

Basildon Towngate Theatre

A Study by

**Tim Ronalds Architects
& David Pratley Associates**

of the facilities and operation of the Towngate Theatre
in the context of the Masterplan Proposals for
Basildon Town Centre by Barratt Homes

Stage 1 Report

October 2011

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1. The Brief for the Study
2. David Pratley Associates Stage 1 Report on the programme, operation and facilities of the Towngate Theatre
3. Tim Ronalds Architects Stage 1 Report on options for the physical development of the Theatre
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The Brief for the Study

The aim of this work is

- to review the facilities and operation of the Towngate Theatre within the cultural and leisure context of the area, and
- to consider options and make initial recommendations for the programme, financial operation and management of the theatre, and for physical development of the facility as part of the overall proposals for the development of Basildon Town Centre.

The work to be undertaken by Tim Ronalds Architects and David Pratley Associates.

Tim Ronalds Architects are specialist arts architects - responsible for some of the UK's most successful theatre projects such as Hackney Empire.

David Pratley Associates are Arts Consultants who specialise in arts development studies and business plans, and are one of the three leading UK firms in this field.

The work we did in 2007 identified that the stage and backstage areas of the Towngate Theatre were well equipped and functional but that the auditorium and front of house areas were limited by their form, capacity, quality and design. Proposals that retained the stage and backstage and built a new auditorium and a more expansive front of house which possibly incorporate library, gallery and community spaces may provide a cost effective solution.

A key initial architectural step is to establish that the larger development strategy for the area provides sufficient space for such a development.

The essential issues for the business plan will be what market exists for the current theatre or its alternatives, what programme models would be viable, what production, presentation and management structures would be required to support these, what complementary functions would be appropriate and at what scale, who would run it and how, and what the financial projections would look like over a period of years.

The work is proposed in two stages:

- Stage 1 (May/ July 2011): an initial study of the audiences, programmes, economics, competition and concepts to consider options and place the project concept in the right 'ball park' in terms of scale, type, location of the facility required
- Stage 2 (Aug - Sept 2011) which develops a business plan, building plans, capital and revenue costs and management models for the Council to consider as a basis for a development brief and plan.

Study Brief

David Pratley Associates work comprises:

Stage 1:

1. Strategic planning: context, competition, concept, scale, stakeholders, and potential uses
2. Market research, analysis of current programme and audiences, and identification of extent and habits of theatre and arts attenders within a 30 minute drivetime
3. Retail, bars and catering uses
4. Initial programme study (scope to be identified when preferred options for use have emerged)
5. Basic business model

Stage 2:

6. Detailed programme model
7. Detailed I&E projections
8. Governance options
9. Management arrangements

Tim Ronalds Architects work will comprise:

Stage 1:

1. Analysis of existing site and building, in context of the overall development plans
2. Outline of a range of alternative concepts for the theatre, with and without retention of whole or part of the existing building - and with different capacities and range of performance types
3. Outline of alternative concepts for the foyer areas, incorporating options for a library, gallery and other community spaces

Stage 2:

4. Development of preferred option into a concept design for the theatre and arts complex, with outline plans, sections, indicative elevations and costs.
5. Outline design information for initial cost estimates of options

The work will be coordinated with David Pratley Associates work on the business plan and Davis Langdon have the necessary specialist theatre expertise to provide cost estimates.

David Pratley Associates Stage 1 Report



David Pratley Associates

A New Cultural Centre for Basildon

Proposals to adapt the
form and function of The Towngate Theatre
as part of the regeneration of
the Town Centre

Draft v1
July 2011



Section 1

Executive summary

- 1.0 The purpose of this report is to provide Barratt Homes and Basildon Council with a preliminary view on what it should aim to do with the Towngate Theatre within its planned regeneration of the town centre and what implications this would have for spatial arrangements of key civic areas.
- 1.1 Our work has been based on a desk review of such documentation as we have ourselves found or been directed to (which has provided useful contextual information) and a series of discussions with people¹ who have offered valuable views on the challenges of this assignment. Unusually we have not been led to or encountered anyone with passionate views about what should be done to improve cultural provision in Basildon in general or the Towngate in particular. We cannot help but feel that there are many people in Basildon itself who have not been identified to us and who may have powerful contributions still to make to our emerging proposals. Hopefully there is time to engage with some of those voices in Phase 2 on the basis of the scheme proposed in this report.
- 1.2 We have also not received the performance data on the Towngate Theatre that we requested at the inception of our work. In its place we have had to place reliance on the manipulation of other data in order to build up a picture of current theatre-going in south Essex. The quality of this other data is sufficiently good for us to place reasonable reliance on the conclusions to which it leads us and these conclusions have been confirmed by our interview programme.
- 1.3 The construction of the Towngate in 1988/89 resulted in a curious and compromised form which is neither a lyric theatre (with an auditorium capable of seating audiences of sufficient size to attract professional musical productions) nor a drama house (having a stagehouse much larger and technically more

¹ A list of those whom we have met to discuss our brief is set out in Annex 1.



elaborate than would be required for contemporary theatre production). Since it opened in 1989 it has had a chequered history and for a decade (1996-2006) it was dark. Compared with any comparable theatre we have examined it has lower utilisation and a lower number of visitors. It faces stiff competition in attracting established local theatergoers who in the ten years the theatre was dark have redirected their theatergoing habit to London and Southend; and it will likely face growing competition from Brentwood and Harlow. At the moment, it offers little by way of an arts development programme that is likely to generate new audiences.

- 1.4 Positively, national and county research shows that there is a vibrant and active arts community in Essex and significant support for the arts from a local audience. In the last year surveyed over 1.8m people in Essex were attracted to around 16,000 arts performances and events. This audience has grown since 2004/5.
- 1.5 There is a significant audience for theatre living in Basildon District. Nearly 32% of respondents of those recently surveyed locally indicated that they visited theatres and performing arts venues every two months or more. But this audience is going elsewhere, primarily to theatres in London but also to theatres in Southend. In Section 4 we look at the arts attendance habits of households from within a 30 minute drivetime of Basildon and track their actual spending at London venues across 2009/10. This audience bought 490,000 tickets and spent £8.8m in the capital. This is Basildon theatre's 'lost audience' and, if the Towngate Theatre was to attract even 5% of this business, it could boost its box office income by £440,000. Whatever the prospects for its long term redevelopment, the lack of attendance at the Towngate Theatre by residents suggests that more needs to be done as a matter of urgency to address both the theatre's artistic programme and marketing.
- 1.6 It has been suggested to us that the Towngate's fortunes could be turned around if the auditorium were expanded to its original designed size (ie around 1,000 seats) so that it could accommodate more paying customers and better attract (and better defray the higher costs of) top class shows. We do not believe that this offers a credible solution. The Towngate's competitors in Southend are in too dominant a market position and will see off any challenge in programming



from a larger Towngate Theatre. The range of work going into the Cliffs Pavilion and the dominant position now occupied by HQ Theatres in running both Southend theatres by virtue of its ability to offer dates to producers across the whole of its national chain, means that it would be very difficult, if not impossible, for Basildon to compete head on for the kind of shows that go to The Cliffs Pavilion, particularly for musicals, opera, ballet, and rock and pop. Even at its present size, Basildon would find that it was prevented from presenting certain shows due to the barring clause in many touring contracts; and, even without a barring clause, producers would feel that the venue was too close to Southend to risk presenting the same work in both towns. Even if Basildon were able to compete on programme – which we doubt - Basildon would require significant marketing resources for it to succeed in attracting the Southend Theatres' audience. We do not believe, therefore, that this offers a credible option for Basildon Theatre.

- 1.7 The absence for ten years of a theatrical entertainments programme in Basildon, the legacy this has left in diminished audiences and the years in which there has been no local arts development programme lead many with whom we have spoken to believe that Basildon needs a long term programme of cultural animation which enables children and young people, particularly, to raise participation levels in the arts, extend the ambitions of their own work, and develop a curiosity and appetite to see the work of others. Without this no presenting venue (of whatever scale) is likely to succeed. We believe that the key to unlocking the door to the next generation of “theatre” in Basildon is the re-engagement with a much more ambitious arts development programme.
- 1.8 In the timescale envisaged for the regeneration of the town centre we believe that Basildon needs a participatory cultural centre rather than a theatre modelled on the presentation of product to large scale audiences. The latter model has and is likely to continue to fail. Only the former model offers the potential for artistic and financial success, the growth of audiences and participants for the arts locally, and the outcomes sought by regeneration.
- 1.9 In Section 5 we suggest the characteristics of such a centre and look at some model exemplars not far from Basildon itself. We show how such a centre could be built on the site of the present Theatre and around the existing theatre



stagehouse. We look at how such a centre could help animate St Martin's Square as a critical part of extending the use of the town centre and re-invigorating its evening and holiday economy.

- 1.10 The development of such a centre requires much to happen in the intervening years before capital funds come on stream and design and construction can be contemplated. Critically it needs a qualified creative producer and arts team to create a programme of arts animation working in the Theatre, St Martin's Square and the town centre as found now, and testing and developing ideas which can be given spatial and built form in ten years time. The vehicle for delivering this would be innovative and, potentially, of national interest. It might take the form of a partnership between Barratt Homes and the local Councils. An FE/HE partner would add real value. If the partners' intention is serious, the quality of what it will offer high, and the plan capable of delivery then Arts Council England could also, we believe, be persuaded into partnership. After years of no institutional and financial relationship with ACE, that partnership would be a significant prize.
- 1.11 The Council has been anxious that we identify a potential operator for any new venture we may propose, having seen from the development of its new leisure centre the benefits of partnership with an operator in the design and build. For reasons that will become evident in section 3, we do not see any present scope for attracting a reputable commercial theatre management company. There are really only two such companies at this time. HQ Theatres is sitting on Basildon's doorstep but is quite content with its present theatres in Southend. ATG would be very unlikely to step into HQ's shadow.²
- 1.12 It would be more likely in this day and age for the Council to bring into being an independent charitable trust to operate a theatre or cultural centre. This has been seen to create many operational advantages and carries potential fiscal advantage when compared with direct local Council operation. Such a trust, however, will almost certainly require continuing financial support from the Council (as indeed would a commercial operator). It may be that the special purpose vehicle we propose to run an arts animation programme that would lead

² Where it has done so in Aylesbury it has found the management of a very fine new theatre built and owned by the local Council to be exceedingly difficult in the shadow of the already established Swan at Wycombe, managed by HQ.



to the reconfiguration of the Towngate and its exterior spaces could become the operating vehicle for the new cultural centre.



Section 2

The Towngate Theatre

The theatre's facilities

- 2.0 The present theatre was designed by RHWL and opened in 1989, replacing an older theatre on an adjacent site. We are informed that at some point in the design/construction project the auditorium was reduced in scale from some 1,000 seats to 546 (we infer that this was done to save costs). This results in a curious theatre form in which the stage area is vastly greater than one would anticipate for a middle-scale venue.

Main auditorium: seating 546 (standing 775).

Studio theatre (Mirren Theatre): seating 88 (standing 250).

Two large bars and two foyers.

Catering.

Space for displaying the Basildon Arts Trust's collection on the walls of the upper foyer

The Theatre has always been run by Basildon Council, though we understand that it has tried to divest itself of the theatre on at least two occasions. After six years in which the Theatre was managed in succession by two significant arts administrators, it closed for a decade between 1996-2006.

The theatre's programme³

- 2.1 There are three parts to the Towngate Theatre's programme: professional touring shows, a wide range of community productions and events, and a pantomime which is produced in-house. The professional shows are usually for one night, and include comedy, music, family events and celebrity nights, for example an evening with Peter Aliss.

³ This section has been written with the benefit of a half day interview with the Theatre Manager. At the time of writing this report, none of the data requested at the inception of this assignment had been received.



- 2.2 Last year (2010/11) the theatre presented a total of 33 events to 10,615 people, averaging 59% attendance. Only 5 of these events sold over 500 seats and a further 8 events sold between 400 - 500 tickets, with the most popular presentations being *Strictly Come Dancing*, psychic mediums *Tony Stockwell* and *Derek Acorah*, musician *Billy Ocean*, and *The Stylistics*. Other successful presentations included Rory Bremner, Chris and Pui's children show, Des O'Conner and Julian Clary. In the last 3 months (April – June 2011) the theatre has presented a further six professional events to 2,339 people, averaging 61%. Ticket sales are already strong for return visits by groups such as The Stylistics, suggesting that The Towngate is beginning to build an audience for specific genres.
- 2.3 In the last few years the theatre had tried to introduce a drama programme, including presenting a production of *Othello* (October 2009) by the middle scale touring company, Icarus, and *A Picture of Dorian Gray*, but the theatre has struggled to sell sufficient tickets. *A Picture of Dorian Gray* had to be moved into the Mirren Studio because the audience was too small for the main house.
- 2.4 The community programme included 79 events across the main theatre and the Mirren Studio. The community programme is made up of regular bookings by the main local amateur dramatic companies, such as the Thalian Theatre Group and the Basildon Players, together with a large number of dance and drama schools. It is not possible to analyse the attendance figures for these events because many of the hirers sell their own tickets direct; but the theatre management estimates that this element of their programme must attract around 90,000 people, or 70% of their annual audience.
- 2.5 The annual pantomime is The Towngate's main event. Last year the theatre scheduled 55 performances of *Aladdin* which was enjoyed by 27,000 people, averaging 90% of capacity across the run. Unlike many presenting theatres which 'buy in' their pantos, Basildon has maintained that the only way to guarantee a quality show is to develop it in-house and the Council commissions actor/director Simon Fielding to write and produce it each year.. The previous production of *Jack and the Beanstalk* was seen by around 25,000 people and this was a 9% increase on the 2008 pantomime. Though the theatre lost money on



its earlier pantomimes, the production now provides around 40% of The Towngate's annual income.

2.6 Attendances at The Towngate can therefore be summarised as follows:

Professional touring shows	11,000
Pantomime	27,000
Community (estimate)	90,000
Approximate total	128,000

2.7 The number of events across both theatres (90 – 100 a year) is low and the theatre is, by any standard, under-utilised. The Harlow Playhouse, by contrast, presented 203 performances last year, while the Hawth in Crawley presented 350 performances across two auditoria.⁴

2.8 The present theatre management has found it hard to increase the number of professional shows at The Towngate for two reasons. The growing interest from the community sector has meant that there is significant demand for space at certain times of the year, particularly from local dance and drama schools. This has meant that, on many occasions, the theatre is unable to provide dates for professional tours seeking late availability.⁵ Secondly the theatre has found it hard to develop strong relationships with key promoters and companies touring to middle scale venues, which has meant that it is taking time to build audiences for particular genres. We are surprised that there are not more opportunities to develop the family audience, for example, by attracting regular visits by some of the excellent companies which tour the middle scale circuit⁶. The Towngate is planning to introduce a regular comedy club in the Mirren Studio, which may be a better space in which to develop this element of the theatre's programme.

⁴ The Mansfield Palace is a council owned theatre which is a similar size to The Towngate, seating 534 people. Last year it presented 250 performances and the total audience was 163,000. The Mansfield Palace receives £466,000 from its local council.

⁵ The fact that promoters are seeking late availability is a mark of where the Theatre stands in promoters' rankings – it is filling dates between others rather than forming one of the key venues that gets first call on available dates)

⁶ An example of this would be the current tour of *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* which is playing in Dartford, Derby, Oxford and Hull amongst other dates this summer



- 2.9 We are concerned that there is no marketing strategy for the theatre and that the marketing budget is too low.⁷ There is no-one on the theatre staff with a responsibility for marketing, and the theatre is struggling to extract marketing information from the current box office system.⁸ It would be helpful if The Towngate could ensure that all community productions sold their tickets through the theatre box office since the current arrangements mean that it is impossible for the theatre to capture data on and subsequently build a relationship with the largest section of its audience.
- 2.10 The Towngate is also finding it hard to generate income from other sources. The Council is using theatre spaces such as the Olivier Room for offices, and there is nobody on the staff with responsibility for promoting the venue for conferences, for meetings or for external events, such as trade shows. The theatre management believes that the market for trade fairs and conferences could be expanded, but this development would require investment in staff and promotional activity.
- 2.11 Given the fractured history of the Theatre and its difficulty, since re-opening, of finding suitable professional shows and audiences other than for community productions, the task of looking at its remodeling or replacement is not a straightforward one.

⁷ The marketing budget for all shows except the pantomime is £21K. £14K of this budget is spent on the design and print of the theatre's brochure, leaving only £7K to develop the theatre's audience.

⁸ The Towngate is currently using a box office system called Theatreflex.

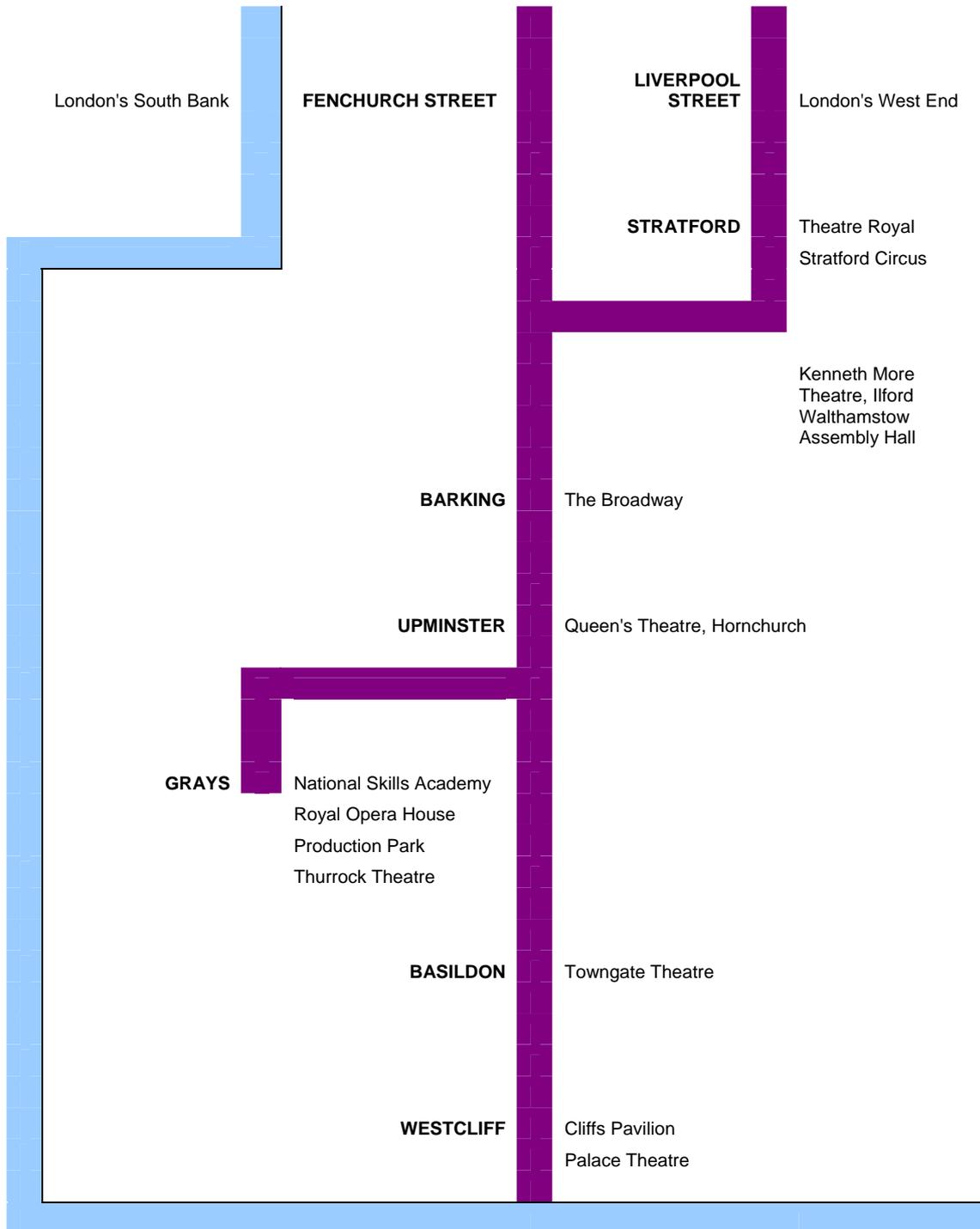


Section 3

Planning context

3.0 Capital provision in the arts is rarely the product of a spatial plan for a region or sub-region but rather the outcome of individual decisions made over the years by a combination of private enthusiasts, voluntary organisations and local authorities. In this respect South Essex is not untypical of other parts of the country. At different times EEDA (the East of England Development Agency) and the former Eastern Arts Board (EAB) invested in Colchester and Southend as growth points for theatre and the contemporary visual arts. Thames Gateway's Development Strategy designated Southend as the cultural and learning hub of South Essex and its summer arts festival just concluded reflects its ambition of fulfilling that designation. The Royal Opera House's decision to relocate its production facilities to Thurrock and the subsequent decision to build a new National Skills Academy for theatre crafts on the same campus, though facilitated by the Thurrock Development Corporation, were third sector decisions driven initially by the need for ROH to relocate from premises on what is now the Olympic Park. But the planning and regeneration vehicles that brought all this into being have been (or are scheduled soon to be) abolished. To this extent Basildon is neither shaped nor constrained by any cultural masterplan of continuing currency.

3.1 The railway route which we have used to travel to interviews turns out to provide the most helpful map of existing and planned provision of theatre, and the movement of audiences. At one end of the line sits London acting as a powerful magnet to people living in South Essex predisposed to attend theatre and visit art galleries and museums (up to 30% of Basildon residents are drawn to London events). At the other end of the line sits Southend acting as magnet for theatergoers (6% of the Cliffs Pavilion audience comes from Basildon, and Southend generally draws 21% of Basildon's cultural migrants).





- 3.2 Travelling on this same mainline route there are two important theatres on the Essex borders:
- The Broadway at Barking, a 340 seat theatre converted from the former Town Hall Assembly Room with basement dance and drama studios shared with the Arts Department of Barking & Dagenham College. We look in more detail at the model of The Broadway at 5.8 below; and
 - the Queen's Theatre, Hornchurch, a 500 seat professional producing theatre built by the London Borough of Havering and operated by an independent charitable trust. The Queen's claims today to be the only producing house in the country still with its own resident company of actor-musicians.
- 3.3 Branching off towards the Thames Estuary at Grays/Thurrock are two cultural production and training centres mentioned earlier and now under construction: the Royal Opera House's new High House Production Park (where all sets and costumes for ROH productions will be made), and the National Skills Academy. Whilst the production work at High House will be focused on ROH's own theatres in Covent Garden and the National Skills Academy has a national remit facilitated by associate colleges outside London, both organisations have interests that are likely to touch on Basildon. With the abolition of Creative Partnerships (the Arts Council and Department for Education programme for whole schools improvement through creative activity), ROH will become the "bridge organisation" for creative interventions in school by professional artists in an area of South East England that covers the whole of Essex. It has already created an active community programme and commissions for new work in south Essex. NCA may have a number of needs that could be met by theatre in Basildon and a number of assets that it could bring to bear.
- 3.4 At Thurrock can also be found from earlier generations of development the small Thurrock Theatre and, at Grays, the art deco State Cinema for which development proposals for mixed cultural use have recently been made.
- 3.5 As we have said earlier the existence of these theatres or production centres has come about through a series of local civic, third sector and voluntary initiatives. Between the theatres there is little movement in product (ie what they show on



stage). Other than the enormous pull on audiences into central London and the smaller contrary pull outwards to Southend from south Essex, local audiences along this commuter rail line don't tend to migrate *between* these venues. To the extent that they do, it is almost always an outer migration – central London residents going out to Newham to see the very distinctive programme of the Theatre Royal, Stratford East; and some Newham residents being attracted to the new offering at The Broadway, Barking.

Basildon's competition

The Cliffs Pavilion and the Palace Theatre, Southend

- 3.6 The two theatres in Southend⁹ have for some time been run by HQ Theatres, the second largest commercial theatre management company in the country. HQ also manage the Wyvern in Swindon, the Wycombe Swan, the Beck Theatre in Hayes, the Orchard in Dartford, the White Rock in Hastings, the Watford Colosseum and the new music venue in Guildford, G Live, which will open later this year. HQ Theatres have recently introduced centralised programming for all their venues which is intended to increase their negotiating strength in attracting the major shows looking to tour to large and middle scale theatres. Programming for all HQ Theatres is now controlled by Ellen McPhillips, General Manager of Southend Theatres, which means that (at least in the short term) all the main touring shows on offer to this scale of theatre can be expected to go to Southend!¹⁰
- 3.7 The Southend Theatres present over 400 performances a year, including West End musicals, ballet, opera, comedy, drama, rock and pop, orchestral music, family and children's shows, and an annual pantomime. The programme is made up of 60% professional and 40% community shows and the two theatres are currently attracting around 370,000 people every year. The Cliffs Pavilion also provides a range of conference and entertaining spaces¹¹, and the management has proved adept at making the most of their adaptable venue - for example in August the main auditorium is used for indoor roller disco sessions! The Palace

⁹ The Cliffs Pavilion has 1,657 seats (2,250 standing). The Palace Theatre has 603 seats in its main house and 100 seats in the studio theatre (Dixon Theatre)

¹⁰ The current season includes Buddy, Joseph, Legally Blonde, All the Fun of the Fair with David Essex, Midnight Tango, Lee Evans, Mark Watson, Roger Daltrey, Madame Butterfly, Jools Holland, Lord of the Dance, and the National Theatre tour of The Pitmen Painters.

¹¹ There are four rooms which can be used for meetings or conferences, accommodating between 40 – 200 people.



Theatre is the home of their flourishing youth theatre company, and this summer over 70 young people will be involved in a production of *High School Musical*.

What does this competition mean?

3.8 Southend is less than 30 minutes from Basildon, so these two theatres present strong competition for product and for audiences. The range of work going into the Cliffs Pavilion means that it would be very difficult for Basildon to compete head on, particularly for musicals, opera, ballet, and rock and pop. The size of the Cliffs Pavilion, together with the opportunity to tour the same show into other HQ Theatres, means that the Southend offer is very attractive to producers and promoters. A larger theatre in Basildon would also find that it was prevented from presenting certain shows due to the barring clause in many touring contracts; even without a barring clause, producers would feel that the venue was too close to Southend to risk presenting the same work in both towns. There is also a danger that producers will decide not to bring shows to Basildon because of the town's proximity to London, particularly if they are hoping for a West End run. The Cliffs Pavilion also has a formidable marketing operation and, even if Basildon were able to compete on programme – which we doubt - Basildon would require significant marketing resources for it to succeed in attracting the Southend Theatres' audience. As we have noted earlier, over the last few years around 6% of the audience at the Cliffs Pavilion and the Palace has come from Basildon postcodes, representing 21,000 people. Research undertaken for Basildon Council by WYG suggests that this is predominantly an older audience (55+).

Further competitors – Brentwood and Harlow

3.9 A major competitor for the Cliffs Pavilion is the Brentwood Leisure Centre. Brentwood presents around 120 events a year in their 2,000 seater hall, ranging from Dionne Warwick, McFly, Cliff Richard and Michael Ball to the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. A recent tour by the popular dance group Diversity went to the Brentwood Centre as opposed to the Cliffs Pavilion because it was a larger venue. The proximity of Brentwood Leisure Centre means that it would be difficult for Basildon to attract the major large scale music tours.

3.10 Harlow Council has recently revealed outline plans for a new 1,500 seat theatre costing around £35m. The auditorium would accommodate up to 1,800 people



for rock and pop by removing a certain number of seats. The outline programme would include week long runs of West End musicals, as well as tribute bands, comedy, drama, opera, ballet, classical music and an annual pantomime. There is also a plan for a flexible 300 seat studio theatre which would be fully equipped for film and for digital work. The studio theatre will be used by community organisations, by young emerging artists and by small scale touring companies. It is also expected that the new theatre will house rehearsal rooms for local companies in addition to two dance studios. Harlow's aim is to attract at least 350,000 people a year.

- 3.11 Whilst a new theatre may not appear to be an immediate threat to a redeveloped theatre in Basildon, by the date at which Basildon may remodel the Towngate the new Harlow Theatre could easily make inroads into Basildon's potential theatre audience. Whilst Basildon is outside the 40 minute catchment area of the new theatre, there could be an impact upon the shared audience, for example people living in and around Brentwood and Chelmsford.



Section 4 Market appraisal

The arts in Essex

4.0 In 2010 Essex County Council undertook a survey of cultural organisations to understand more about the way that the arts contribute to the local economy across the county. The survey prompted responses from 315 organisations including theatres, galleries, festivals and community groups. The Council has recently produced a report of the findings from this research, *Creative Consequences*. The report notes that most of the county's arts organisations are concentrated, as to be expected, in the main towns of Colchester (78), Southend (48), Chelmsford (42) and Rochford. Clusters of activity can also be found in Epping, Brentwood, Braintree, Harlow, Maldon, Clacton and Saffron Walden.

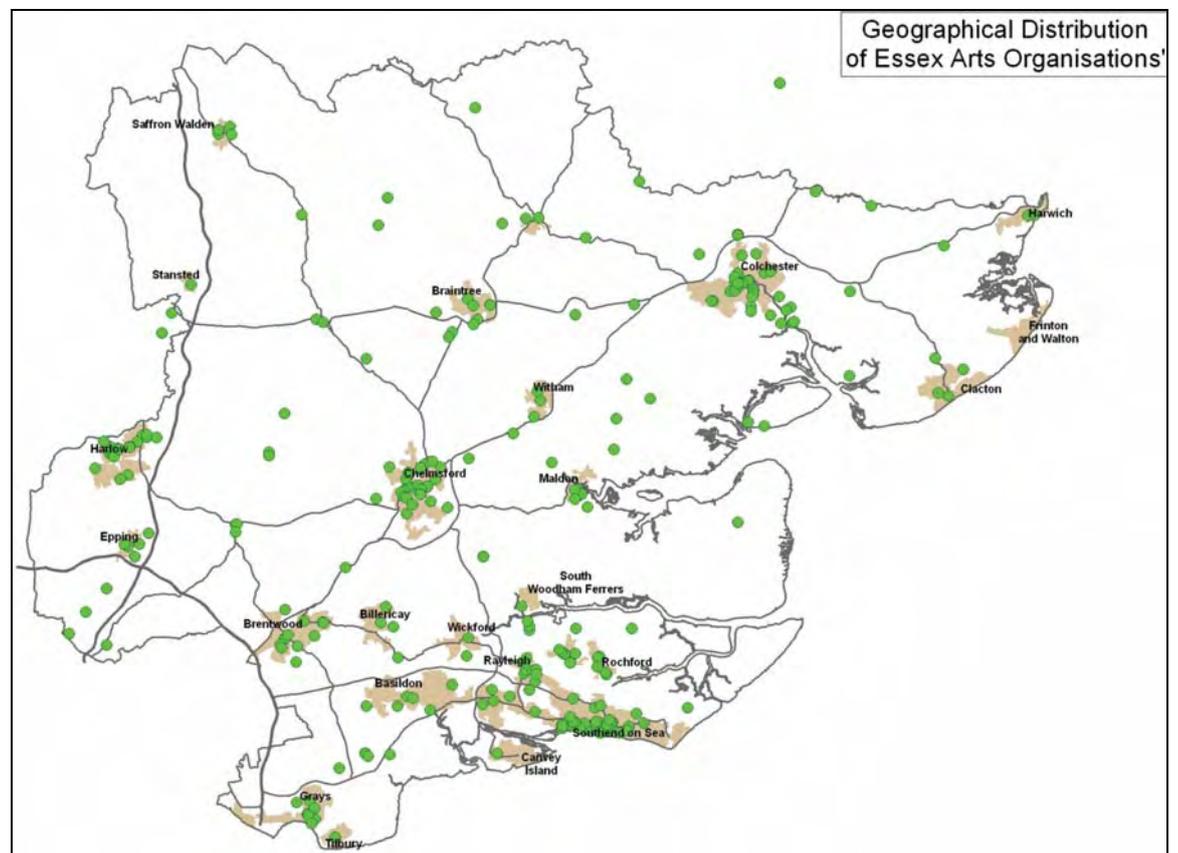




Table 1

Map showing the geographical distribution of arts organisations in Essex.
Creative Consequences, © Essex County Council, 2010.

4.1 These organisations attracted over 1.8m people to around 16,000 performances and events across the county in 2009/10, demonstrating that there is a vibrant and active arts community in Essex and significant support for the arts from the local audience. This audience has grown since 2004/5 when a similar survey indicated that 1.1m attended the arts in the county. It is also important to note that nearly half the events were aimed at young people and that 365,000 children participated in them. Essex County Council's research suggests that the arts sector generates around £31m in the local economy.

The audience for the arts in Essex

4.2 The strong audience for the arts in the county, identified by Essex County Council, is also reflected in the results of the ongoing national survey of arts attendance and participation, *Taking Part*.¹² Recent results from this survey show that people in the East of England were significantly more likely to have engaged with the arts in the last year than those in all other regions in the country except for the South East and South West. Around 72% of the adult population in the region attended at least one arts event in 2009 and 52% participated in at least one arts activity.

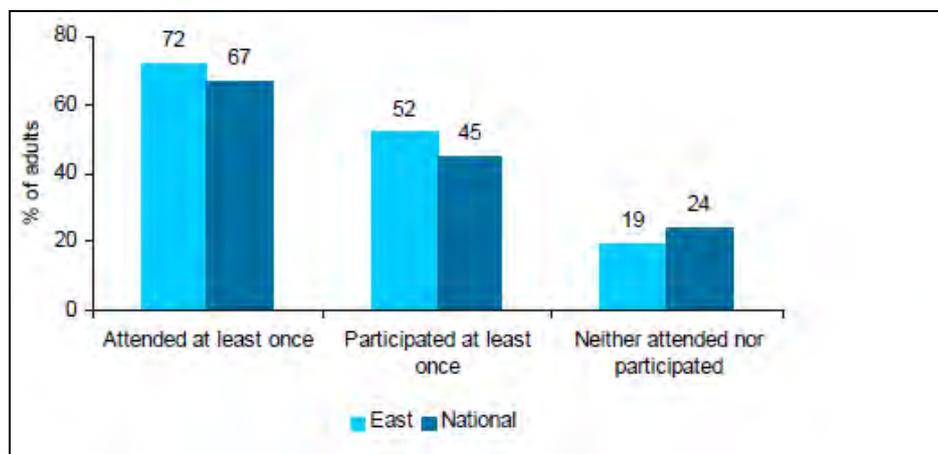


Table 2

Proportion of adults attending and participating in the arts in the Eastern region in 2009.

¹² Taking Part Survey, DCMS 2010.



4.3 The research further suggests that, within the region, there is strong interest in music, musicals, drama, the visual arts and pantomime.

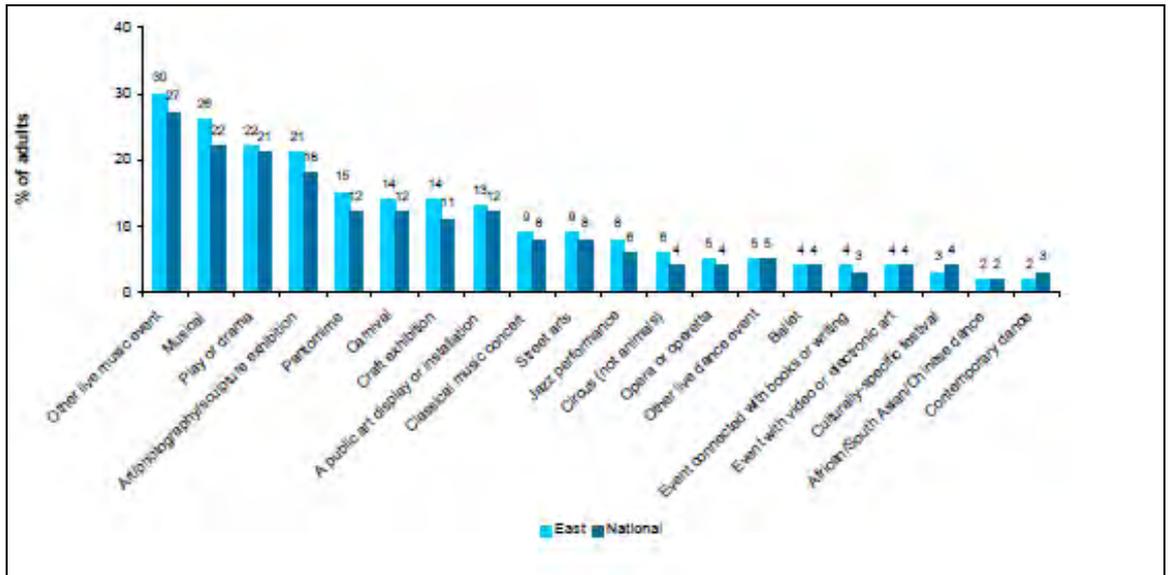


Table 3 Proportion of adults attending individual art forms in Eastern England in 2009.

4.4 People living in the region are also actively involved in crafts, painting, playing an instrument, dance and photography.

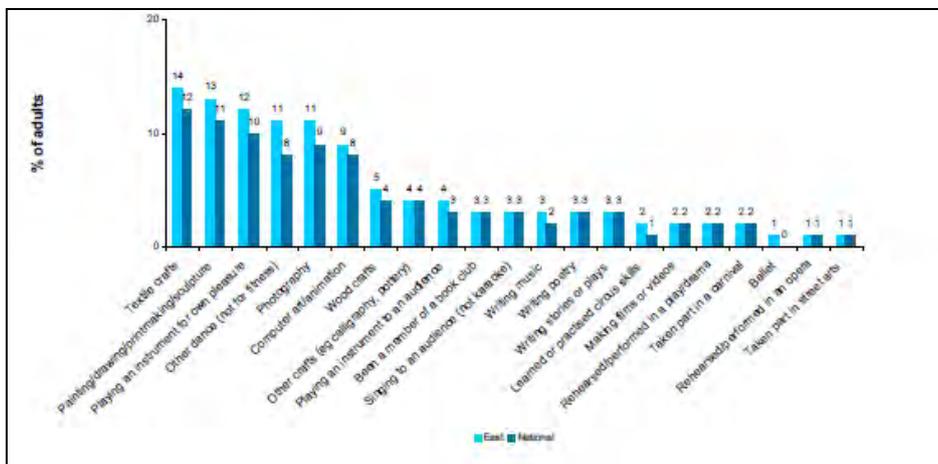


Table 4 Proportion of adults participating in the arts in Eastern England in 2009



The audience in Basildon

Demographics

4.5 Basildon has the third highest population in the eastern region behind Luton and Colchester. The population of the district is currently around 170,000 people, but this total is expected to grow to 185,000 by 2029.¹³ The town faces a number of real challenges, including a significant skills shortage and a high rate of unemployment compared with the rest of the region¹⁴. A large proportion of the population of the town is either dependent on low skilled, low income jobs or benefits. Educational attainment is low and relatively few adults in Basildon have degree level qualifications. The town also suffers from areas of deprivation¹⁵ and contains the largest proportion of social housing in the south east. A significant percentage of the local workforce (28%) commutes to London, which is only half an hour away by train.

4.6 For this study we looked in detail at the demographics within a 30 minute drive-time of the town. This catchment area contains 1m people including 880,000 adults. An ACORN breakdown of the area suggests that there is a very low percentage of people from the 'Wealthy Achievers' and 'Urban Prosperity' classification who tend to be active theatre-goers, especially when compared to the averages for the rest of the country, but a high percentage of the ACORN categories of 'Comfortably Off' and 'Moderate Means'.

Table 5
ACORN category (within 30 minute drive-time of Basildon)

Wealthy achievers	179,335	19.4%
Urban prosperity	69,814	7.6%
Comfortably Off	346,510	37.6%
Moderate Means	192,174	20.8%
Hard Pressed	134,040	14.5%

¹³ ONS Projections.

¹⁴ Basildon District Council Organisational Assessment 2009.

¹⁵ It is estimated that up to 33,000 people, or 20% of the population, live in areas of deprivation. Source: Cultural Strategy for Basildon 2006.



If we examine these figures further it is clear that the catchment area has a very high proportion of families, particularly the Post Industrial Family sector.

Around 30% of households have dependent children.¹⁶

Local research

4.7 Basildon Council commissioned White Young and Green (WYG) to undertake an extensive research exercise last year which looked at residents' attitude to, and participation in, leisure and the arts in the district.¹⁷ The report suggests that the majority of residents participate in some form of leisure activity, and that 61% of people living within Basildon District attend theatres and music venues. The report notes that while this figure is lower than the national average of 66%¹⁸ it is all the more surprising given the lack of theatres in the area (the Towngate Theatre had been dark for a decade between 1996 and 2006), and that it must reflect the ease of reaching London venues. The close proximity of London, which is only 30 minutes from Basildon, is also reflected in the high attendance at museums and galleries (47.8%, against a national average of 42%).

Ranking	Activity	% participation
1	Restaurants/Eating Out	87.1
2	Cinema	65.5
3	Theatres/Performing Art/Music Venues	61.1
4	Health and Fitness	58.4
5	Country Parks/Nature Reserves	56.6
6	Public Houses/Drinking Establishments	51.3
7	Museums/Art Galleries	47.8
8	Animal/Farm Centres and Zoos	43.4
9	Gardens/Historic Buildings	42.5
10	Ten Pin Bowling	37.2

Table 6

Top 10 leisure activities enjoyed by Basildon residents. WYG 2010.

¹⁶ 136,235 households out of a total of 454,000 have dependent children at home.

¹⁷ *Leisure, Arts and Tourist Accommodation in Basildon*, White, Young, Green 2010.

¹⁸ Taking Part Survey, DCMS 2006/7.



4.8 The research further examined how different age groups participate in leisure and arts events, as the table below illustrates:

Ranking	Age brackets and percentage participation (in brackets)		
	18-34 years	35-45 Years	55+
1	Restaurants (91.7%)	Restaurant (88.7%)	Restaurants (80.6%)
2	Cinema (79.2%)	Cinema (77.4%)	Theatre & performing arts (63.9%)
3	Health & fitness (75%)	Health & fitness (66%)	Country parks & nature reserves (52.8%)
4	Public house/drinking establishments (54.2%)	Theatres & performing arts (66%)	Museums & art galleries (47.2%)
5	Nightclubs (50%)	Public houses & drinking establishments (56.6%)	Gardens & historic buildings (41.7%)
6	Ten pin bowling (45.8%) Country parks & nature reserves (45.8%)	Museums art (52.8%)	Animal & farms centres & zoos (41.7%)
7		Ten pin bowling (50.9%)	Public houses & drinking establishments (41.7%)
8	Performing arts (43.5%)	Animal & farms centres & zoos (49.1%)	Cinema (38.9%)
9	Museums/Art (37.5%)	Gardens & historic buildings (43.4%)	Health & fitness (36.1%)
10	Animal & farms centres & zoos (33.3%)	Ice rinks (24.5%)	Ten pin bowling (11.1%)

Table 7



Leisure attendance and participation by Basildon residents. WYG Report

The breakdown by age follows national trends, for example older people (55+) are more likely to attend theatre and museums and galleries than 18-34 year olds. Notice the importance of restaurants and eating out for all age groups.

4.9 The research further looked at the age and socio-economic grouping of those people attending arts and leisure. As to be expected, women were more interested than men in attending the performing arts. People in ABC1 socio economic groups were also more likely to visit performing arts venues (71.2%).

Ranking	Gender		Socio Economic Grouping	
	Male	Female	A, B, C1	C2, D, E
1	Restaurants (80.9%)	Restaurants (90.9%)	Restaurants (89.8%)	Restaurants (83.0%)
2	Cinema (61.7%)	Cinema (68.2%)	Performing arts (71.2%) Cinema (71.2%)	Cinema (55.3%)
3	Health and fitness (57.4%) /	Performing Arts (63.6%)		Performing Arts (53.2%)
4	Performing arts (57.4%)	Country Parks (62.1%)	Heath & Fitness (66.1%)	Health and Fitness (53.2%),
5	Gardens, historic buildings (55.3%)	Health & Fitness (59.1%)	Country Parks (64.4%)	Public houses & drinking establishments (48.9%)

4.10 The research also examined whether residents are going outside the district for leisure activities. In the case of the performing arts, it would appear that over 50% of people are travelling outside the area. Only 8% of residents who attend the performing arts are visiting local venues.



Activity	% undertaken in District	% undertaken outside District	Unknown/varies
Ten Pin Bowling	95.2	0.0	4.8
Cinema	93.2	2.8	4.1
Snooker	71.4	0.0	28.6
Bingo	71.4	0.0	28.6
Public houses and Drinking establishments	69.3	20.4	10.3
Health & Fitness	66.8	9.0	24.2
Restaurants	58.3	6.0	35.7
Country Parks	53.1	14.1	32.8
Nightclubs	52.2	13.0	34.8
Youth Facilities	44.4	27.8	27.8
Ice Rinks	21.1	63.1	15.8
Animal Farms/Centres/Zoos	14.3	57.1	28.6
Performing arts	8.6	50.8	40.6
Museums/Art Galleries	0.0	46.3	53.7
Gardens/Historic buildings	0	22.9	77.1

4.11 The lack of attendance at the Towngate Theatre by residents suggests that more needs to be done as a matter of urgency to address both the artistic programme and the marketing of Basildon's theatre. Only 2% of respondents indicated that they had visited the Towngate Theatre and all of those respondents lived in Basildon itself. If this research is correct, not one of the respondents living outside Basildon had visited the Towngate Theatre. What is even more surprising is that there was a huge lack of awareness of Basildon's own theatre, particularly amongst the older age groups.

The London audience

4.12 There is clearly a significant audience for theatre living in Basildon District—nearly 32% of respondents to the WYG survey indicated that they visited theatres and performing arts venues every two months or more. But this audience is going elsewhere. A large percentage of local people are attending



performing arts venues in London (29.4%), Southend (21.9%) and Chelmsford. Basildon's theatre is not alone, of course, in having to struggle against the pull of the capital's major arts venues and the West End. Recent studies undertaken by Ancer Spa for Harlow Council suggested that 60% of total attendances in the region were at central London theatres and concert venues, and around 10% at other regional venues including Cambridge, Milton Keynes, Watford and Southend.

4.13 We wanted to understand more about this potential audience – how active is it, what do they attend, how much are they currently spending, and how often do they go to the theatre. So we analysed the Towngate Theatre's catchment area, using a 30 minute drive-time from Basildon, and cross-referenced this data with the massive database of attendees at London venues held by the development agency, Audiences London. This database covers some 30 venues including the Royal Festival Hall, the Royal Opera House, the Barbican Centre, the National Theatre, the Old Vic, the Royal Albert Hall, Sadler's Wells, the Almeida, Greenwich Theatre, Lyric Hammersmith, the Globe, The Place, the Roundhouse and the Unicorn¹⁹. We took households from within a 30 minute drivetime of Basildon and tracked their actual spending at these London venues across 2009/10. This is Basildon theatre's 'lost audience'.

4.14 The results were surprising. If we analyse the audience living in Basildon's catchment area and track their attendance at all the main London performing arts venues, in the year 2009/10 they bought 490,000 tickets and spent £8.8m in the capital. This theatre going audience is capable of being captured by Basildon itself. If the Towngate Theatre was to attract even 5% of this business it could boost its box office income by £440,000.

4.15 We examined the audience for seven art forms and the results are below:

	Children/family	Classical music	comedy	community
Households	2060	3419	1211	3414
Transactions	9816	26134	8462	15134
Tickets	28764	68334	22974	59374
Total spend	£373,070	£1,379,876	£377,495	£772,425

¹⁹ Audiences London database of bookers does not include West End shows or large rock and pop events



	pantomime	plays	Rock and pop	Total: 7 art forms
Households	4027	8387	4111	26,629
Transactions	16201	57302	17050	150,099
Tickets	72991	155768	43156	451,361
Total spend	£927,687	£2,409,788	£902,297	£5,380,692

These figures clearly indicate the potential for growing the pantomime audience, and also suggest that there is a significant audience for plays and for music which is currently being lost to London venues. Across these seven art forms the audience living within the Basildon catchment area spent £5.3m on 450,000 tickets at events in London.

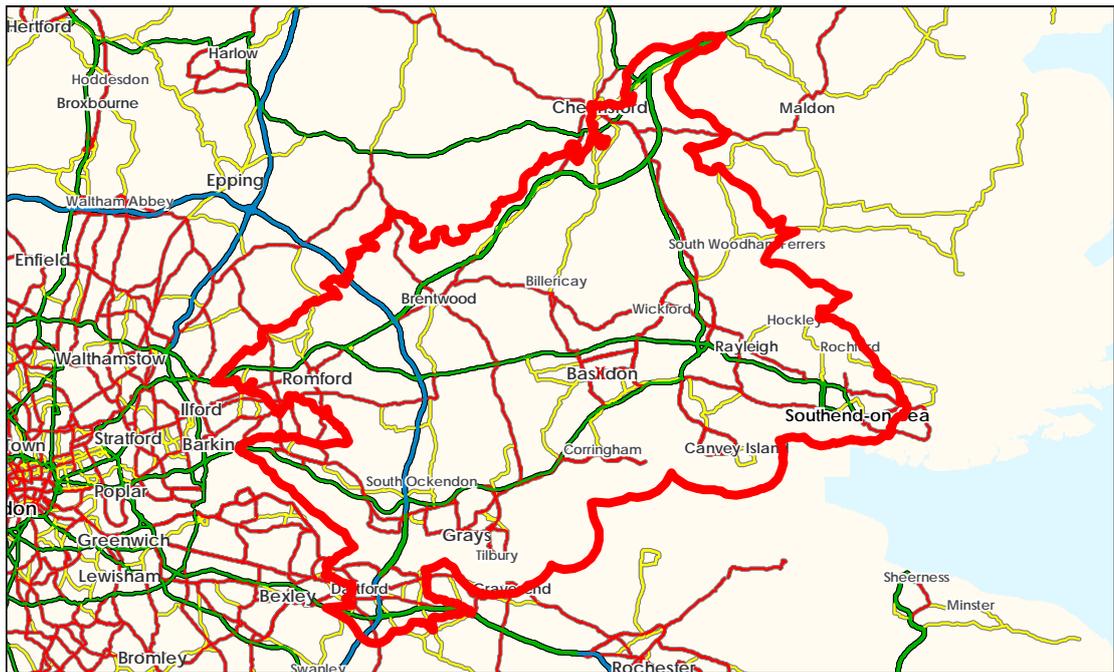


Table 8
30 minute drive-time area around Basildon

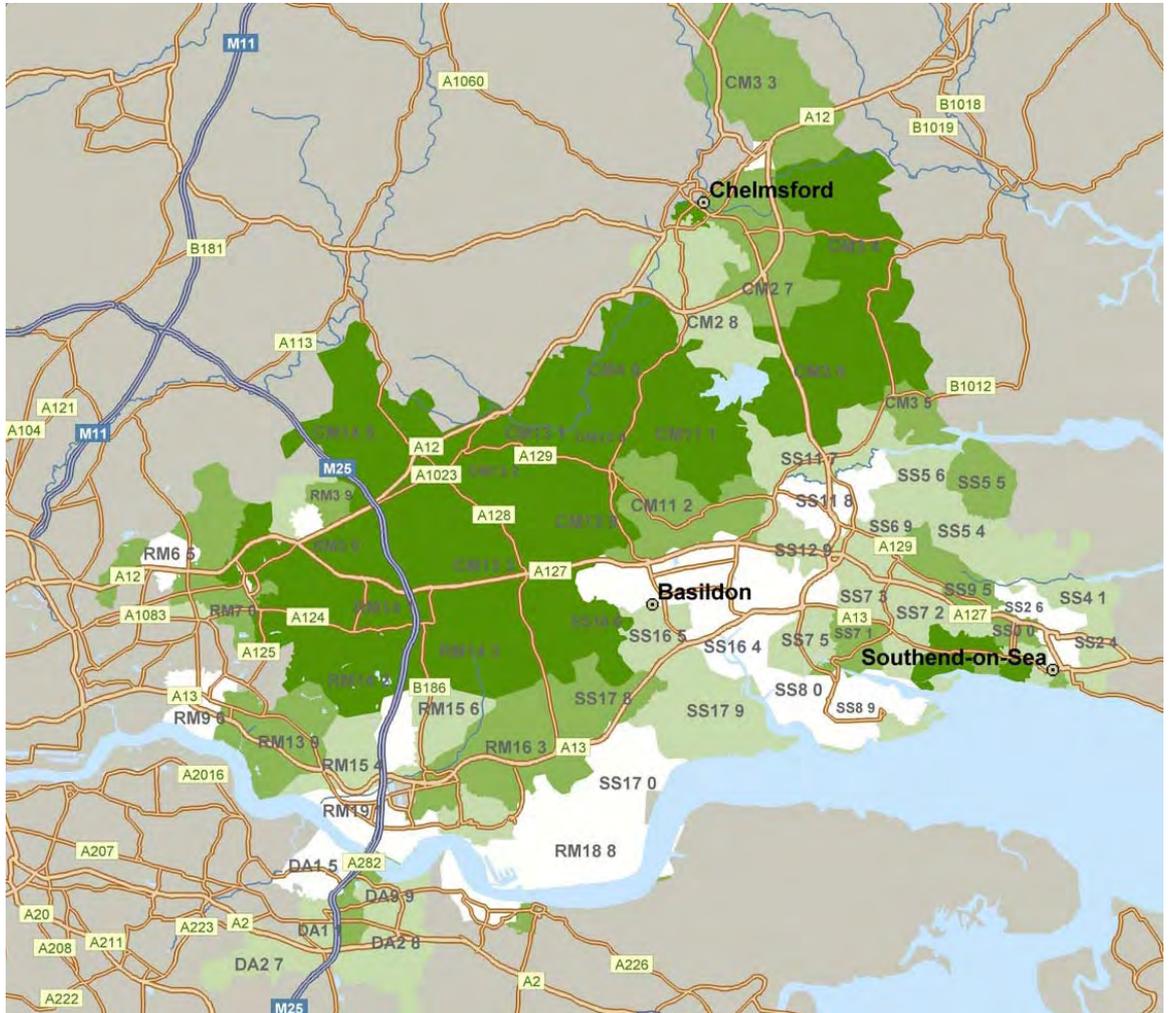


Table 10
The classical music audience living within the Basildon catchment area which attended concerts in London 2009/2010

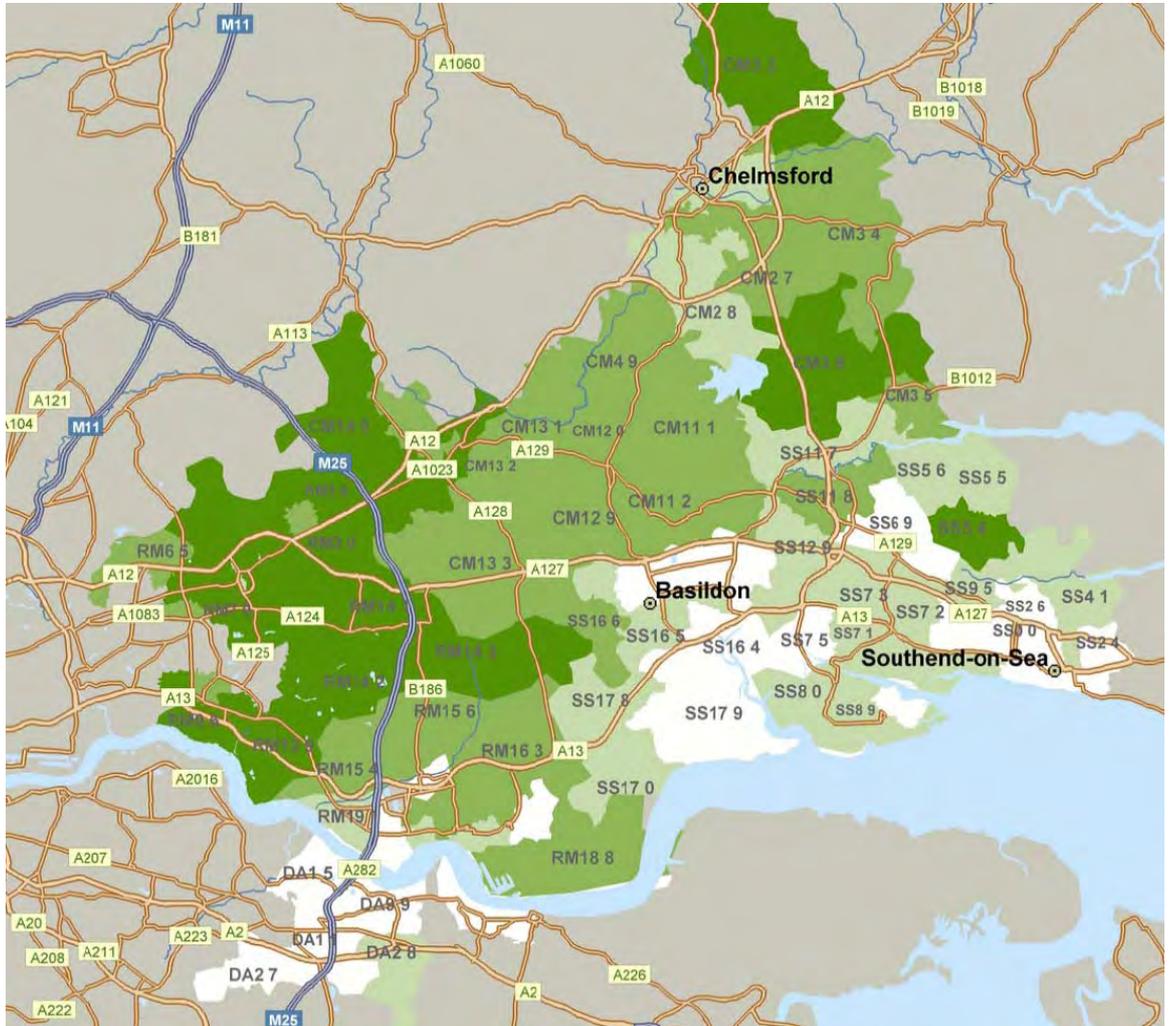


Table 12
Audience attending community and amateur events in London in 2009/10

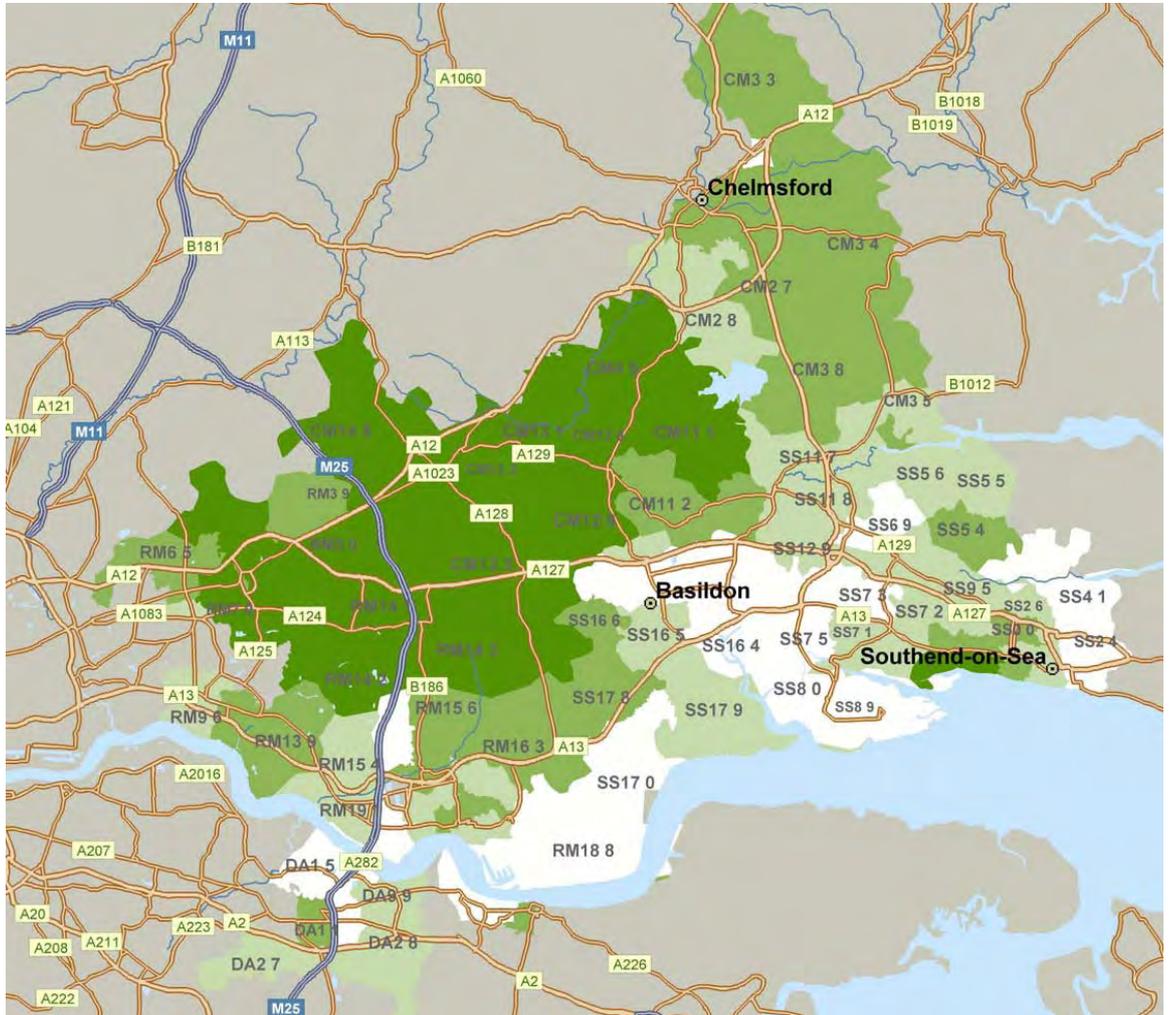


Table 14
Households attending plays and drama in London in 2009/2010

Note

A key postcode for developing the audience for plays and drama is CM13 2. Within this postal sector there are 168 households who spent a total of £49,289 on tickets for plays and drama in London venues in 2009/10. The average spend per transaction within this postal sector was £51.



How does the London audience impact upon Basildon?

- 4.16 The Towngate Theatre clearly faces significant competition from London venues for audiences for all art forms. There is a sizeable audience within its catchment area but at the moment this audience is either travelling to London to see shows or to enjoy music, or it is going to the Cliffs Pavilion and the Palace Theatre in Southend-on-Sea. The main audience, perhaps not surprisingly, is located to the west of Basildon, and this audience is within easy reach of London. This research indicates a low audience potential close to Basildon itself, which perhaps reflects both the limited number of professional shows at the Towngate Theatre and the fact that the theatre was closed for 10 years to 2006.



Section 5

A new cultural centre for Basildon

5.0 Every town needs a cultural centre: a public space in which people of all ages - residents and visitors alike - can meet and in which

- They can participate in activities which offer opportunities for learning about the place in which they live, or to which they have come, and the world of which it is part;
- They can interact freely with others, whether - for children - through play or - for young people and adults - through more structured events in which they can join with others in writing or creating visual imagery, or making music, dance or drama;
- They can learn about, discuss and debate issues of importance to their lives and community and thereby become full citizens of their town; and
- They can watch and be part of experiences offered by people who have committed their lives to the practice of an art and have the genius to be able to convey ideas, emotions and reflections of extraordinary power and influence.

5.1 Cultural centres are about enabling people of all ages and backgrounds to engage with each other, creating pathways for them to discover their own heritage and find their own voices, and empowering them, through experience of other people's visions, with new perspectives, possibilities and ambitions in their own lives. Next to home and school, cultural centres can offer the most important formative influences in people's lives. They can act as the focal point and platform of the democratic life of a community. They can be places of which people hold lifelong memories: places where they have had fun, entertainment, and – occasionally – the experience of a play, a book, a film or an exhibition that has been life changing.



Cultural presentation v. animation

- 5.2 What Basildon presently has by way of a cultural centre is some distance from the kind of place that we have just described. But elements of that model – two theatre spaces and a library already exist - and on what exists could yet be built a greater whole which makes more sense of the found parts. The key difference between the two models is the existence of a programme of animation that turns an otherwise sterile space for much of the day (the present Theatre) into a creative hub teeming with people and activity 15 hours a day. Instead of a space run by facility managers (the “garage” model of cultural centre into which professional and community producers drive their shows for a short stay leaving little or nothing by way of legacy), the key to the model of animation is a team of creatives capable of building and delivering a range of arts development activities that nurture interest in making, doing and participating in arts activity. The aim of these activities is to capture the long-term commitment of generations to support their local cultural centre as their creative home, and to create a bond of trust in programming that brings local people comfortably on a journey of artistic discovery.
- 5.3 Philosophically arts development is no different from sports development. And Basildon has done arts development before, though it has not done so for some time and, when it did, it was never part of a cultural strategy that embraced audience development for the Theatre. The years of neglect of arts development leave a legacy of challenge in Basildon that is very large, but it is not insurmountable and there are partners ready to help. Critical to the success of arts animation in Basildon will be a focus on children and young people. For adults arts animation will need quickly to create some extraordinary public events in Basildon which fire the imagination of local people with entertainment that is wholly outside people’s conventional expectations of what Basildon can do for its inhabitants and what it might offer cultural visitors.
- 5.4 There is nothing highbrow about such an initiative. Our attention has been drawn to the recent England Football Day promoted by the Essex County Football Association in Basildon for young and aspiring football players as a possible exemplar of what we are talking about in the arts. Simply convert that



model from football into drama, dance, music or art and you have (at the top end) the outcomes of an arts animation programme.²⁰

Models

Stratford Circus

5.5 If we are looking at a different model for a building at the centre of an arts animation programme, what would this look like, and how different is it from the present Towngate Theatre? One useful model to look at in more detail in Phase 2 (a model which has not been without its own financial difficulty and which may yet prove to be unsustainable in its present form) is Stratford Circus. Built in London's East End and very close to the famous Theatre Royal, Stratford East (built in 1884 and developed by Joan Littlewood and Philip Hedley as stage for radical theatre), Stratford Circus bills itself as “a contemporary performing arts venue situated within sprinting distance of the 2012 Olympic site and Stratford City.” Designed by Levitt Bernstein and managed by Newham Sixth Form College, “Stratford Circus is a rare and brilliant combination of space, talent, ambition and attitude which reflects the residents' cultures and communities whilst also filling a niche within the London-wide arts scene.” The centre produces and curates a professional programme of circus, comedy, cabaret, dance, music and children's theatre²¹ alongside events, workshops, education and training opportunities for the local community and broader audiences. It has a number of artists in residence and associate artists.

5.6 Stratford Circus has a number of facilities which serve for creating, rehearsing and presenting artistic work and for business and social functions. These include:

- 2 auditoria (one with flying facilities and pit) both with sprung floors

²⁰ Boys and girls teams in the Under 8s, 9s and 10s age groups can enjoy a day of skills, challenges, 4v4 football and fun to promote grassroots football development if they take part in the 2011 England Football Day Festival on Saturday 25th June at Selex Sports & Leisure Club in Gardiners Way, Basildon. The Essex County Football Association are currently inviting clubs to apply for their squads to take part in the Festival, which will comprise a range of activities as part of an initiative to promote playing, coaching and volunteering opportunities within the game. (Source: Essex County Football Association website)

²¹ A review of events advertised in July was notably thin but this could be caused by summer closure and/or inability/policy not to advertise in advance an autumn programme.



- Circus 1: Courtyard style theatre with retractable Ground Floor seating (290 seats or 650 standing)
- Circus 2A: End on studio theatre with retractable seating (93 seats or 160 standing)
- Circus 3: A large, flexible rehearsal studio space, with sprung dance floor, mirrors, adjustable shading etc, and adaptable for performance. This bright dance studio measures 15m x 15m and comes with a sprung floor, mirrors and bars. It can accommodate a maximum of 120 people standing and can be set out in cabaret style.
- Boardroom
- Café with inhouse catering

5.7 Stratford Circus's website promotes two parallel strands of use:

- The first as a funky arts venue aimed at cool promoters for concerts, community shows, dance training, fashion shows, film events, and final performances; and
- The second as a destination of choice for local business for conferences, exhibitions, seminars, staff training, awaydays, product launches, receptions, children's parties, corporate events, birthdays,

Governance of this centre was originally in the hands of Newham Council and has for some time been in the hands of Newham Sixth Form College.

5.8 Stratford Circus is interesting because it houses participation and presentation (with links between the two), spans all the performing arts, and provides a high-end social and business meeting place. And it is much used.

The Broadway, Barking

5.9 The Broadway was originally the Barking Assembly Hall, designed in the 1930s as part of Barking Town Hall. In the early years of the Millennium the venue was modernised and redesigned at a cost of £4.8m, opening in 2004 as a joint venture between Barking & Dagenham Council and Barking and Dagenham College which was looking for a home for its performing arts department. The Broadway is part of a major redevelopment of Barking town centre, including a major new library and learning centre, a citizens' advice bureau, an art gallery, a



family health centre, cafes, shops and new residential accommodation. It offers an exemplar of the construction of a new town square formed of a mixture of historic and contemporary buildings.

- 5.10 The Broadway has a large, open foyer space which extends out from the original 1930s façade, and a flexible auditorium with a seating capacity of 341. The auditorium can also be cleared for a standing event, accommodating up to 850 people. The similarity of auditoria size with Stratford Circus is interesting and reflects a more current approach to the scale of theatre facilities manageable in a non-metropolitan city centre.
- 5.11 The venue is managed by an independent trust with a turnover of approximately £1m a year. Earned income accounts for 45% of this turnover, while the remaining 55% comes from charitable trusts, sponsorship and support from the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham²² and Arts Council England. The current chairman of the trust is John Middleton, who is Head of Economic Development at the London Thames Gateway Development Corporation.
- 5.12 The College uses the theatre and its three studio spaces from Monday – Wednesday during term time, and the Broadway management team programme events and shows during the rest of the week. The management team, interestingly, refer to the performance space not as Theatre but as a place of entertainment and they recognise the paramount need in their locality to engage with a very diverse audience. The Broadway currently attracts 45,000 visitors from a 5 mile radius. The theatre is now achieving 60% of capacity across a programme which includes contemporary dance, ballet, music, family shows, drama and comedy²³. The current artistic director, Karena Johnson, is focusing on ways of developing a strong, multi-cultural programme, which includes an increasing amount of work created and developed by local artists and practitioners. Partnerships are being developed both locally, with the Theatre Royal, Stratford East and the Queens Theatre, Hornchurch, and nationally with the Birmingham Rep and the Young Vic. The Broadway also developed a strong

²² The Council grant is currently £380,000. Arts Council England has recently accepted the Broadway as a National Portfolio Organisation and in 2012 it will receive a grant of £70,000.

²³ The current season includes an extensive community dance festival, the Enigma Dance company, Bucks Fizz, Ballet Cymru, the comedian Richard Herring, Chas Hodges, the Searchers, and Paul Daniels.



youth theatre which is now involving 120 young people from 6 – 18 years. Karena is intending to produce 2 to 3 shows a year, and is looking at ways of touring this work to other venues, under a new ‘Made @ the Broadway’ banner.

- 5.13 The Broadway’s strong focus on local engagement and participation would have been a crucial element in securing national portfolio status and a three year funding agreement with Arts Council England. It is another successful exemplar for the basis of what might be developed in Basildon if the town were to pursue a strategy of cultural animation as a way of reviving the fortunes of its Theatre and building towards a new cultural centre. In style and focus The Broadway comes from the same new generation of arts venues as Stratford Circus.

Developing a new audience

- 5.14 Creating successful cultural centres requires finding and developing users, audiences, advocates and financial stakeholders. With the Towngate open, then shut, then open once more, there has been no opportunity for sustained audience development. At points over the last ten years we’ve worked with the Henley Centre at looking at leisure trends and the likely trends in audiences for planned new theatres. Whether Basildon continues to run its current Theatre model or plans for a new cultural centre, it should take account of the Henley Centre’s recent forecasts which confirm long-term trends:

- The audience for theatre is likely to be older, and this will have an impact upon programming, levels of comfort within the building, quality of catering, ease of physical access, proximity of car parking, and sense of security;
- Proximity to supporting services – restaurants and cafes - is becoming increasingly important to theatre patrons;
- Programming will need to address an increasingly culturally diverse society;
- Participation will be key to audience development;
- Scheduling will need to suit changing lifestyles, for example events staged at lunchtime or early evening rather than always conventional theatre performance times;
- Levels of service will need to be exceptional – organisations that cannot provide an excellent professional service will be bypassed;



- Audiences will increasingly look for something different, such as outdoor events and spectacles;
- Sustainability, environmentally friendly, green – all these issues will become more and more important in guiding people's choices.

Animating the Town Centre

- 5.15 Creating a new cultural centre in the heart of the new town centre should not been done merely because such are the traditional locations of theatres, concert halls and galleries.²⁴ Locating the cultural centre in the heart of Basildon's new town centre must offer the opportunity of animating the town centre with activities that create a sense of ceremonial place, a place of public gathering, a place of discourse and a place of entertainment. Whilst not quite "the most perfect ballroom in Europe", St Martin's Square provides the perfect civic room for such activities. It has been estimated that some 3,000 people pass through the square every hour during the daytime. The presence of the Civic Centre, the Theatre and the church and the absence of retail shop fronts already create much of the public character of the square.
- 5.16 Bringing together the elements that would contribute to a lively, animated public space which also delivers civic and commercial outcomes will take careful assembly. Although much smaller in scale than St Martin's, one of the most successful recent public square developments has been the transformation of Bermondsey Square, SE1. This is a mixed use development with retail at ground floor levels and apartments above set on four sides of a square which houses in the daytime the old Bermondsey Market. It is a visually attractive space, sufficiently intimate to feel safe at all hours. It houses a small commercial cinema/café.
- 5.17 In front of the new cultural centre should be an open air performance space (with sound and lighting positions wired in) that can stage everything from a lunchtime concert, to an evening drama, dance or (new) circus performance, to a weekend rally or meeting.²⁵ The presentation of outdoor theatre is not a new concept to Essex. ESSEXstreetdiversions, presented in Chelmsford, is now in

²⁴ Certainly in Europe. In the USA, where there are many more linear city models, cultural centres can be found most anywhere.

²⁵ Robert West who worked in Essex youth theatre in the 1980s recalls at least one outdoor theatre project in Basildon town centre created by professional theatre artists. His memory is that, whilst there was much scepticism about the project – because nothing like this had been presented before in Basildon - it drew about 1,000 visitors.



its ninth year.²⁶ In winter months (when the weather will not in England support outdoor performances) this space might well be convertible into an ice rink, as is now becoming familiar at Christmas time in cities such as New York, London, Cardiff and Edinburgh.

- 5.18 On one of the walls bounding the square, or on a separate tripod mount, should be a high definition big screen TV which can take (and enlarge) real time images from the open air performance space, real time video from the interior performance spaces of the cultural centre, and real time broadcasts of events relayed from distant international theatres and opera houses. If this can be combined with a service that also delivers news and relays from sports events (as with the BBC big city screens) so much the better.²⁷
- 5.19 The large wall formed by the side elevation of M&S should be fitted with anchors, cables, and lighting for aerial and physical theatre, allowing for more spectacular night-time events in the Square.
- 5.20 Cafes and market stalls should be introduced to help animate the square at times when there may be no performance activities.
- 5.21 The new cultural centre should programme the Square in partnership with whatever structures are created for its management; and an innovative fiscal structure created by which the retail community contributes to the cost of animating as well as maintaining the hard landscape of this open air space.

²⁶ The next Festival takes places in Chelmsford Town Centre on Saturday 1 October 2011. The eighth international ESSEXstreetdiversions festival took place on Saturday 30 October 2010 from 2pm with a finale at 7pm. Through this festival Chelmsford Borough Council's Cultural Events Team continued to showcase some of the best live street theatre and outdoor arts from the UK and beyond. Each year, entirely new shows are presented alongside familiar favourites such as the Coneheads. In 2010, for the first time, the artistic programme not only featured amusing and curious shows during the daylight hours, but also peculiar twilight performances, installations and a finale to suit the unsettling shift in seasons. (Source: *Chelmsford Borough Council website*).

²⁷ Though not as well animated as it might be, The Square in Middlesbrough provides a modern example of a grassed recreational area bounded on one side by civic buildings and the other by the new £16m museum of contemporary art. The big screen sits on the third side of the Square.



The nighttime economy

5.22 *Basildon lacks a high quality and vibrant evening economy*.²⁸ A key driver for the new masterplan of the town centre is to ensure that there is a range of activity to attract residents into the town at night; at the moment the town centre goes to sleep as soon as the last shop closes for the night. A dynamic cultural centre on one side of the Square, a strong and varied café and restaurant offer, and events staged in the Square, will make a real contribution to creating a night time economy. Given the present lack of much else in Basildon's cultural offer than The Towngate, it would make sense to cluster any other planned cultural provision around the Square. We understand that there are preliminary discussions taking place with Cineworld about the feasibility of developing a new multi screen cinema at the eastern end of the town centre to help animate that part that part of the plan. We would suggest that the offer would be much stronger, particularly for the supporting restaurant business, if the new cinema was sited closer to the cultural centre.

Components of a new cultural centre for Basildon

5.23 We have said earlier that some elements of a cultural centre already exist in Basildon and that the object should be not to replace them but to make better sense of them in the context in the context of a greater offer to the public. Our discussions and reflections lead us to propose that an enlarged cultural space should seek to create facilities that facilitate learning, study and reflection by means of books, electronic media and the visual arts, workshops that make and create, and spaces that present dance, drama and music. Ideally it should encompass:

- Spaces for local people, and especially children and young people, to learn, create and participate in creative work. These spaces would be animated by professional artists and teachers and might include a dance studio, drama studio, music studios, and a digital media suite;
- A performance space which facilitates the presentation of work grown from the studios together with the presentation of professional work at the small and middle scale;

²⁸ WYG Report for Basildon Council, 2010



- A gallery which houses the Basildon Arts Trust collection securely and with proper interpretation;
- A temporary exhibition gallery;
- A space for civic and social functions and business meetings; and
- A daytime café/bistro operating up to evening performance times and pre-show and interval bars.

Theatre

5.24 Whilst in 2011 one might not build a conventional proscenium arch theatre in a town such as Basildon as its chosen physical form for an entertainment venue, it would represent a criminal waste of money to demolish that which has been built and still has value and longevity. Rather than demolish the present performance space in favour of a mid-scale space comparable to The Broadway at Barking and Stratford Circus, we would therefore base any scheme on the retention of the present stagehouse of The Towngate. This will continue to provide an acceptable stage, flytower, get-in facilities, artists' rooms and dressing rooms for a large scale entertainment venue. But the performance auditorium would be converted into a series of uses from a fixed seat (say 700) theatre to a flat floor function room capable of accommodating banqueting, weddings, civic functions and trade exhibitions. It is, perhaps, a curious place from which to depart in designing a new kind of cultural centre but, in Basildon, it is an unavoidable part of the canvas that history has painted.

Performance auditoria

5.25 We recommend, therefore, that the whole Front of House area – which was in any event compromised in its redesign and construction - should be demolished. In its place should be built an auditorium that has two configurations:

- a flat floor configuration which can be used for civic and business events, exhibitions, dinners, and dances (with retained spectator balconies) and
- A theatre configuration with about 700 seats.

5.26 The main auditorium would have a mixed use:

- Social functions



- Community theatre and musical theatre productions
- Youth theatre and musical theatre productions
- Occasional professional productions.

We would expect to spend time in Phase 2 looking at this programme and its operational and financial dimensions in more detail

Studio theatre

- 5.27 We would retain the Studio Theatre as a drama and music studio. In Phase 2 will we similarly look at its future use in more detail.

Front of House

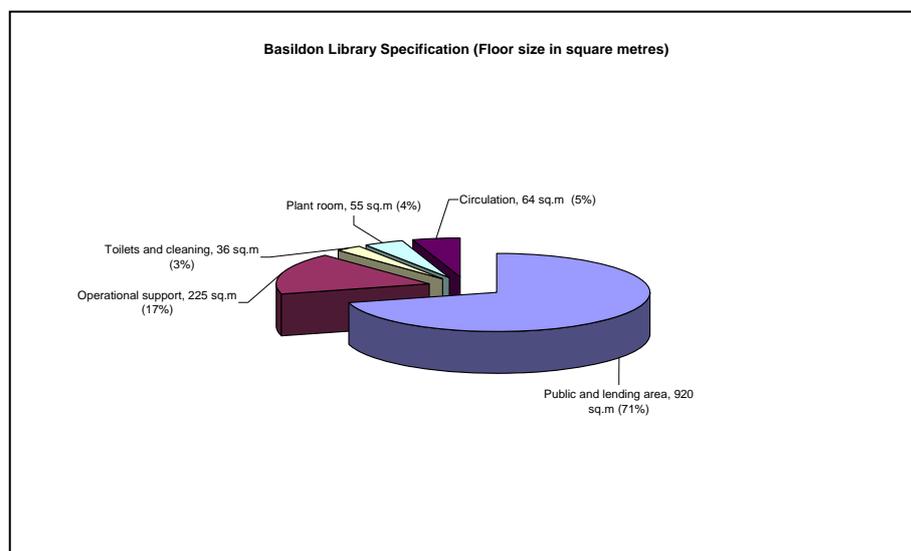
- 5.28 The fundamental change of identify would come about through the complete remodeling of the present Front of House spaces. Instead of serving rather poorly) for the pre-performance and interval needs of the Theatre audience, these would be rebuilt to provide a suite of studio, workshop and public spaces that facilitated learning, reflection study, creation, rehearsal and presentation of work in different media. What might then be the building blocks of this new area?

Library

- 5.29 Essex County Council's Library Service has been working on the basis that the new town centre scheme would demolish the Basildon Centre and re-house the County's central library on another site. The existing library is owned and operated by Essex County Council and is located on the Ground Floor of the Basildon Centre. The County Council's brief of its requirements for a replacement central library is set out in an Operational Requirement Specification dated 4th July 2008 (and updated on 3rd September 2008). This records that ECC will be provided with a new library on an equivalent basis integral to the new Civic Office at nil cost to ECC. Discussions with Barratts have focused since that time on the location of the relocated site and any interim arrangements. ECC officers were not aware at the time of our meeting with them that the Basildon Centre and the central library might now be retained in their present form.



5.30 ECC's overall space requirement is for 1300 sq.m. 930 sq.m are required for public and lending area, 225 sq.m for operational support space, 36 sq.m for toilets and cleaning stores, 55 sq.m for plant room and 64 sq.m for circulation. The operating model is a relatively conventional one with a book stock for lending and reference, a wi-fi area and 40-50 PCs for research, a number of study and reading spaces, a clearable space for events and wall space for art displays.



5.31 In many cultural centres in continental Europe a library function would be integrated with other cultural functions within the envelope of a single building or building complex. In many C19th and C20th British civic centres – where public assembly, education and library functions took precedence over arts provision (for which local government had and still has no statutory requirement to provide) - parallel provision within a complex of buildings was favoured and some of the opportunities for integration lost. In some comparators we have looked at (for example at Barking) a new library still sits in a separate building across a public square from other civic facilities (the Town Hall, the Broadway, and the Health Centre). In other recent developments (such as Norwich) the library forms part of a complex of facilities within a single building envelope. Practical opportunity and restraint is probably more of a determinant in which model will be followed than any overt policy.



- 5.32 In Basildon there would be a huge advantage in co-locating the new library within the new kind of cultural centre we are proposing. It would reinforce the centre's daytime utilisation and offer by providing a foundation of 130,000 visitors per annum. It would allow many of the operational support functions and public facilities required by the library to be integrated with other parts of the cultural centre. It would bring a critical body of staff into the centre to help build the new cultural centre team. It would reinforce the centre's identity of democratic public space. It would offer the library, its staff and users the resources of performance spaces, film theatres, gallery and café of a scale that it would never be able to justify in its own terms.
- 5.33 At present, however, the realisation of such a scheme would have to surmount two obstacles. First there is insufficient floor space to relocate the library within an extended Theatre without intrusion onto St Martin's Square to a degree we had not contemplated. Second the scheme would need to be funded by purchase of the library's present premises or re-use by Essex County Council itself on which it could place an equivalent value.
- 5.34 If the Basildon Centre is to be retained, then we understand that the County Council would wish to develop plans with Basildon Council on the better utilisation of the present Centre. The staffing requirements of both Councils are likely to change over the next four years and it may be that future utilisation by both Councils could release a ground floor area large enough to annex within the footprint of the proposed Theatre extension. These are discussions for Phase 2. At the moment all we would wish to do is press our strong view that integration should be high on a list of desired outcomes.

Art Gallery

- 5.35 In the last 20 years there has been an explosion in interest in design, fashion and the contemporary visual arts. In the last decade we have witnessed the creation of several new contemporary art museums in England which (for cultural administrators) seek to ride the tide of a supply side to this new demand and which (for urban planners) seek to mirror the "Bilbao effect" on urban and economic regeneration. Local research also indicates that there is a strong interest in the visual arts in Basildon and in Essex generally *"there is a vibrant and dedicated visual arts scene in which would benefit from the provision of appropriate support and*



*a venue for activities.*²⁹ But at the moment the audience for the visual arts have to travel outside the District to enjoy art exhibitions³⁰.

- 5.36 The Basildon Arts Trust may be little known about but it has collected important work by British artists from the second half of the Twentieth Century, including work by Barbara Hepworth, Terry Frost, Tom Phillips, Patrick Heron, Ivon Hitchens, R. B. Kitaj, and Elisabeth Frink. A few paintings from the collection, which is a mix of oils, watercolours, prints and drawings, are currently displayed in the upper foyer of the Theatre, but the collection is not shown to advantage and we imagine that few residents are aware of the Arts Trust's work. Of the collections 67 works, most are in store.
- 5.37 Within the new build Front of House of the cultural centre – and preferably flanking at least one of its exterior walls thereby creating a different kind of shop window on to the Square - there should be a small art gallery. The gallery would house and show work from the Trust's collection (which should have a permanent room) as well as temporary exhibitions by local artists and work derived from its own animation programme. These spaces and the new art and media programme which they would permit require animation. The scheme would benefit from studio space for two artists, allowing a twin fellowship programme for one artist working in traditional media and the other in digital media.

Studios

- 5.38 We would hope that sufficient space could be created (possibly by redesignation of the Mirren Theatre) to create studio spaces for dance, drama and music³¹. How substantial these are (and how well equipped) and how extensively they would be used will depend to some considerable extent on whether partnerships can be struck with an FE/HE provider, or possibly with schools. The aim would be to create state of the art facilities above the level than any school or college would expect to finance or accommodate; at which top level courses were offered; and at which final rehearsals and performances took place in a

²⁹ WYG Report.

³⁰ The Arts Council Area Profile report for the 30 minute catchment area of Basildon suggests that there is a potential audience of 297,000 for the visual arts and for galleries.

³¹ We have held back from a proposal to create a small cinema until the nature of the multi-screen cinema in the town centre is better understood.



town centre location. There are many exemplars of such arts centre facilities across the country: South Hill Park, Bracknell and The Maltings at Farnham are just two. This is work for Phase 2 once consensus has been reached around the whole model.

Conclusion

5.39 In summary:

- This project needs to start by acknowledging the challenges which a conventional theatre faces and is likely to continue to face in Basildon;
- It needs to embrace the wider and more inclusive concept of a cultural centre for participation and presentation in the arts across all arts genres;
- Such a centre would be generated most economically by retaining the Towngate Theatre's stagehouse rebuilding its auditorium for both entertainment and social functions;
- The cultural centre in partnership with the town centre management should manage an outdoor programme in St Martin's Square for which certain permanent features should be built, landscaped and wired in;
- Whilst the physical construction plan develops, the partners in the town centre's regeneration should develop an arts animation programme built on and around the present Theatre, seeking to build interest in and a profile for a more exciting cultural offer in Basildon. The partners should seek to secure Arts Council interest and post-Creative Partnership funding.

5.40 If our clients continue to wish us to progress to a further stage of our work we would recommend that it:

- Further articulates with Tim Ronalds and other members of the regeneration team the spatial implications of our proposals;
- Develops a high level business plan to show how the centre would operate;
- Offers advice to Basildon Council on what might best be done to improve the present Theatre's operation in the light of our recommendation to focus energy and investment on a programme of arts development capable of creating the profile and delivering partnerships, governance, funding and audiences for the Theatre's proposed replacement.



Annex

We are grateful to the following for giving freely of their advice or views whether in face to face discussions, or by phone, or simply by pointing us in useful directions:

Mark Richards, Senior Manager, Corporate Planning	Arts Council England (East)
Paul Brace, Manager Leisure Development and Sport	Basildon Council
Karena Johnson, CEO & Artistic Director	The Broadway, Barking
Deborah Sawyer, General Manager	
Robert West, Head of Programmes	Creative & Cultural Skills Council and National Skills Academy, Thurrock
Martin Palmer, Principal Office, Libraries	Essex County Council
Gaynor Bell, Project & Programmes Manager, Libraries, Arts and Heritage	
Alan Hardy, Property Appraisals Manager	
Andrew Ward, Arts Development Officer	
Ellen McPhillips	HQ Theatres
John Middleton, Head of Economic Development	Thames Gateway Development Corporation

Tim Ronalds Architects

Stage 1 Report

Contents

1. Analysis of the existing site & building
2. The Theatre in the town centre master plan
3. Alternative concepts for the Theatre
4. Cost estimates
5. Summary discussion

1. Analysis of existing site & building, in the context of the overall development plans



The Towngate Theatre was built in 1988, the first building in Basildon's New Town Centre. The adjacent Council offices and Library were completed shortly after. The theatre cost £6.5M, had a seating capacity of only 550 and was designed by theatre architects RHWL.

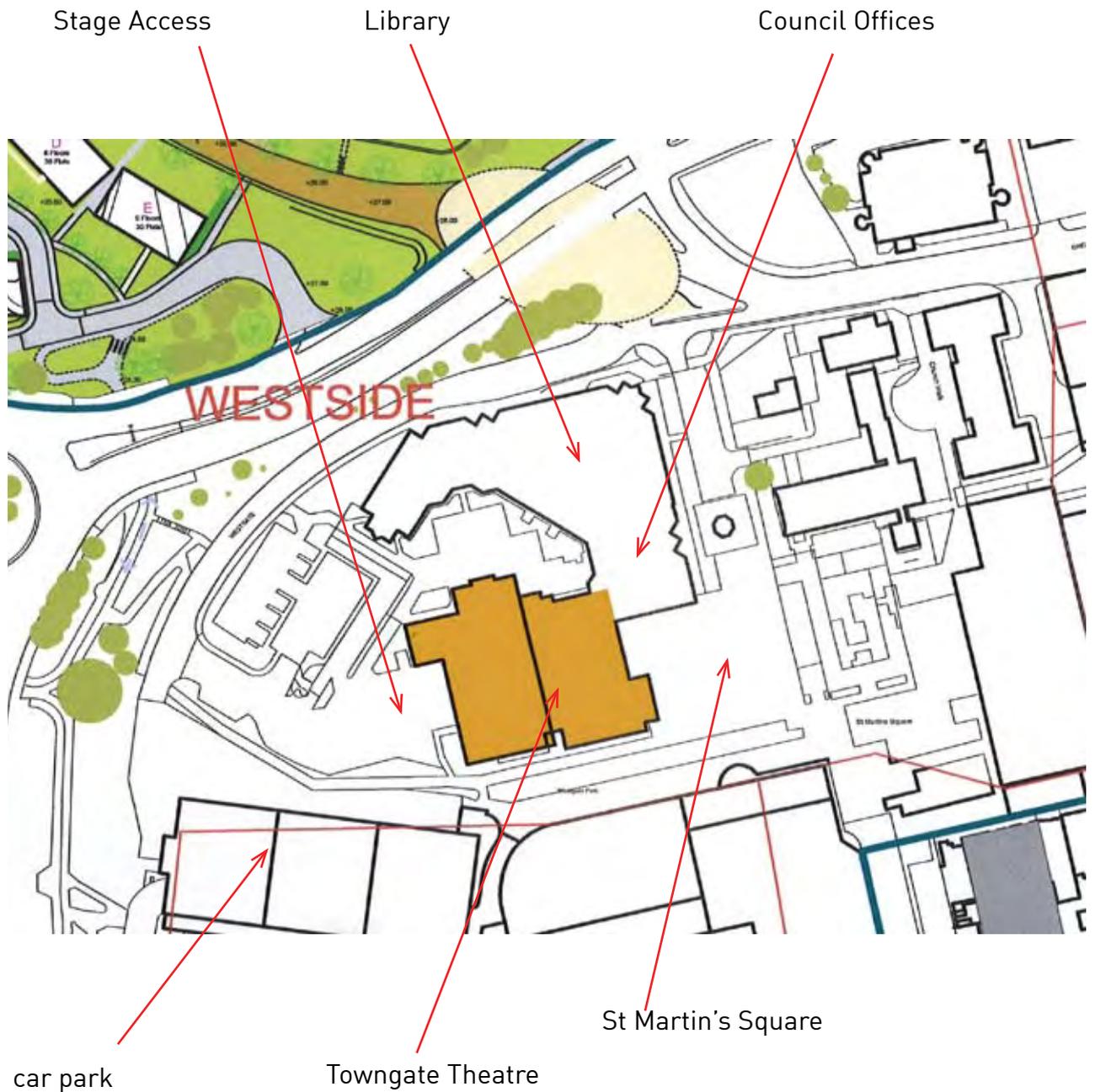
The outside of the theatre is in 1980's post-modern brick style, but the form of the auditorium is more historic and based on the Georgian horseshoe shape, with shallow curved tiers. The theatre has a sizeable, well equipped proscenium stage and fly tower, and smaller studio space and good backstage accommodation. The auditorium offers some flexibility with an adjustable proscenium width and moveable stall seating units.

Apparently the capacity of the auditorium was reduced during design to reduce cost, and this had the effect of making its shape rather more claustrophobic. The interior design lacked the refinement of its Georgian precedents.

It was essentially a theatre designed for plays, but the history of the theatre shows that apart from the inaugural performance very few plays have been staged at the Towngate and the auditorium does not work well for other kinds of performance. The two level foyers are generous but heavy and dated in style. The small studio theatre is a useful shape, but not well connected to the foyer. Technically the theatre was originally well designed and well equipped and has been well maintained.

But its concept and aspirations did not match the needs of Basildon audiences for performance and entertainment and although it has civic significance in the town it is very much under-utilised.

Site plan

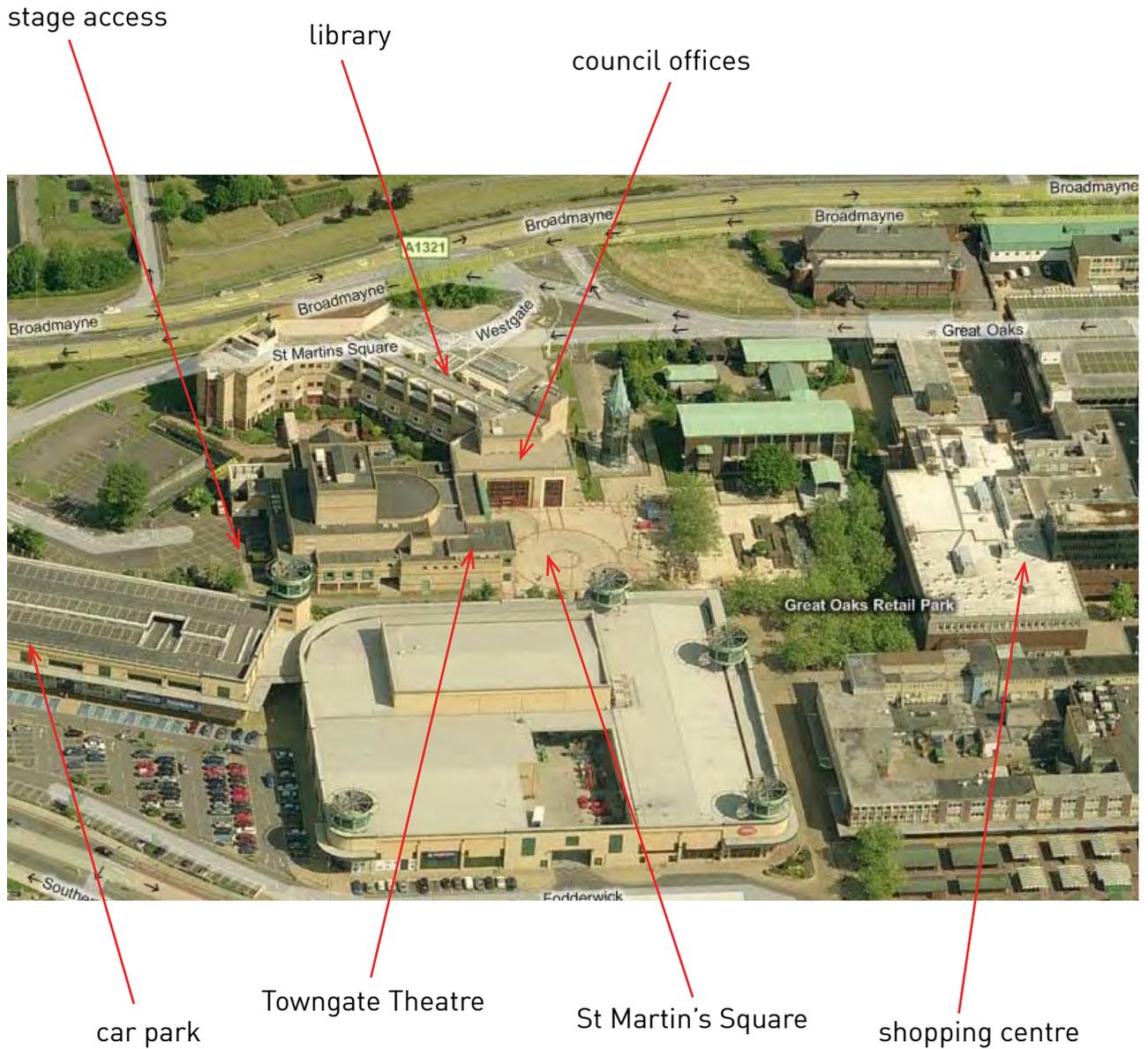


The Towngate Theatre and the Civic Offices form two sides of a paved space on the west side of St Martin's Square.

Ample parking is available in the two nearby multi-storey car parks and adjacent ground level parking areas.

Access to the theatre for production vehicles and for performers is from the west and is good.

Aerial view



The theatre is barely visible from the main roads. It is also somewhat isolated from the more active parts of the town and at night the locality must be otherwise deserted.



Basildon Towngate Theatre



Tim Ronalds Architects

Auditorium

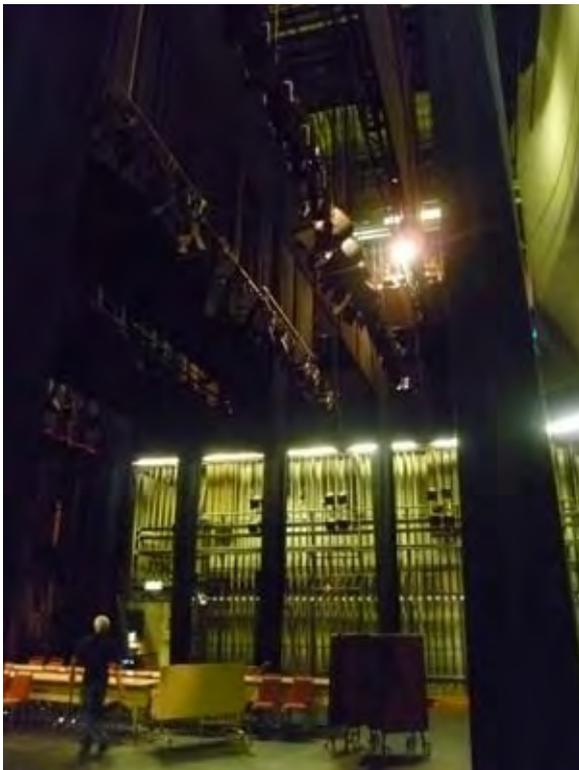


the horseshoe auditorium



The horseshoe shaped auditorium has an intimate feel, like the Georgian theatre its design was based on. The red and pink colour scheme is rather overwhelming. The stalls seating is on moveable units allowing various arrangements of forestage and orchestra pit, or a flat floor level with the stage. But changing arrangements is labour-intensive and rarely done.

Backstage



backstage facilities



Technically the theatre is well equipped and the equipment is in generally in good order. The stage is of a good size (14 x 18m) with a 10m wide proscenium. The fly tower has a counterweight flying system. Backstage facilities are professionally planned and get-in arrangements good. The performance systems are appropriate and have been updated since the theatre was built.

Flytower

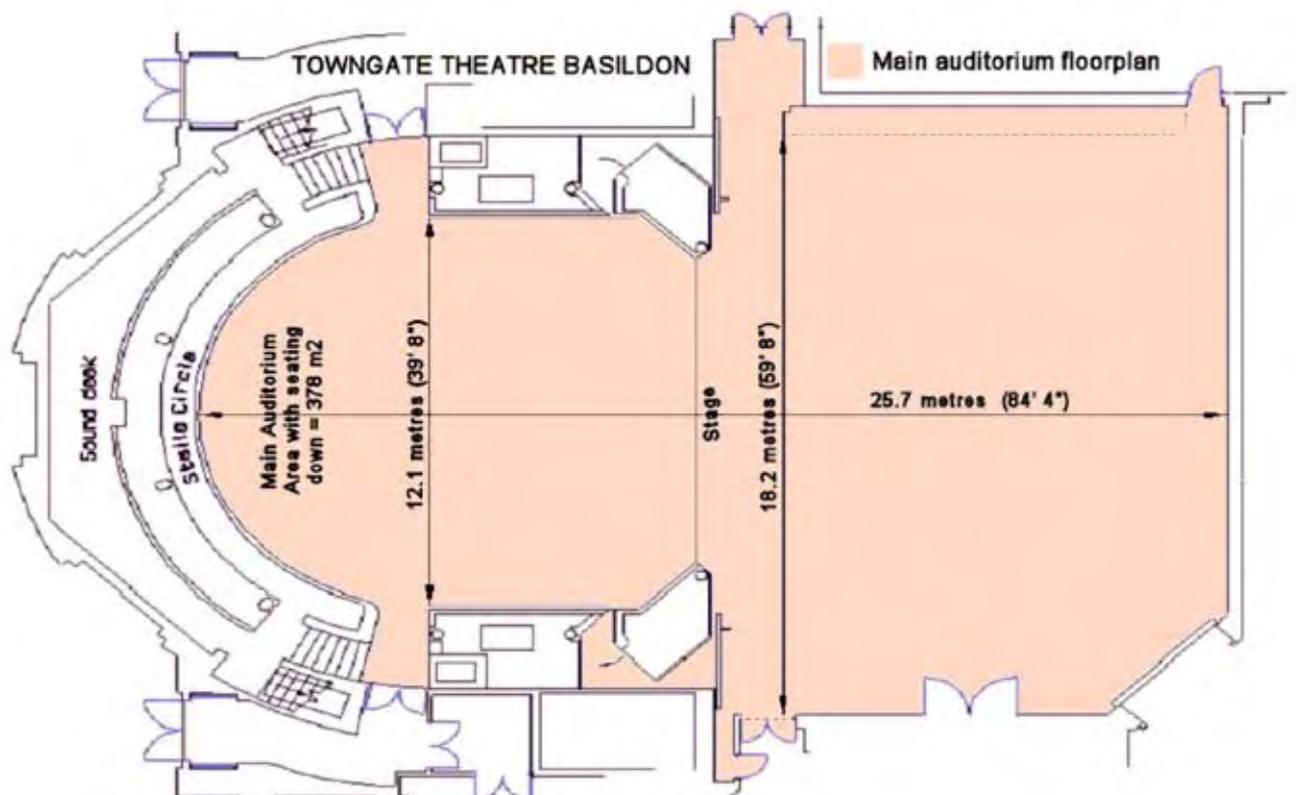


Flytower, stage and backstage of the Towngate offer well designed facilities with good get-in arrangements and surface parking for staff and people with disabilities.

Auditorium

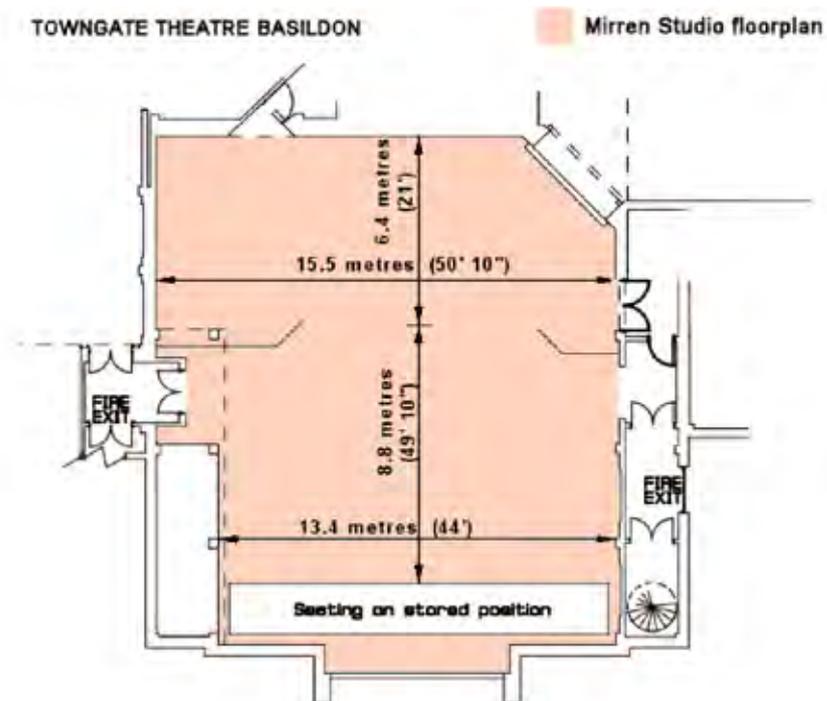


view of horseshoe auditorium with lighting bridge above

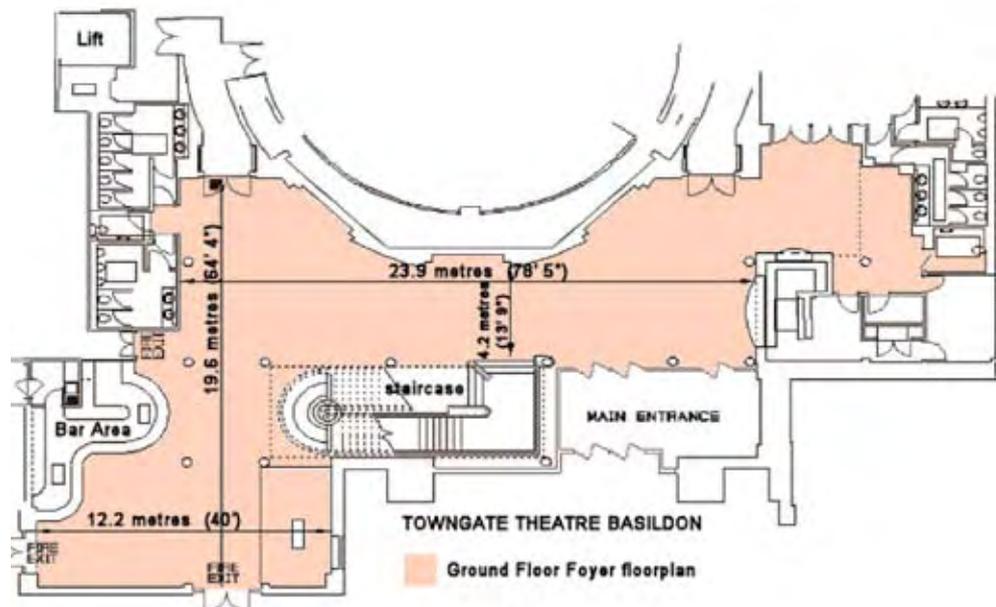


technical plan of auditorium and stage

Mirren studio

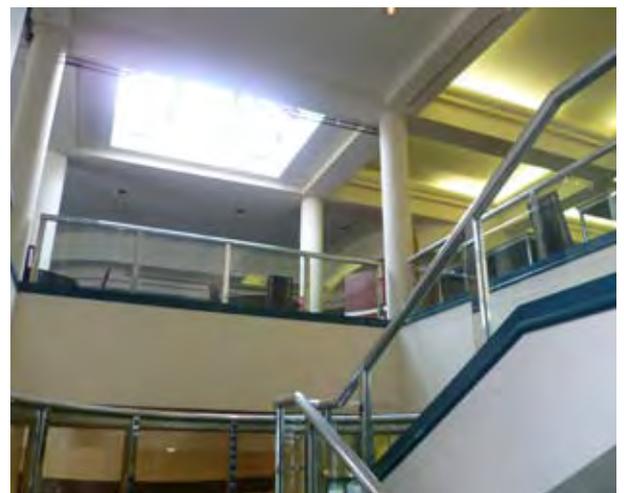
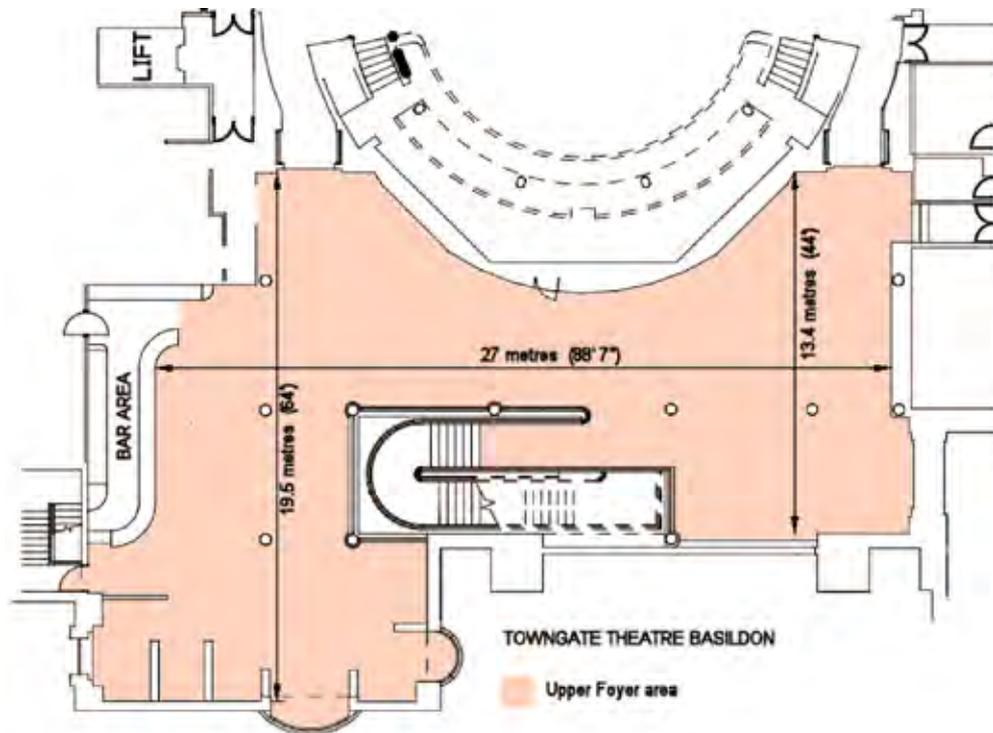


The Mirren Studio is a useful space with retractable seating accommodating 150 seated or 250 in flat floor mode. But the interior is heavy and plain in style and it is not well connected to the foyer.



The foyers are not an attractive feature of the Towngate. They are spacious enough but the interior architecture and colour schemes are heavy, dated and cluttered.

Foyer



On the walls of the first floor foyer are displayed works from Basildon's Stuyvesant Collection, some important twentieth century paintings which deserve to be better exhibited.

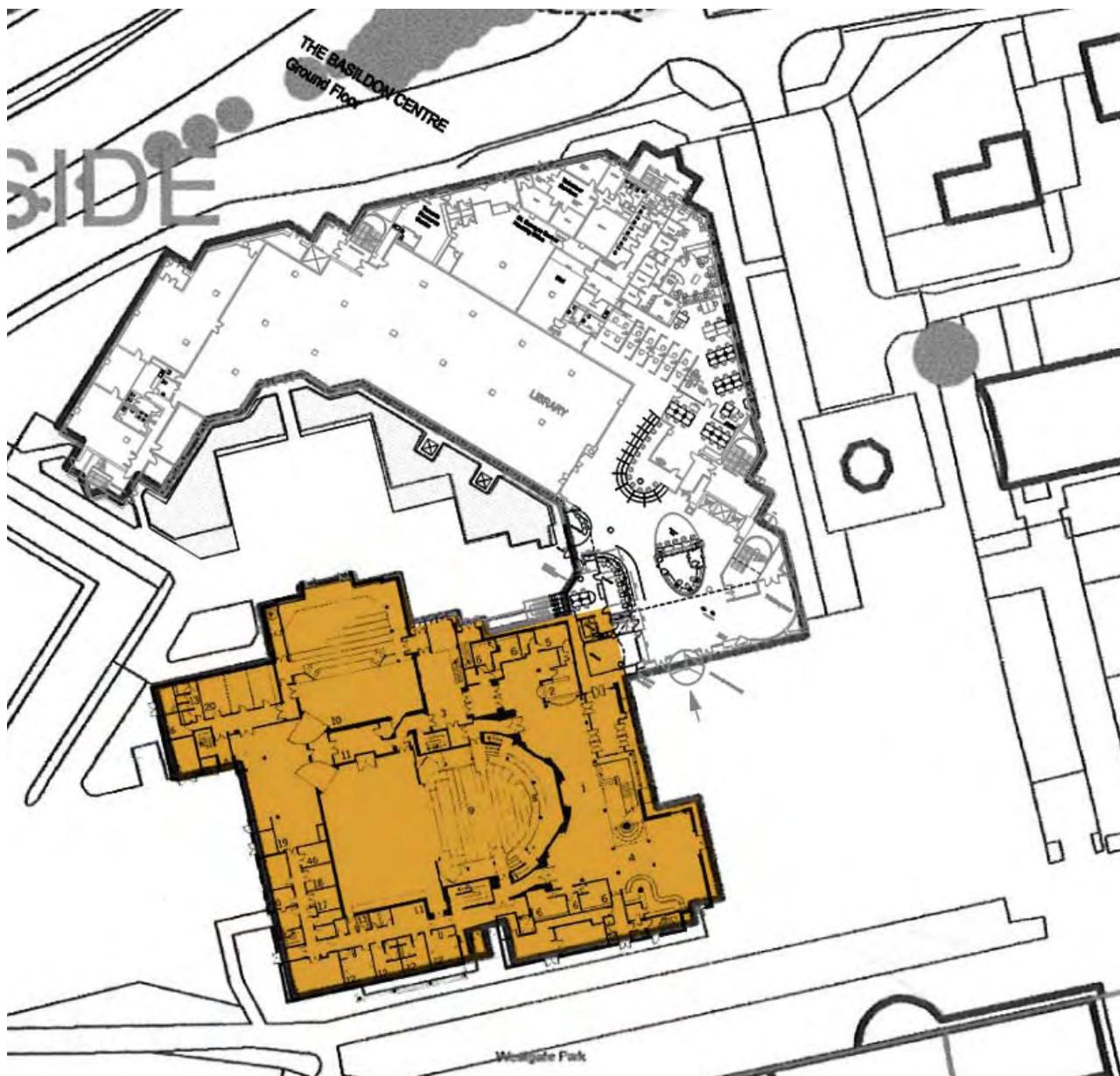
Entrance



But the least good aspect of the Towngate is the entrance. The facade is unattractive and unexciting, with none of the features that would make it look like a theatre or a place of entertainment.

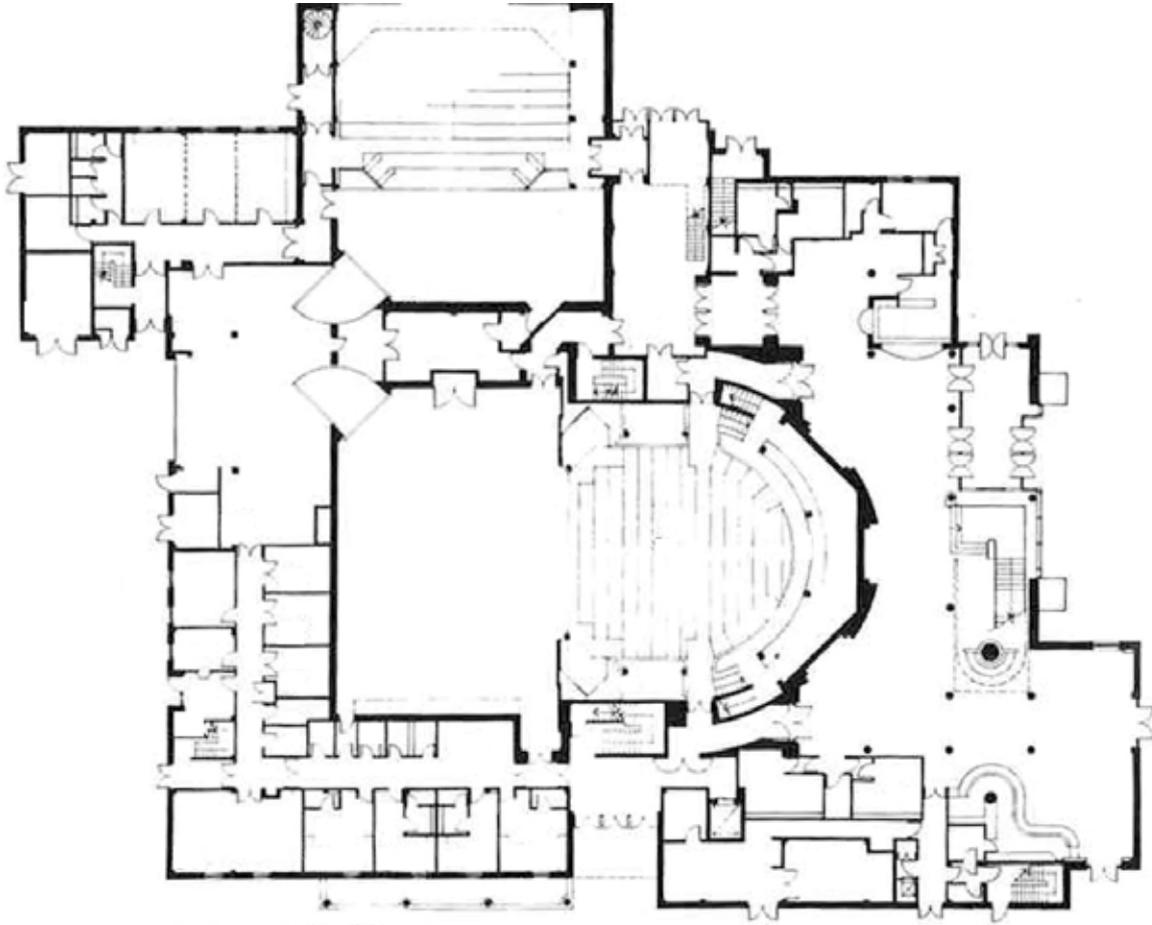
The entrance to the Council Offices is also uninviting, and the paved area outside has little life. Not exactly a place to come to for a good night out!

Site Plan

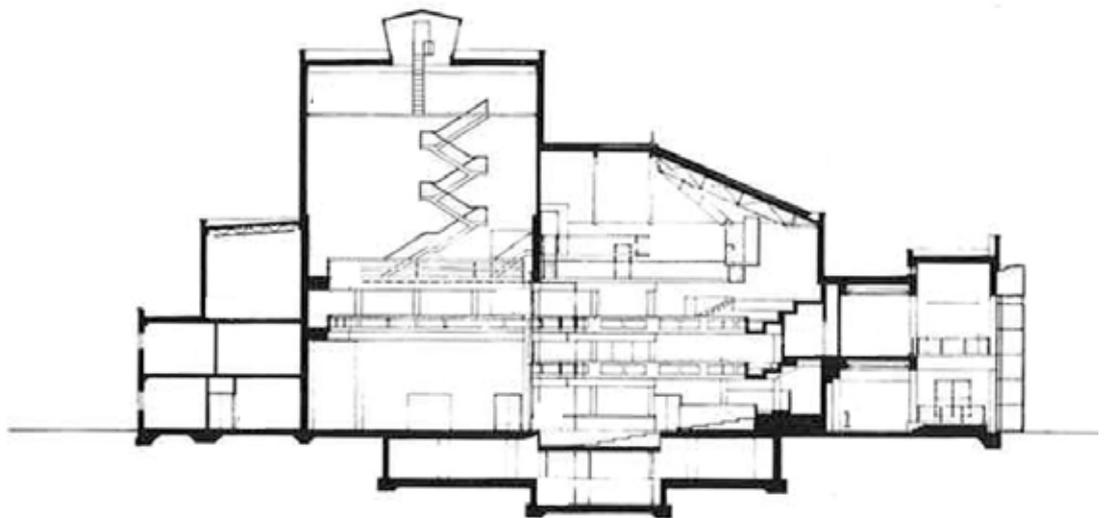


Existing plan

Plans & Sections

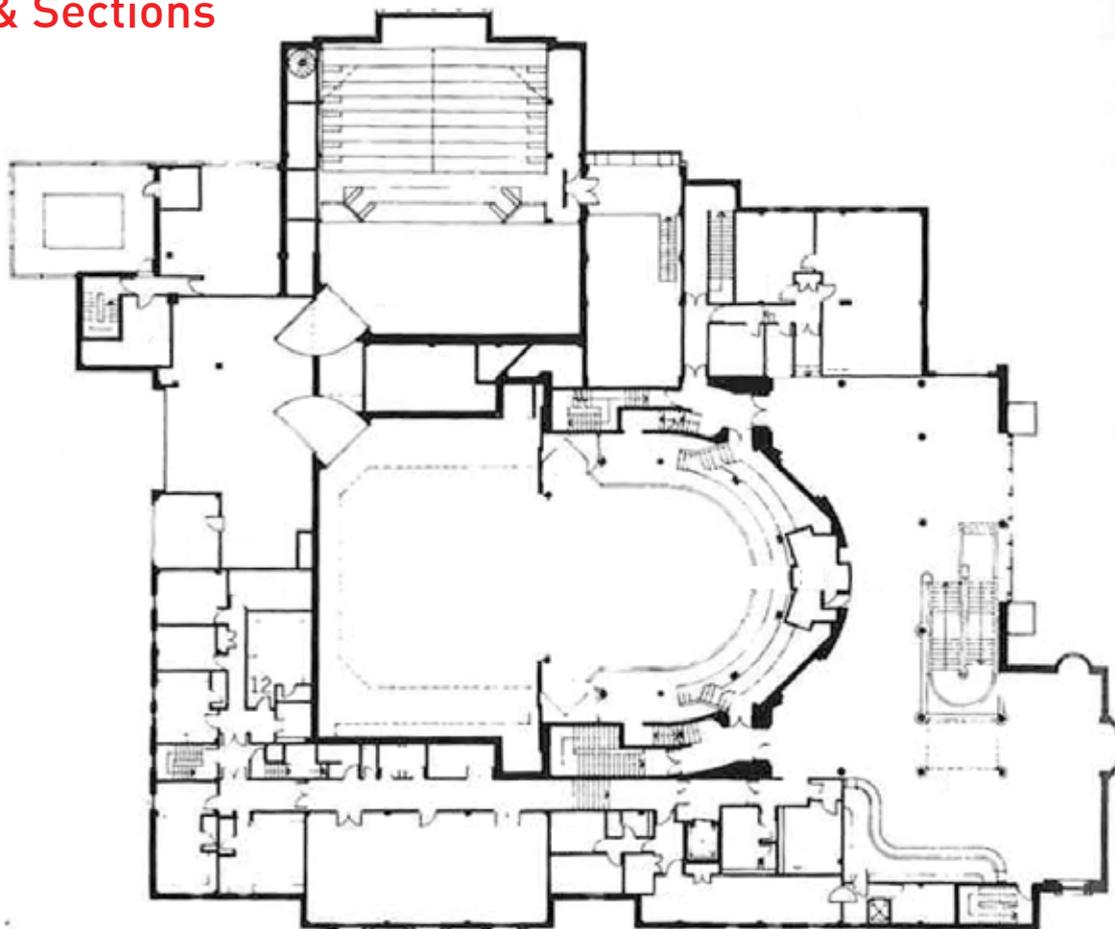


Ground floor plan

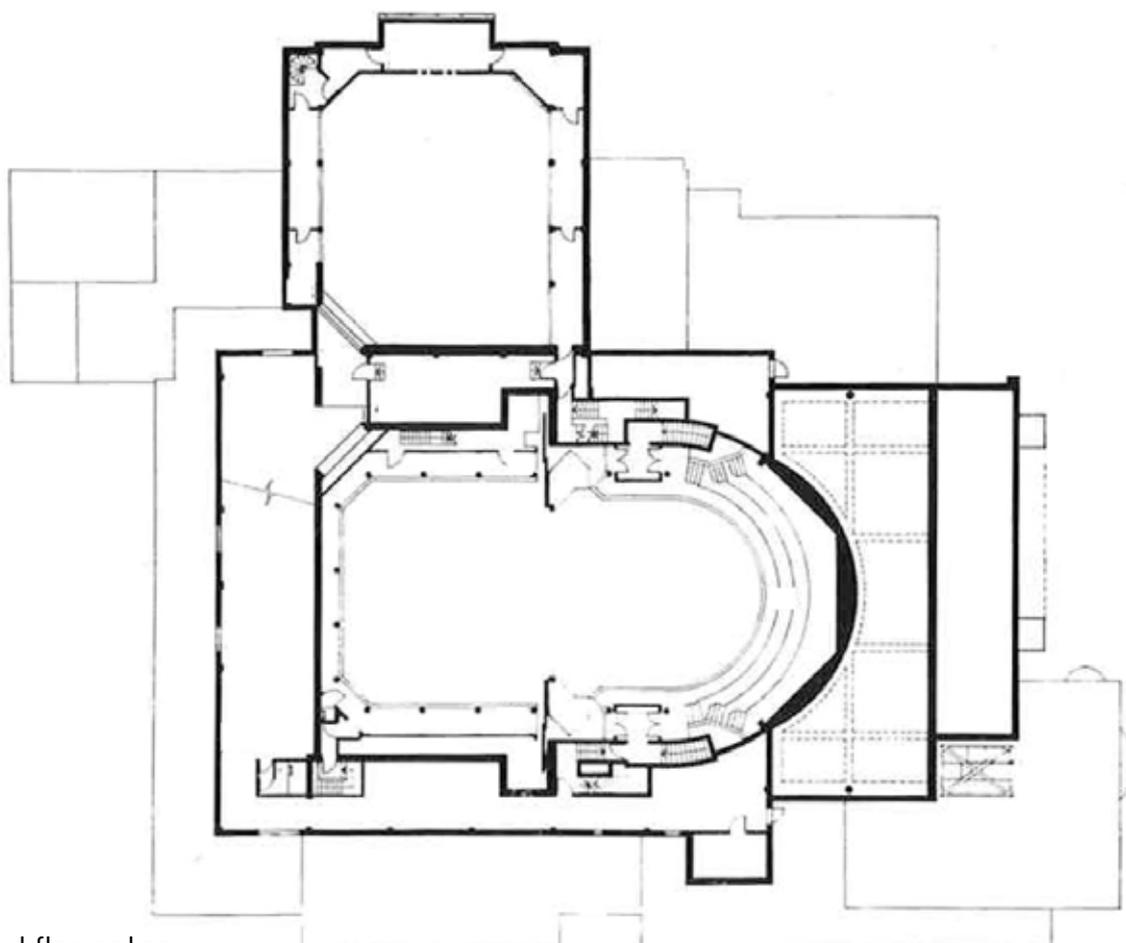


Section

Plans & Sections



First floor plan



Second floor plan

Summary Architectural appraisal of the Towngate Theatre

In some respects the theatre is an enviable facility - a spacious well equipped professional modern theatre in good working order.

It has two shortcomings. One is that the facilities it contains do not meet the current or future market for culture and entertainment or the community needs in Basildon.

The other, is that the style, atmosphere and quality of the public parts of the building are not appealing.

A thriving cultural centre in a town like Basildon should be a place which hosts a wide range of activities throughout the day. Not just a venue that opens occasionally for performances. It is a place that appeals to all ages and is a focus for public life and entertainment in the town.

This building is too valuable to be replaced but it does need to be expanded and extended, this time with a far-sighted brief which caters for the real needs and real opportunities in the community.

The theatre in the town centre masterplan



Second floor plan

Towngate Theatre

The overall development plan for Basildon Town Centre described to us at the time of this report envisages regeneration of the town centre, through new retail and commercial development, a new higher education centre, new leisure and entertainment facilities including possibly a multiplex cinema, all supported by higher density residential development nearer the town centre and improved public space. The aim is to increase the level of activity in the town centre, and particularly the evening economy.

We appreciate that aspects of the Masterplan proposals are still under discussion.

The theatre in the town centre masterplan

Within this plan, St Martin's Square is defined and reinforced as a public space, with the street market relocated here, and more active frontages facing the Square. Changes to the hard and soft landscape will allow the Square to host a wider range of public activity. The Council offices will remain, as probably will the Public Library.

The theatre can play an important role in the town centre regeneration, bringing new life and a new image and an new quality to this, the civic part of the town centre.



3. Alternative concepts for the theatre

Some people believe that the Towngate needs to have a larger capacity to enable it to compete successfully with rival venues.

David Pratley Associates report does not support this view. It suggests the Towngate has little prospect of successfully competing with Southend for commercial audiences and strongly recommends that the Council develop the Towngate as a cultural centre, supporting more community, civic and arts development work. David Pratley's argument is we think convincing and our exploration of alternative concepts for the theatre is focused on two options which support that concept.

In both cases the existing stage, backstage and studio theatre are retained. They are simply too valuable to countenance demolition.

Option A is a proposal which keeps, but improves the existing auditorium, retains the foyer and adds new studios, dance spaces, art gallery and cafe spaces, linking to a refurbished library. It includes a large new flexible space to host a wider range of activities.

In Option B the auditorium and foyer is demolished and replaced with a larger more modern and flexible auditorium and a new foyer with studio, gallery and public spaces.

In both schemes the building has an animated new facade helping bring the Square to life and sustain a night-time economy in the town centre.

Option A

Ground Floor Plan

In this plan the existing auditorium and the foyer structure are retained, with a new extension providing studios, a gallery and a new flexible flat floor performance and function space.

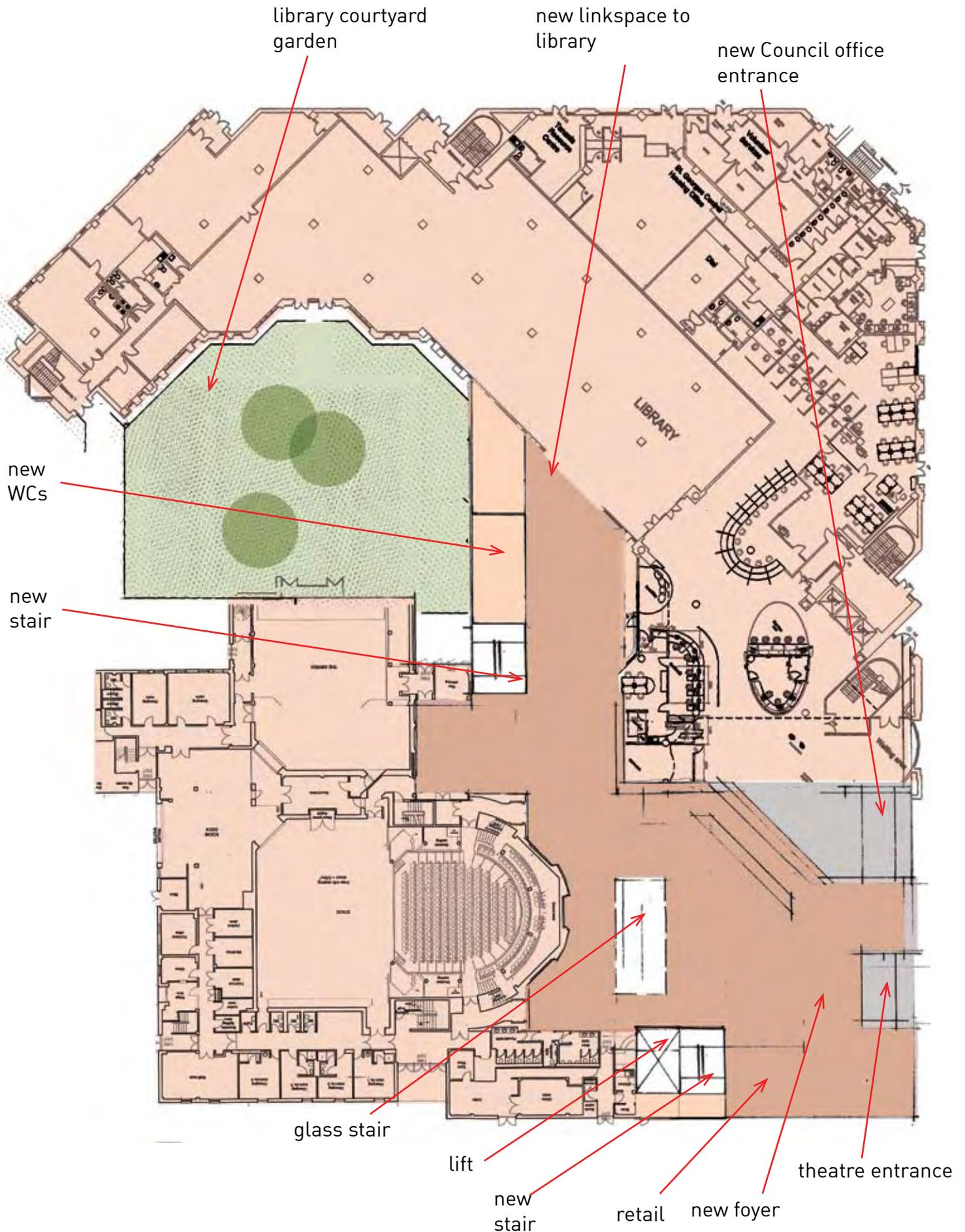
The Towngate auditorium has a new interior design to lighten and modernise its appearance and atmosphere.

The centre has a new entrance leading to an extended foyer, with cafe and retail space. The central feature is a glass staircase which brings light into the heart of the building and a new link space connects the foyer to the library - the library is a key part of the cultural centre.

The remaining part of the courtyard becomes a landscaped garden.

The Council offices have a new entrance facing St Martin's Square.

Option A Ground Floor Plan

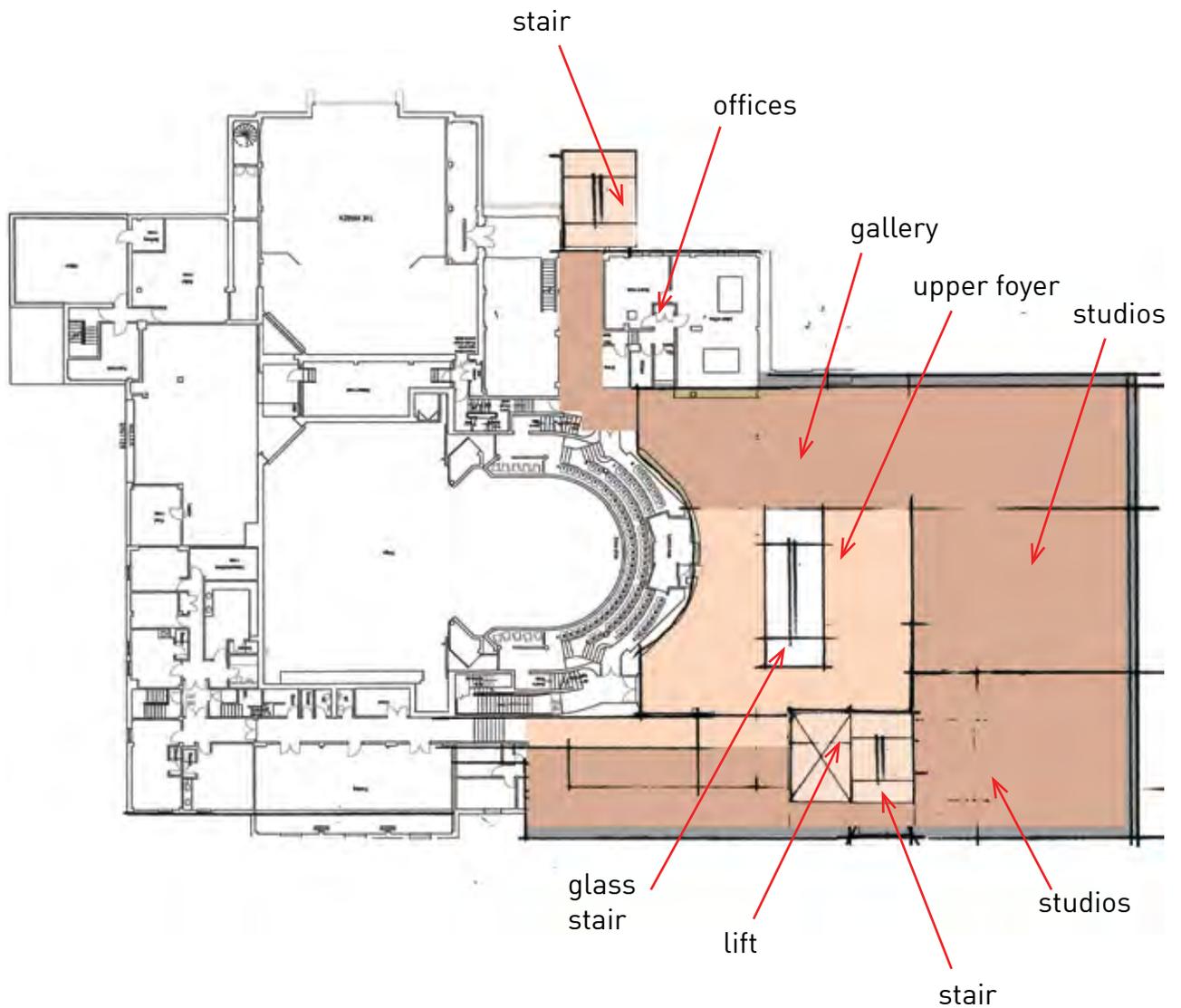


Option A First Floor Plan

The first floor plan is shown with studio spaces and a gallery opening from the upper foyer with the glass stair in the centre.

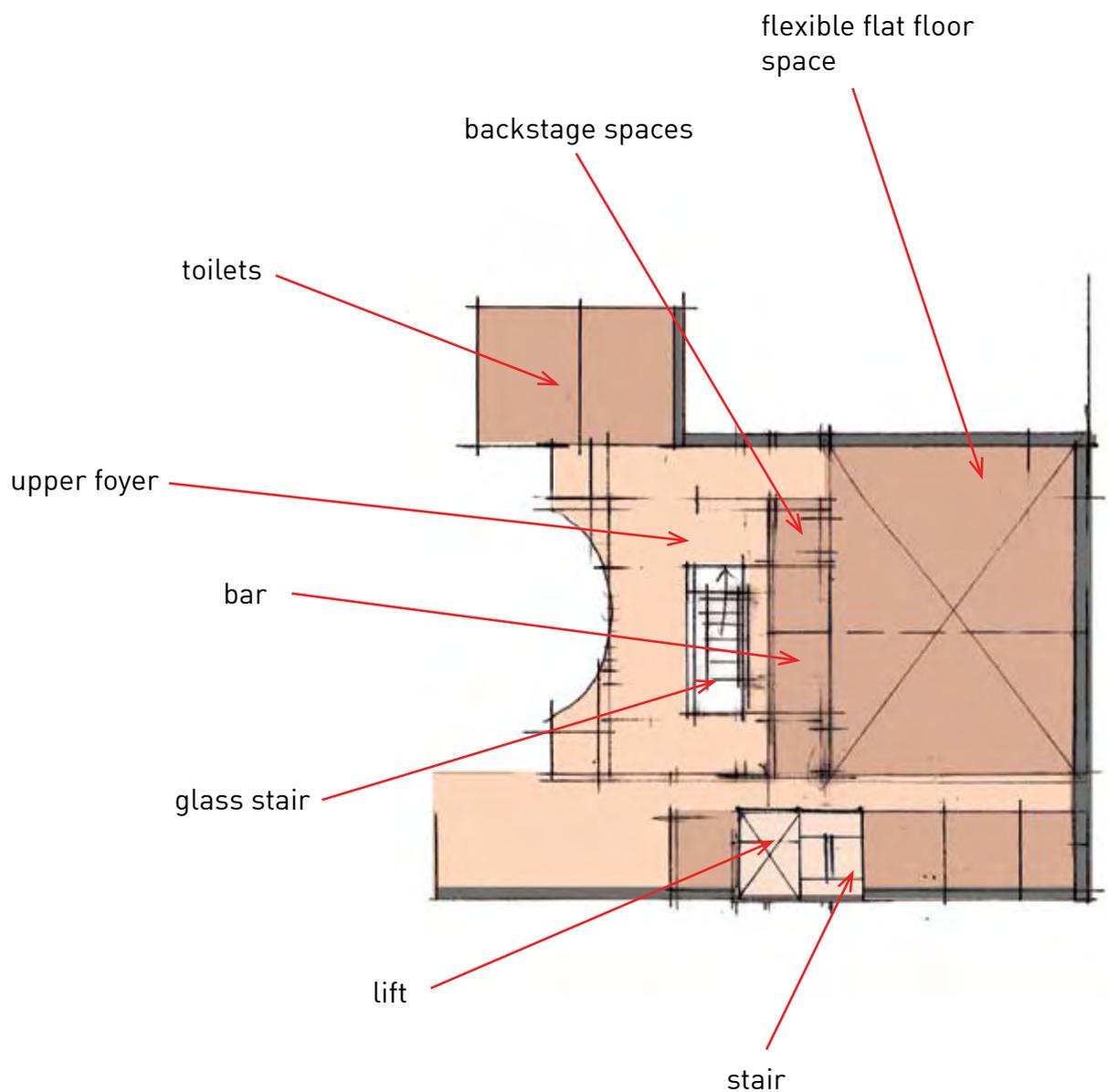
Large new lifts provide easy access.

The important thing is to have simple, flexible, soundproof spaces that can adapt to changing needs.



Option A Second Floor Plan

On the second floor is shown a large flexible flat floor space that can be used for music, dance, cabaret, functions and major meetings - opening from a toplit foyer and with all the necessary supporting spaces. Measuring 17 x 24m and 8m high, this space could hold up to 800 people.

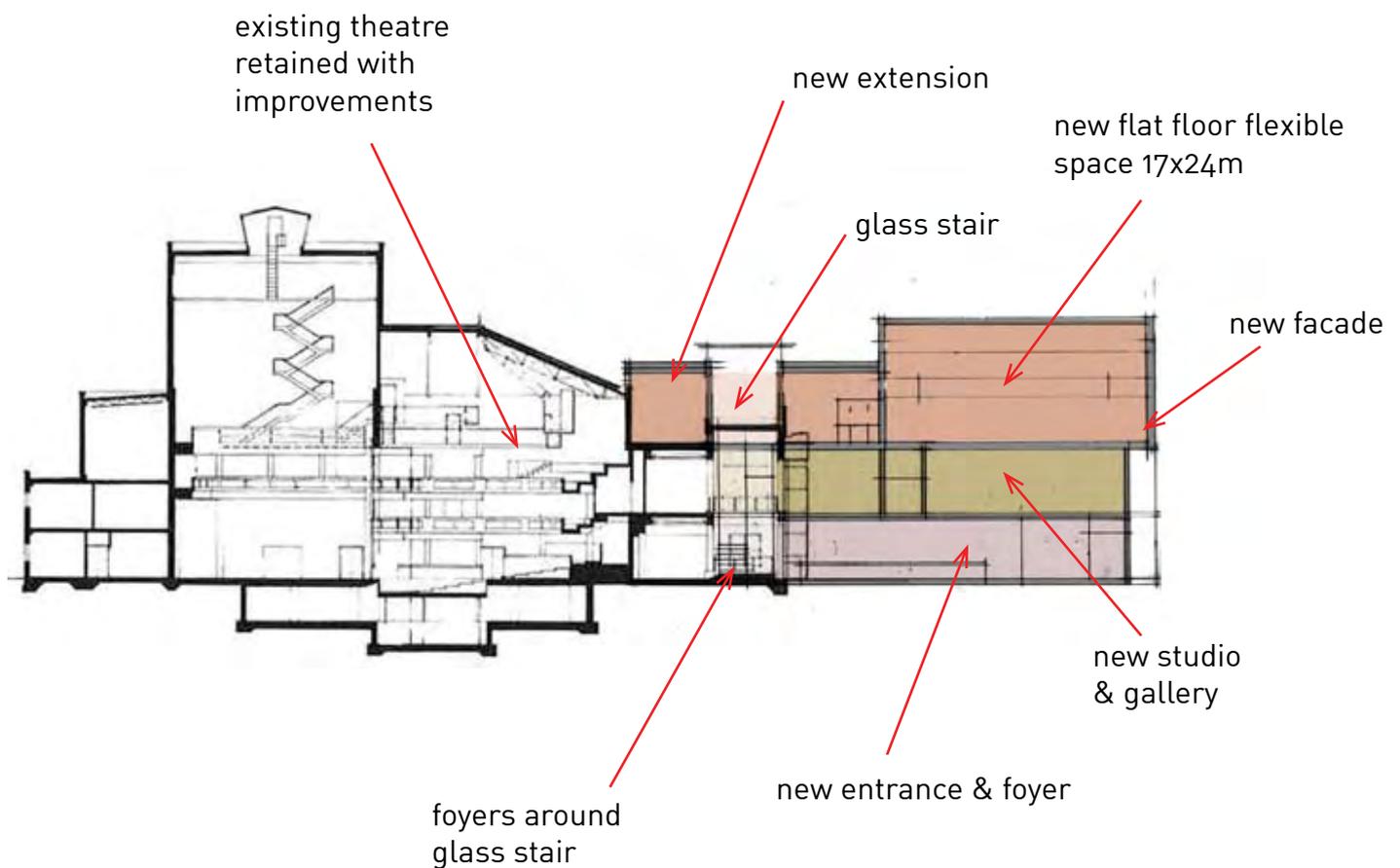


Option A Section

A new glass stair in the existing stairwell is the main feature of the three level foyer.

The new flat floor space is a modern, flexible venue that can host a very wide range of events.

On the first floor, flexible studio, gallery and smaller activity spaces will encourage participatory activities. And on the ground floor more modern, transparent and stylish foyer spaces will draw people into the building, day and night.



Option B

Ground Floor Plan

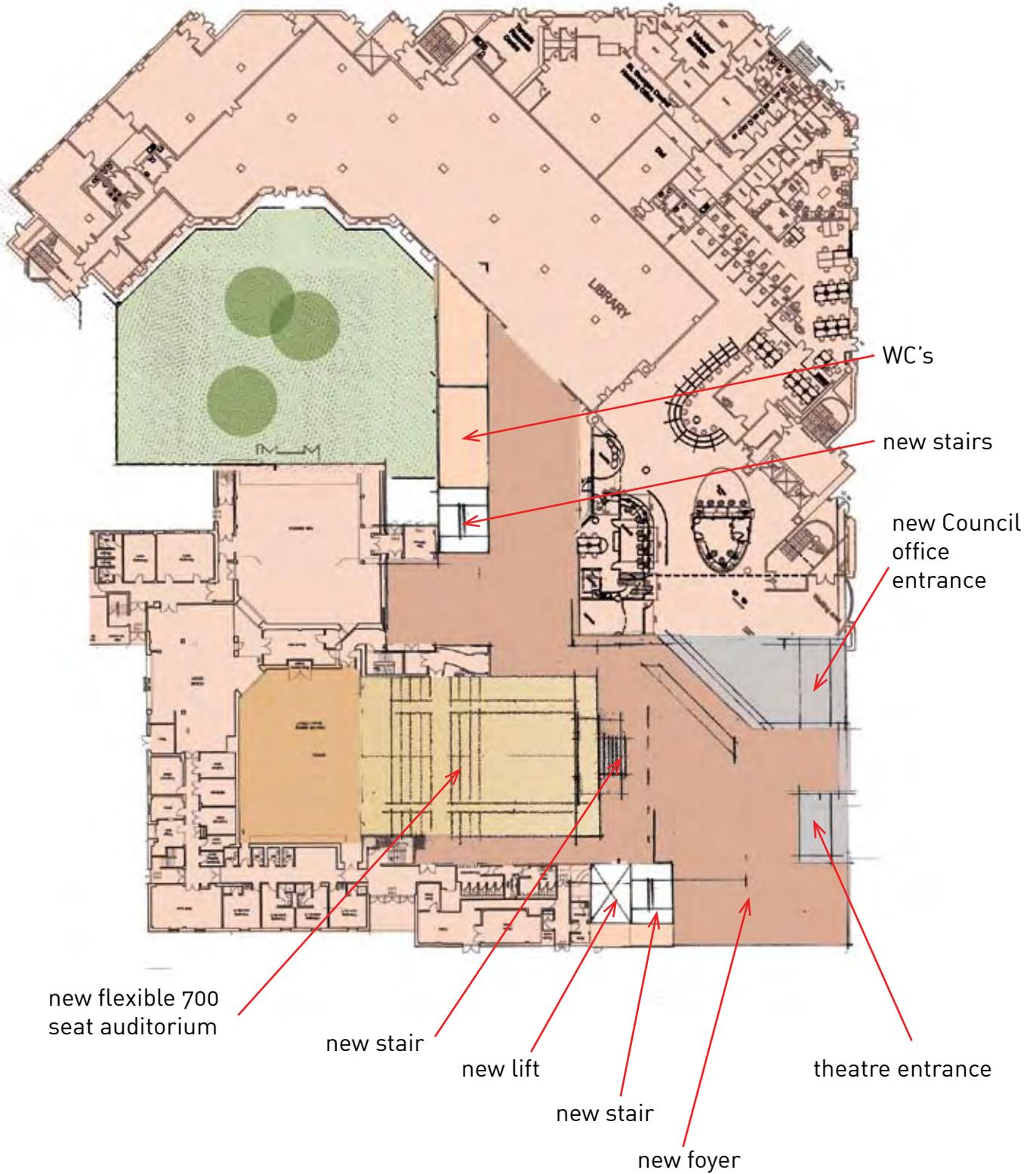
In this plan the existing auditorium and foyer is demolished and a new larger and more flexible auditorium is built, with extended foyer spaces and studio, gallery and activity spaces on the upper floors.

The existing Towngate auditorium has some flexibility, with moving seating units allowing the stalls to be re-configured, but it a labour-intensive exercise and rarely used. A simple single rake of retractable seating as shown here can allow the space to be changed quickly from an auditorium seating 700 to a flat floored space of 36 x 17m. Such a theatre has a less intimate feel, but suits a wider range of uses.

The extended foyer, as in option A, provide space for new cafe/ bar and retail, a new entrance and a new entrance to the Council offices.

This plan however makes it more difficult to improve the connection between the Mirren Studio and the foyer, or to link the foyer and the library.

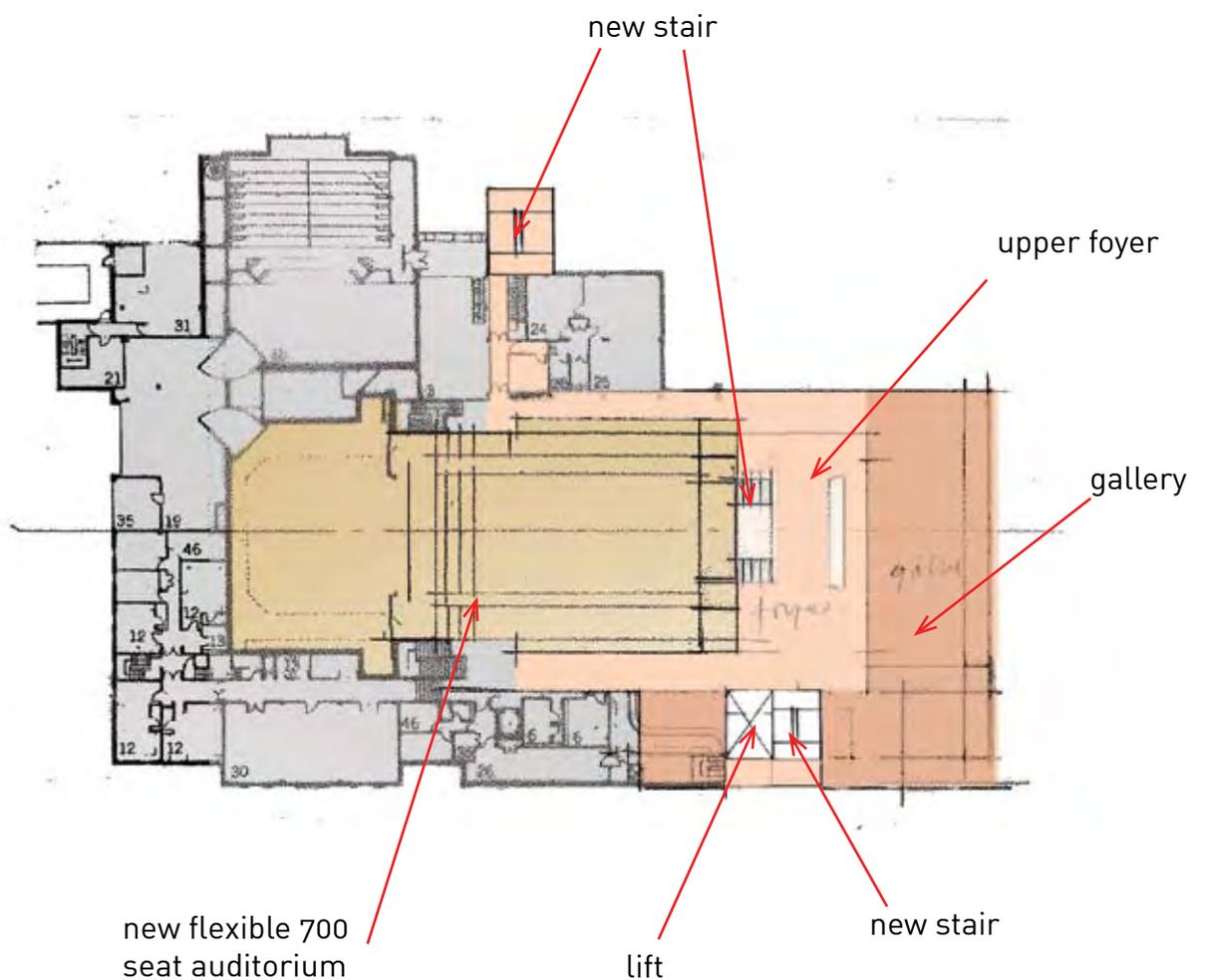
Option B Ground Floor Plan



Option B First Floor Plan

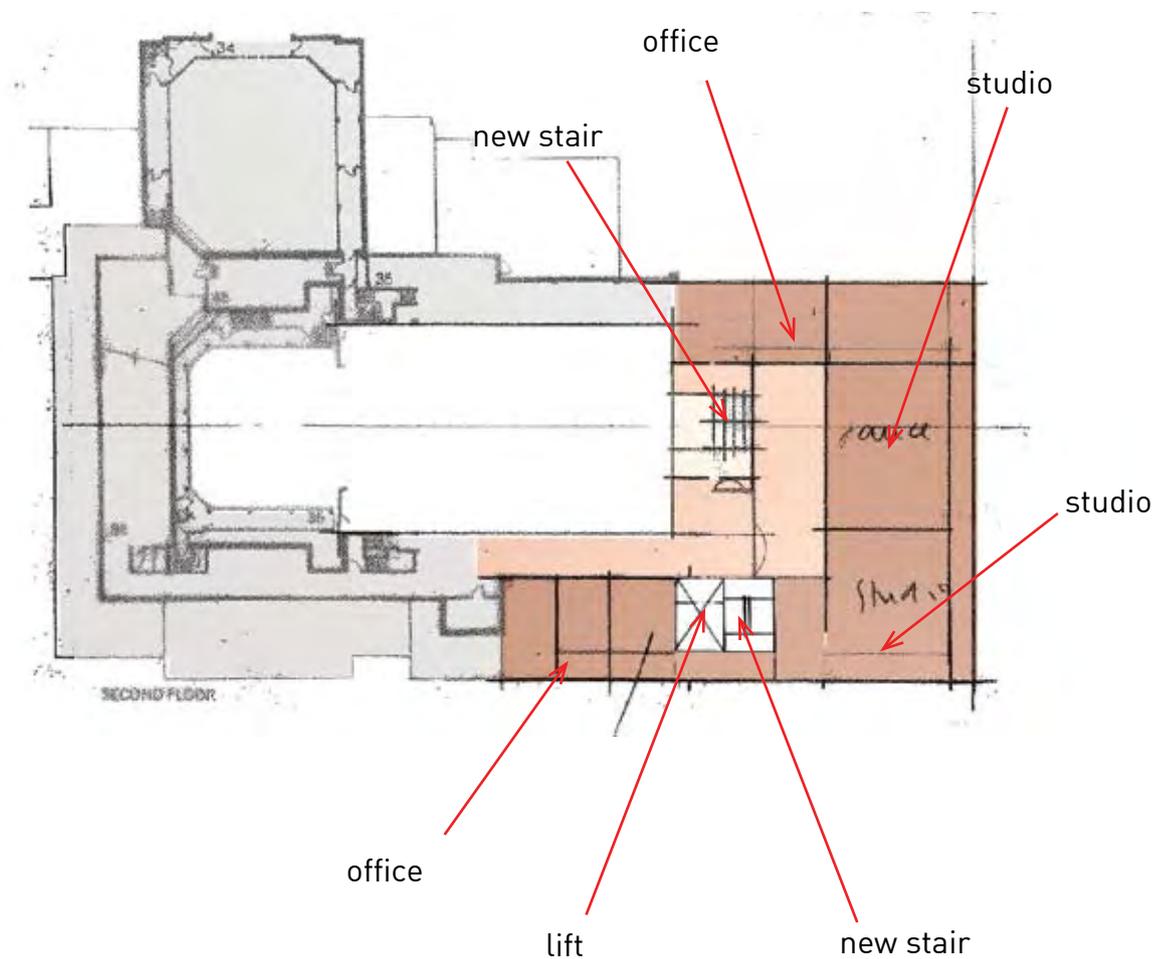
As with option A, the first floor provides gallery, studio and activity room space, opening off a foyer with new stair and lift.

The new auditorium is shown with galleries on the side walls to give the space focus.



Option B Second Floor Plan

Here the second floor is shown providing space for dance studios

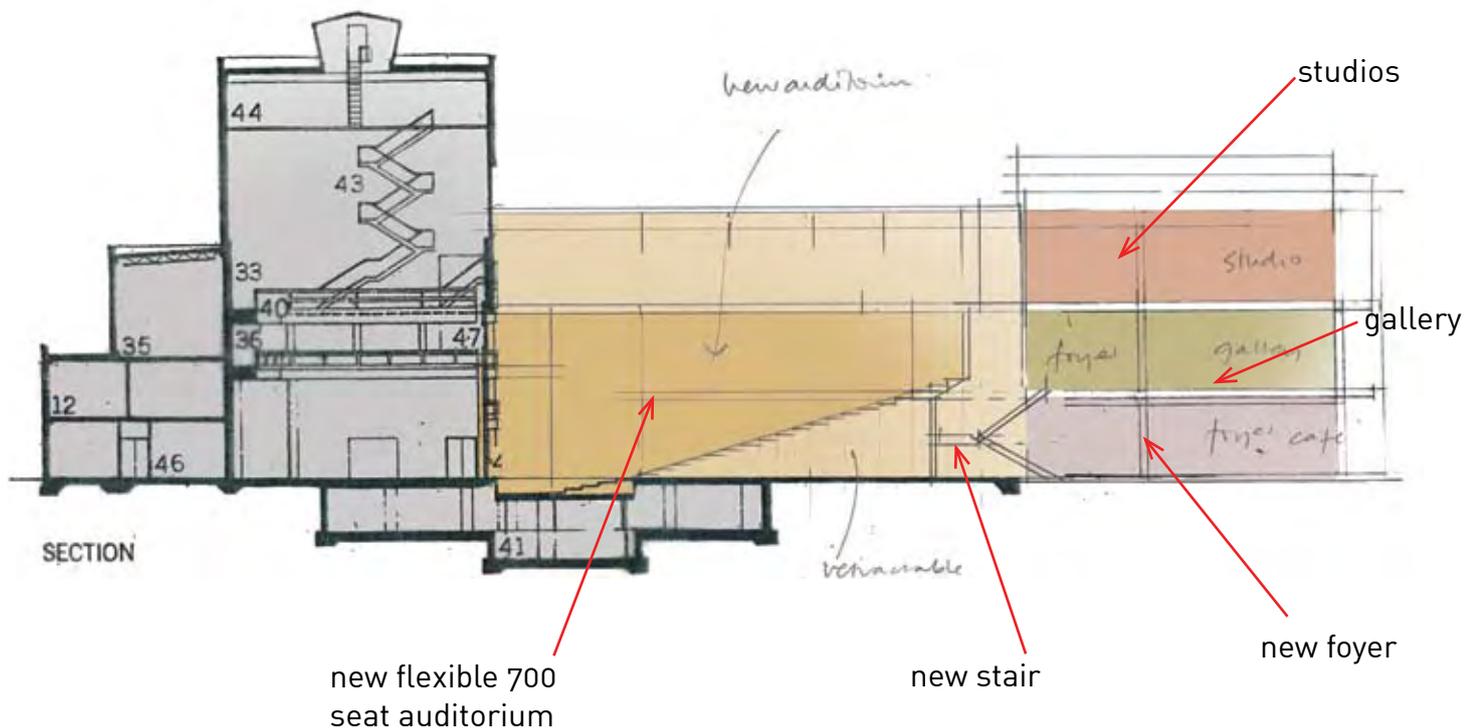


Option B Section

The existing stage, backstage and theatre basement is retained.

The new larger auditorium has retractable seating for 650. Gallery seating on the side walls increases the capacity to 700. In flat floor form, say for a rock concert, the space could hold up to 1000 people.

A new toplit stair connects the three levels of the foyer extension with spaces for dance, a gallery, activity rooms and cafe and bars.



Both options extend the theatre forward to make a new face to the new Square. This can make a more animated and transparent facade, with a more modern image. This development creates a new entrance to the Council offices and has the potential for theatre and offices together to give a new civic identity to the town centre.



4. Cost estimates

Cost estimates have been prepared by Quantity Surveyor, John Burgess of Davis Langdon. More detailed estimates are given on the pages following this summary.

Summary: Option A

1. Improvements to existing auditorium	£1,090,000
2. Alterations to retained foyer space (1774m ²)	£4,300,000
3. New Extension (2667m ²)	£8,100,000
	<hr/>
	£13,490,000

Costs are current, inclusive of fees, excluding VAT

Summary: Option B

1. Surgical demolition of existing auditorium and foyer and consequential alterations to services and performance systems (1288m ²)	£ 930,000
2. Construction of new auditorium, foyer and activity spaces on three levels (5,148m ²)	£19,980,000
	<hr/>
	£20,910,000

Costs are current, inclusive of fees, excluding VAT

4. Cost estimates

Davis Langdon

Option A			
Refurbish Auditorium	m2	Rate	Total
Strip out		Item	30,000
Balcony Fronts		Item	100,000
New Carpets		Item	40,000
Reline/ redecorate walls and ceilings		Item	100,000
Upgrade doors		Item	50,000
Technical Equipment		Item	150,000
Alterations to electrical services		Item	200,000
Sub total			670,000
Preliminaries		20%	130,000
Contingencies		10%	80,000
Total Auditorium construction cost			880,000
Professional Fees		20%	180,000
Loose FFE			30,000
Total Current Construction plus Fee Cost			1,090,000

Option A			
Alterations to Foyers (1,774m2)	m2	Rate	Total
Strip out and Structural alterations	1,774	200	350,000
Glass Stair	1,774	120	210,000
Replacement Services throughout	1,774	750	1,330,000
Partitions and Finishes	1,774	225	400,000
Alterations to Facades	1,774	100	180,000
Fixed fittings	1,774	100	180,000
Sub total			2,650,000
Preliminaries		20%	530,000
Contingencies		10%	320,000
Total Foyers construction cost			3,500,000
Professional Fees		20%	700,000
Loose FFE			100,000
Total Current Construction plus Fee Cost			4,300,000
Total Current Construction plus Fee Cost per m2			2,424

Option A			
New Extension (2,667m2)	m2	Rate	Total
Substructure	2,667	120	320,000
Frame and superstructure	2,667	350	930,000
External Walls	2,667	400	1,070,000
Partitions and Finishes	2,667	225	600,000
Mechanical and Electrical Services	2,667	750	2,000,000
Fixed fittings	2,667	50	130,000
Sub total	2,667		5,050,000
Preliminaries		20%	1,010,000
Contingencies		10%	610,000
Total Extension construction cost			6,670,000
Professional Fees		20%	1,330,000
Loose FFE			100,000
Total Current Construction plus Fee Cost			8,100,000
Total Current Construction plus Fee Cost per m2			3,037

Option A			
Refurbish auditorium			1,090,000
Alterations to Foyers			4,300,000
New Extension			8,100,000
Total Option A			13,490,000

4. Cost estimates

Davis Langdon

Option B			
Demolish Auditorium and Foyer (1,288m2)	m2	Rate	Total
Strip out and surgical demolition		Item	370,000
alterations of Services/ connections to BOH		Item	200,000
Sub total			570,000
Preliminaries		20%	110,000
Contingencies		10%	70,000
Total Auditorium construction cost			750,000
Professional Fees		20%	150,000
Loose FFE			30,000
Total Current Construction plus Fee Cost			930,000
Total Current Construction plus Fee Cost per m2			757

Option B			
New Auditorium and Foyer (5,148m2)	m2	Rate	Total
Substructure	5,148	200	1,030,000
Frame and superstructure	5,148	450	2,320,000
External Walls	5,148	400	2,060,000
Partitions and Finishes	5,148	400	2,060,000
Mechanical and Electrical Services	5,148	800	4,120,000
Technical Equipment (Sound and Lighting)		Item	500,000
Seating		Item	150,000
Fixed fittings	5,148	60	310,000
Sub total			12,550,000
Preliminaries		20%	2,510,000
Contingencies		10%	1,510,000
Total Foyers construction cost			16,570,000
Professional Fees		20%	3,310,000
Loose FFE			100,000
Total Current Construction plus Fee Cost			19,980,000
Total Current Construction plus Fee Cost per m2			3,881

Option B			
Demolish Auditorium and Foyer (1,288m2)			930,000
New Auditorium and Foyer (5,148m2)			19,980,000
Total Option B			20,910,000

5. Summary discussion

It is generally agreed that the Towngate stage and backstage are too valuable a resource to consider complete replacement.

But is it worth demolishing the auditorium and foyer to make a more modern theatre?

What are the relative merits of these two options?

In our minds there are four advantages in Option A - the one that retains the existing auditorium.

The first is that, as with the stage and backstage, the existing auditorium is a good facility - very good for some kinds of performance and of about the right capacity for a more community based programme.

The second is that Option A provides two major space and the combination of a large new space and a fixed audience that will allow more activities and be more useful than a single flexible space.

The third is that it allows the library (and the Mirren studio) to be better connected to the foyer so that it can be an active part of the cultural centre.

The fourth is of course cost. Option A you provides more facilities at less cost.

The disadvantage of option A is that the large new space is on the second floor, but large new audience and stage lifts can make it accessible.

Next Steps

The next step is for Basildon Council and Barratt Homes to consider this report, and then review and confirm or amend the scope of work outlined in the brief for Stage 2 of the study.

We would be delighted to discuss any aspects of this report and the next stage.

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