possible' to achieve in a constrained fiscal environment.

Therefore, the opportunities, aims and goals of a range of funding bodies, as well as the constraints these bodies place on funding applications, are central to determinations by ATT going forward.

In particular, ATT should examine potential access to capital funding from: Heritage Lottery Fund; Arts Council England, and Philanthropic Funding. Consideration of these opportunities will play an important part in any Recommendations that ATT adopts.

Similarly, consideration of potential capital for building developments and ongoing revenue to be raised through income generating activities in the Theatre and East Wing, will play an important part in any recommendations that ATT adopts going forward.

*ATT comment: the Trust is obliged to ensure that whatever suggestions and proposals are adopted annual revenue exceeds annual costs to ensure long-term sustainability.*

## 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

### 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**

This recommendation is drawn from feedback from funding and development organisations.

#### *CONSULTATION WITH ARTS COUNCIL OF ENGLAND (ACE)*

In meetings between ACE and Trust representatives, it became clear that ATT's provisional approach to development – that funding be accessed to develop both the East Wing and the back of the theatre as single project - would struggle to gain support (from ACE) because of:

- prioritisation by ACE of NPO organisations' submissions
- the lack of the Trust's history of successful venue development beyond basic refurbishment of the Theatre auditorium
- the limited history of Trust programming in line with ACE goals and priorities
- the development of a new ACE infrastructure programme (2018 – 2022) - as yet: unknown: program guidelines; program structure, application dates or quantum of funding available

An alternative approach was tabled and discussed whereby ATT might apply for a significant project grant from ACE (together with other funding sources) to complete the East Wing and commence its program of activities and revenue generation. This would demonstrate ATT's capacity to manage a development process and deliver a programme in line with funding priorities.

#### *CONSULTATION WITH HERITAGE LOTTERY FUND (HLF)*

The refurbishment of the Theatre auditorium is considered by ATT to be a stand-alone development, ripe for investment by the HLF due to its structural and community heritage value. At the time of writing this report, ATT has previously partnered with one Heritage project focused on Coventry and will shortly commence a second.

Importantly, ATT has stated its commitment to building the Theatre's heritage value by developing a large-scale interactive digital project to be presented throughout the venue; a project that captures both the history and contribution of the theatre as a community asset that includes stories of student apprentices and the industries connected to the venue from its time as a training college. This commitment is likely to prove positive in any grant applications for HLF funding.

As funding of up to £2,000,000 can be applied for, through one of four annual funding submission rounds to a local West Midlands HLF Board, the development of the Theatre auditorium could be developed as the second project for ATT, within the overall development of the venue.

## ***COST AND COMPLEXITY OF BACK OF THEATRE DEVELOPMENT***

The proposed development at the rear of the Theatre appears significantly more complex and expensive to accomplish than either the East Wing or the Theatre auditorium.

It is recommended that this infrastructure be developed as the last stage of the overall development project. Factors informing this recommendation include:

- although far from ideal, the current back of stage provision can continue to operate as-is for at least another 3 years
- the development of the back of Theatre provision should be considered in more detail by ATT following a separate, focused consultation process, including advice from technical and structural experts
- having completed the development of both the East Wing and the auditorium, ATT will have a significant history of development and programme implementation, thus encouraging confidence in ATT by potential funders

## **It is therefore recommended that the refurbishment be considered in 4 stages**

- initial development of the East Wing - to enable the re-location of the temporary box office, café/bar, flexible performance space and walkway to the theatre auditorium – this to be completed by 24 November 2017 to meet the requirements of the lease (*ATT comment: this is under way*)
- development of the remaining space in East Wing, together with a fit-out to include a permanent café/bar, box office, shared working space, meeting rooms and a flexible dance/rehearsal/performance/screening space – to be completed by 31 July 2018
- the development of the auditorium through HLF investment – to be completed by July 2019
- the development of the back of the theatre – to be completed by December 2020

*(ATT comment: the Trust has 5 years under the terms of the lease to complete these works, i.e. by 25.5 2022.)*

## **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 of consultation**

The current auditorium and back stage area are not as critical to the overarching development of the Project, as is the re-location of key infrastructure in the East Wing. Nor is there an imperative (as in the East Wing) to commence operations as soon as possible, in order to generate commercial and programme income streams.

(In anticipation - throughout this consultation it has slowly emerged that the collective vision for the East Wing, its focus, priorities and operations, should differ significantly from the operations and opportunities currently provided by the Theatre. Hence, while the Theatre and the East Wing form part of a single development, the discrete potential of each, and where appropriate the nexus between the two, will need further research and consideration. Consequently, these current research recommendations lead naturally to a further recommendation that research should be initiated going forward, to identify fully the needs and opportunities from the Theatre. This includes the back-stage area.)

Consultation for the auditorium and back stage area is therefore recommended as an initial step, with consideration of:

- targeted contributions from technical and structural experts
- consultation with past current and potential hirers, not only to ascertain their needs, but also to ensure they are aware of the type and quality of venue provided
- a focussed review of the commercial, artistic, community and operational approach to the venue, particularly as a heritage site

- 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**

The Theatre is an asset that is generally identified as having a strong profile/constituency/ebullience/focus in and around Coventry. Importantly, too, the Theatre provides a (growing) commercial income stream to support Trust operations. Under these circumstances it is recommended that any change to the focus and activities of the theatre, in the short term, would be, at least, counterproductive.

*(ATT comment: in the immediate future, the trust will largely rely on income generated from the theatre - the Main House - to support long-term artistic and community developments, which will take time to establish, although the new space will make it possible to generate revenue from new activities such as conferences. This is the pragmatic reality for a non-funded arts organisation.)*

- 4 Develop a strong narrative for the nexus between the Theatre (as a heritage, community and development venue for Coventry) and the East Wing**

While attracting a strong audience base as well as volunteers and student participation, the current programming policy in the Theatre is somewhat out of line with the funding priorities of public and other potential arts investors, on an on-going basis.

However, in a weak fiscal environment this mixed-economy income model (Theatre/East Wing nexus) is likely to be perceived by the same investors as imaginative, innovative, stable and effective. Although on going public funding is more likely to be attracted by work in the East Wing, this nexus/model could prove a template that funding bodies will hold up/support/promote/advocate for/highlight, more generally, in the wider arts, social and commercial communities. Current use of the Theatre as an income generating activity works well for both the Theatre and for the development of the East Wing.

It is recommended that an expanded narrative for the Theatre be developed to describe the broad impact of its activities for its constituents and its contribution to ATT's overarching vision.

*(ATT comment – the comment to 3 above refers)*

**5. Enclosed walkway from East Wing to the Theatre that can also be used as additional seating/flexible space**

ATT has identified a clear need to provide an enclosed walkway across the courtyard area between the new entrance to the East Wing and the Theatre foyer. It is noted that by increasing the width of the walkway, there is the opportunity to create a flexible space that can be used for additional seating or as a separate meeting room, and this is a recommendation. There is also the potential to extend this space further through the provision of covered decking in front of the new walkway, thus creating the potential for indoor/outdoor activities in these areas. It is recommended that the provision of these break out spaces be undertaken since they have the potential for one-off hires with a more commercial focus.

**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 more easily addressed than housing this facility in the East Wing.**

Although consultations indicate a strong, unmet demand for an additional black box auditorium, of up to 200 seats, the ceiling height, existing support columns and availability of current space in the East Wing suggest that the optimum delivery of this venue will be as part of the re-development of the back of the Theatre.

It is recommended that this facility be positioned on the top floor of the back-theatre development, to mitigate any issues regarding ceiling height, optimum width and sound insulation. It is recommended that theatre architects be employed to advise this development, together with experienced theatre personnel to advise options for the building conversion. It is also recommended that the issue of 'ease of access' to this additional venue be through an extension to the walkway (already recommended) and that an external lift and/or covered stairs be put in place to ensure comfortable easy access for audiences.

**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**

Any operational improvements in the Theatre, such as the recent introduction of a Spektrix Ticketing System; the introduction of full utilisation of office 365 within an integrated digital operations system, or the introduction of an on-line venue management and programming system should be addressed within an overarching review of ATTs Strategic and Operational Plans.

## 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

### **1. Review of Artistic, Strategic, Operational Plans and Artistic Plans to incorporate recommendations, operational needs and programming opportunities identified through research and consultation**

During these consultations, a number of questions emerged regarding organisation and the operations of the East Wing and the Theatre, in the context of the changing strategic direction and ‘identity’ of ATT.

(It has already been recommended, for example, that the challenge of forming a consistent narrative regarding the ethos, priorities and activities of both the Theatre and the East Wing, should be addressed and developed.)

As well, understandably, ATT's current Strategy does not address potential opportunities arising from the development of the East Wing (the purpose of this consultation and Report)

To address these questions, it is recommended that a review of current strategies: Strategic Plans, Operational Plans, Artistic Plans, together with revision of the Organisational Structure for ATT, be undertaken. These documents will accurately reflect the management and organisation of proposed activities in the East Wing, as well as current activities in the Theatre.

**THEATRE-** The review should incorporate potential adjustments needed to incorporate the East Wing complex as a partner element, while minimising any impact on the operational effectiveness of existing operations.

**EAST WING -** Given the need to secure new public funding streams, it is recommended that the East Wing be commercially/strategically 'segmented' from the Theatre. If the East Wing remains currently constituted, it might be ineligible to apply for public funding to support its activities.

It is also recommended, that a new Artistic Vision be developed with an expanded vision and rationale to reflect the wider interests of multi-responsive stakeholders. It is recommended that the Artistic Vision, at least in part, should be responsive current arts investors' goals and priorities.

*(ATT comment: see Appendix 1 – Vision, Mission and Objectives)*

## **2. Incorporation of separate cost centre for the East Wing to operate as a stand-alone business unit, together with a distinct narrative designed to attract funding from arts and cultural investors**

A stand-alone business unit is a spin-off company attached to a parent company. A stand-alone business unit, may, for example, have higher a profit potential if incorporated as an independent entity; in which case, it would be judicious for a company to employ this model.

It is recommended that ATT identify the optimum business process to increase the potential to attract arts and philanthropic funding for the East Wing and then seek expert advice to identify the best model to support this. Further advice will be needed (e.g. from the Coventry Enterprise Hub) with respect to best practice, and implementation of an appropriate legal and operational model to meet ATT's needs.

### **3. Large open areas that can be utilised for exhibitions/music performances/ special events/ gaming hacks /comic-con/ etc**

There are a number of identified medium and small-scale events/activities in the Coventry area that occur annually, or on a flexible basis, and that struggle to find a venue that can be hired as cost effective (up to 600, with facilities, flexibility and services to support).

In addition, there are many visual artists and arts organisations (and musicians, and performers and gamers etc) that struggle to find a space where work can be exhibited or presented imaginatively in a venue that has the resources and flexibility to present work for maximum impact.

The open areas in the East Wing offer optimum user experience for patrons of the Theatre as audience - prior to show, at interval and post-performance. At the same time, they also have enormous potential, including the scale and capacity to provide a venue for multiple events, an abundance of current and unmet demands - exhibitions, performances, etc - that were raised by respondents in the consultations.

It is recommended that multi-flexible spaces, designed in partnership with a high-speed digital provider, should be incorporated into the design of the East Wing. These spaces will give ATT greater capacity to navigate a rapidly changing arts environment, while providing discrete experiences, some of which are not available elsewhere.

### **4. Need for flexible dance studio, performance venue, screening and multimedia room**

Although the provision of a large black box flexible performance space was cited by multiple respondents as a piece of highly desirable infrastructure, as noted earlier, the location of this facility would be better placed at the rear of the Theatre.

It is important, to note, however, that the need for a black box should remain a primary consideration for development by ATT.

Within the East Wing there is the potential to create a smaller multi-purpose performance space (seating up to 80) which can operate as a screening room, and, with suitable flooring and mirrors hidden behind tabs when not required, can also double as a large dance studio. It is recommended that this be incorporated into East Wing to accommodate identified unmet and current demand.

It is probable that this performance space/dance studio will attract multiple hirers, as well as provide a space for the development and presentation of ATT's own programme of activities. Importantly, consideration of the logistics required to manage this space should be addressed by ATT, when considering details of the design.

*(ATT comment: in preparing our business case for Coventry City Council we uncovered significant demand for dance facilities. This demand has not been repeated so far in the consultation. The Trust is eager to explore this discrepancy.)*

## **5. Need for maximum sound insulation**

This was flagged as a critical requirement by multiple respondents and it is recommended that the installation of best-practice sound insulation should be seen as a priority in the East Wing.

To deliver a range of diverse spaces for use by multiple hirers who sometimes operate concurrently; together with the use (sometimes simultaneously) of a single space occupied by up to 620 audience, means that optimum sound isolation throughout the East Wing is a matter of priority.

## **6. Shared creative working space**

Co-working, or working in a shared creative space, is an activity and style of work that offers independent work activity in a communal environment. Unlike a typical office environment, it is unusual for co-workers to be employed by a single organization. Typically, this model is attractive to work-at-home artists, independent contractors and those who travel frequently, and so end up working in relative isolation.

A significant unmet opportunity for the East Wing is the incorporation of a Shared Creative Working Space. Not only would the development of this resource meet the demands outlined by some respondents (and, incidentally it is a priority articulated in the goals of potential funders) it would also create the capacity to attract a diversity of emerging artists to the venue. Activation of a co-working space during the day, would allow interaction and access, both to, and by, emerging creative and cultural practitioners and others. It would significantly promote the venue, while underlining its branding and increasing footfall to the venue and café.

# THE ALBANY

Importantly, a Shared Creative Working Space will also provide a significant stable income stream through fees charged to the co-workers.

Artists who work independently, frequently value the synergy gained from interacting and working with others.

Summary - this space offers:

- a consistent income stream
- venue activation during the day
- increased footfall from visitors to the space for meetings, events etc
- access to practitioners and emerging hybrid forms
- rental of other spaces in the venue for presentation of work
- potential partnerships and program development for innovative delivery of ATT's Artistic Vision.

It is recommended that consideration of the organisation, management, fit out and promotion of this space, be contingent on a) review of the Artistic, Strategic, Operational and Artistic plans; and b) identification and contracting of future hirers and program partners (e.g. universities and commercial etc.)

## **7. Breakout/meeting rooms**

A shortfall of medium sized, affordable meeting/breakout/rehearsal rooms, was flagged by respondents through the consultation. It is recommended that provision of such rooms be incorporated in the design of the East Wing as a priority. Shared creative spaces provide a highly significant opportunity to generate income streams, as well as opportunities to actively engage and partner with new and emerging practitioners.

It is recommended, too, that these spaces offer hirers maximum flexibility, particularly in terms of size. For example, three rooms (each divided with a temporary wall that can be removed) would offer provision of a single larger space, one medium and one smaller space, or three smaller spaces. Each configuration will 'fit' with the requirements of a range of potential hirers.

It is noted that these spaces could also be rented as occasional dance studios or rehearsal rooms.

## 8. Café/Bar

Many respondents identified the development of the Café/Bar as hypercritical to the success of the venue. The activities of the Café and Bar will clearly have a straightforward relationship to activities in the Theatre. At other times, however, the activities of the Café/Bar are likely to be so intertwined with the programming and activities in the East Wing, that ATT would do well to consider the development of the Café/Bar space as a project/venue in its own right.

An earlier survey conducted by ATT (see Appendix 8 – Café Questionnaire) indicated a strong desire for provision of good coffee, high quality home-made produce including high quality light lunches, for consumption both on and off the premises.

As a break- out space/working area/meeting space/ alternative venue, the Café/Bar will have the capacity to deliver a significant income stream that is independent of catering provision.

## 9. **Marketing – capacity to engage young creatives who occupy the venue, as promoters able to use networks in a variety of social media channels – this will require a social media policy driving an additional discrete marketing approach in the East Wing**

Social Media Marketing is a process of gaining traffic or attention through social media sites on the internet.

Social Media is a catch-all term for sites that may provide radically different approaches and social agendas. For example, Twitter is a site designed to allow people to share short messages or “updates”; while Facebook is a full-blown social networking site that allows sharing, photos, joining events and a variety of other activities.

One discrete constituency that will inhabit the shared creative spaces in the East Wing, and their interest in digital narratives, will offer the East Wing a significant opportunity to signpost and attract patrons to activities through Social Media marketing.

It is recommended that ATT capture this opportunity, leverage it and measure its ongoing impact. At the same time, ATT will need to put in place rules/guidelines for marketers, to ensure positive marketing activity in support of ATT’s brand.

It is recommended, that as a priority the development of a social media marketing policy is captured within the Operational Plan, to be part of the remit of ATT’s Sales and Marketing Manager.

## 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 19<sup>th</sup>.

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](mailto: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.