

REPORT TO EXECUTIVE

PORTFOLIO AREA: LEISURE, CULTURE AND HERITAGE

Date of Meeting: 23rd October 2006

Public

Key Decision: Yes

Recorded in Forward Plan:

Yes

Inside Policy Framework

Title: THEATRE/PERFORMING ARTS CENTRE FEASIBILITY STUDY
Report of: DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES
Report reference: CS 56/06

Summary:

This report provides a summary of the initial findings following extensive work by the consultants appointed by the City Council. The need for a facility is shown and a number of potential site options presented. A copy of the full report has been placed in each of the Group Offices and is available in the Customer Contact Centre for the public to access.

Recommendations:

The Executive is recommended to:

- (i) Endorse the recommendations of the Stage 1 feasibility study.
- (ii) Approve officers to progress the Stage 2 study as set out within the report.
- (iii) Approve officers to investigate the development of the Sands Centre Hall as an events venue, the consequences of which will require options to re-locate some sport and leisure provision to community based locations across the City to be assessed.

Contact Officer: MARK BEVERIDGE

Ext: 7350

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND OPTIONS

1.1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.2 The initial stages and consultation on Carlisle Renaissance have established a high level of support and potential for a theatre/performing arts centre in the City which could provide major social, cultural and economic benefits for the City. Such a project could provide a tangible milestone in the Renaissance of Carlisle.
- 1.3 The City Council in partnership with Arts Council England North West have funded this first stage of the feasibility study into the potential of a theatre/arts centre in the City. The purpose of this first stage was to establish if demand existed for such a facility, what form this might take and undertake a very preliminary assessment of sites.
- 1.4 The first stage involved consultation with a wide range of groups and organisations (refer Appendix 1), plus a questionnaire sent to members of the Carlisle Citizen's Panel. From the outset it was intended that the study would not go into any detail with regard to costs etc, that is planned to be part of the second and third stages where the principle would be examined in detail resulting in a preferred site, business plan and financial implications.

1.5 THE STUDY

- 1.6 A copy of the full report has been placed in the Group offices and a copy of the Executive summary (Appendix 2) is appended to this report for information.
- 1.7 The positive conclusion is that Carlisle has an unmet demand for a theatre/arts centre and the research which has been carried out as part of the study underpins this in strategic terms.
- 1.8 In the Citizens panel survey of 608 replies from 1500 asked, 69% answered 'yes' to whether Carlisle should have a new performing arts venue and only 11% said no. The other 20% were undecided. This is a statistically valid representation of the whole Carlisle population and shows clear support for a facility. However, it must be said that at this time no financial aspects have been discussed which might temper such an enthusiastic affirmation for a theatre/arts centre.
- 1.9 The potential components of the ideal facility are identified as:
- A 400 seat theatre
 - A smaller flexible studio space
 - Up to 2 cinema screens
 - A range of smaller spaces for meetings/workshops

Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers: CLS 003/06

- Community media resource facility
- Catering facilities
- Exhibition/gallery space and office facilities for groups or individual artists.

1.10 Roger Lancaster Associates proposes 4 options for further exploration:

- (i) A new build as part of Carlisle Renaissance developments
- (ii) Redevelop the Lonsdale Cinema
- (iii) Redevelop the Methodist Central Hall
- (iv) New Build/redevelopment elsewhere in Carlisle i.e.(Herbert Atkinson House)

1.11 A further option seen as additional but complimentary to the above, is the development of the Sands Centre main hall as an events only venue. This would require investment in community based facilities to cater for existing mainly sports uses either as part of revised school provision, as stand alone facilities or as part of existing community provision.

1.12 SUMMARY

1.13 The report provides a considerable amount of data and adds significantly to the debate about a theatre/arts centre in the city. Attempts have been made in the past to bring this project to fruition. This study lays a firm foundation for the subsequent stages to help the Council to consider the matter in the context of the current position, with a new University and Carlisle Renaissance both significant factors today, which were not part of previous studies. Having established that there is a demand and provided an indication of the form that a theatre/performing arts centre could be the Executive must decide if it wishes to assess the economic viability of such a facility. There are two pieces of work which should be progressed: -

- (i) A stage 2 study for the theatre/performing arts centre which would assess the capital and revenue costs and prepare an outline business plan. This would include a rigorous examination of space usage through market research, management and governance options and potential funding streams. Each of the identified options would need to be developed up to R.I.B.A. Stage B.

The outcomes from this report would enable the Council to take an informed decision to progress this initiative.

This stage 2 study can be funded from existing budgets with match funding from the Arts Council and would take approx. 4-5 months to complete once the commission is awarded.

A copy of the brief for stage 2 is appended.

A further Stage 3 would be required to prepare detailed proposals for the preferred option.

Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers: CLS 003/06

- (ii) A study needs to be progressed in conjunction with Carlisle Leisure Ltd to assess the potential to develop the events potential at the Sands. Similarly the current review of secondary schools in Carlisle may provide the opportunity to explore community sports provision. Consultation with the Education Authority and schools would be undertaken.

This initial study would be undertaken by existing staff and take 3-4 months. The outcome would enable the Council to assess this option in more detail.

2. CONSULTATION

2.1 Consultation to Date.

PFH, Theatre/ Arts Centre Working Group, Senior Management Team, Groups and Organisations identified within the body of the RLA report (see Appendix 1)

2.2 Consultation proposed.

As 2.1 plus Community O&S, Carlisle Leisure Ltd, Education Authority, Secondary Schools.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 The Executive is recommended to:

- (i) Endorse the recommendations of the Stage 1 feasibility study.
- (ii) Approve officers to progress the Stage 2 study as set out within the report.
- (iii) Approve officers to investigate the development of the Sands Centre Hall as an events venue, the consequences of which will require options to re-locate some sport and leisure provision to community based locations across the City to be assessed.

4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 To enable officers to progress stages 2 and 3 and invite tenders for the work.

5. IMPLICATIONS

- Staffing/Resources – Stages 2 & 3 will be subject to formal tenders and the resources which a company can apply is needed over and above that which the City Council is using to progress this project
- Financial – At this stage the main financial implication is the cost of the feasibility study. The Council has a balance of £13,000 available plus contributions from Arts Council England North West and Carlisle

Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers: CLS 003/06

Renaissance for the next two stages. These stages will themselves provide members with a clearer understanding of the potential capital and revenue costs of establishing a theatre/arts centre in the city.

- Legal – None in the context of this report.
- Corporate – The Council is the organisation most likely to facilitate the provision of a cultural facility in the foreseeable future. It would link well with the establishment of the University and contribute to the priority of Learning City through the opportunities a theatre/arts centre provides to link with schools and community groups.
- Risk Management – The primary risk at the moment is that funding is insufficient for the next phases of the study, this is low but until a cost is identified it cannot be eliminated. In reputational terms no economic assessment has been made on the viability of such a facility and public expectations may grow and which ultimately can not be met. For a variety of reasons some of the preferred options may drop out during the course of the Stage 2 study.
- Equality Issues – Enhancing cultural provision will significantly assist in ensuring that access to the arts is made easier for local people without the need to travel outside of the region
- Environmental – Any potential building would comply with the Council's Environmental Policy and any other requirements applicable at the time.
- Crime and Disorder – Although no direct link, it has been shown that young people in particular can through art in it's many forms be engaged and diverted away from acts of anti-social behaviour.

Appendix 1: Consultations

Carlisle City Council Cllr

Michael Mitchelson Cllr	Council Leader and Leader of the Conservative Group
Ray Bloxham	Council Deputy Leader
Cllr Michael Bowden	Leader of the Labour Group
Cllr Trevor Allison	Leader of the Lib Dem Group
Cllr Ray Knapton	Portfolio Holder, Health & Community
Maggie Mooney	Chief Executive
Mike Battersby	Director of Community Services
Catherine Elliott	Director of Development Director
Angela Brown	of Corporate Services
Mark Beveridge	Head of Culture & Community Services
Hilary Wade	Museums & Arts Manager
Mick North	Arts Development Manager
Ian McNichol	Director of Carlisle Renaissance Development
Chris Pearson	Manager, Carlisle Renaissance Tourism
John Bell	Manager
Peter Messenger	Principal Conservation Officer
Rob Burns	Head of Community Support
Ian Hinde	Youth Engagement Officer

Bruce Bennison	Cumbria County Council - Head of Cultural Policy Unit
Carole Leathley	Cumbria C.C. - Community Development Officer Youth
Joanne King	Work in Cumbria, Development Co-ordinator
Richard Greenwood	Cumbria Tourism Board - Director of Development

Malcolm Harris	Eden District Council - Cultural Services Officer
Rebecca Coggins	Dumfries & Galloway Council - Arts Manager

Ian Tabbron	Head of Theatre, Arts Council England, North West
-------------	---------------------------------------------------

Stewart Swift	Area Manager, North West Development Agency
James Berresford	Director of Tourism, North West Development Agency

Ian Haythornthwaite	Acting Chief Executive, Cumbria Vision
Kate Willard	Chief Executive, Rural Regeneration Cumbria
John Kinsella	Director, Creative Cumbria

Euan Cartwright	Chair of Governing Body, Cumbria University
Charles Mitchell	Vice-Principal, Cumbria Institute of the Arts
Dr Neil Simco	Principal, St Martin's College
Moirra Tattersall	Principal, Carlisle College

Jim Douglas	Director, Carlisle Leisure Ltd
Ian Condlon	The Sands

Kevin Parr	Chief Executive, Cumberland Building Society
------------	----------------------------------------------

Eric Martlew MP	Member of Parliament for Carlisle
-----------------	-----------------------------------

Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers: CLS 003/06

Arts organisations

Mike Fox	Chair, Carlisle Lonsdale Arts Centre Trust
Fiona Robson	Save the Lonsdale Campaign
Linda Hargreaves	Save the Lonsdale Campaign
Gillian Peel	Director, Prism Arts
Garry Kerr	Director, Rhythm of Life and The Brickyard Carlisle
Barbara Watson	Green Room Club/West Walls Theatre Chairman,
Stuart Stokell	Brampton Players
Andy Booth	Director, Quondam Theatre
Michael Eccles	Co-ordinator, New Directions
Bill Swarbrick	Secretary, City of Carlisle Orchestra
Jane Dudman	Matrix Arts
Russell Cherrington	Cumbria Film Collective
Peadar Sweeney	Cumbria Film Collective
Margaret Riches	Director, Cumbria Arts in Education
Barbara Slack David	Highlights Rural Touring
Lyons	Vice Chairman, Carlisle Musical Society
Sarah German	Source Cafe
Jeremy Latimer	Lowood Gallery
Ellis Amos	Carlisle International Summer Festival
Kate Brundrett	Cumbria Network
Rich Webster	11 th Hour Studios
Irene Faith	Director, Eden Arts
Dan Russell	Atlas Works
Myrna Reay	Carlisle Folk & Blues Club
Barbara Renel	Cumbria Dance
Ben Gates	Sound Ark
Catherine Traveller	Raging Gibbon
Stephen Matthews	Friends of Classical Music at The Sands
Patric Gilchrist	Chief Executive, Theatre by the Lake
Sam Mason	Chief Executive, Brewery Arts Centre
Geof Keys	Artistic Director, Queen's Hall, Hexham
Jenny Wilson	Dumfries & Galloway Arts Association

Citizens Panel

1,500 questionnaires distributed.

608 replies received

Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers: CLS 003/06

**Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985
the report has been prepared in part from the following papers: CLS 003/06**

Creative Space

A new theatre & arts centre for Carlisle

A report to Carlisle City Council

by

Roger Lancaster Associates

October 2006

Creative Space

A new theatre & arts centre for Carlisle

Contents	Para	Page
Executive summary		3
Section 1 Study brief and methodology	1 - 8	7
Section 2 Strategic context and issues		9
The Carlisle District	9 -12	9
Carlisle Perspective	13 - 28	9
County perspective	29 - 38	12
Education	39 - 47	14
Creative industries	48 - 53	16
Regional perspective	54 - 61	17
Tourism	62 - 81	18
Strategic connections	82	21
Section 3 Current performing arts activity		22
Performing arts venues in Carlisle	83 - 91	22
Performing arts companies	92 - 96	24
Regional performing arts venues & companies	97 - 103	24
Perceived strengths and weaknesses	104 - 110	26
Section 4 Assessment of potential audience/market		27
Mapping the catchment area	111 - 129	27
Citizens Panel Questionnaire analysis	130 - 145	31
Section 5 Potential sites and options		34
What would make an 'ideal' facility?	146 –155	34
Previous studies and options	156 - 161	35
Current study options	162 - 194	38
Criteria – selection and ranking	195 - 197	46
Appendices		
1. Consultations		47
2. Key Reference Documents		49
3. Citizens Panel Questionnaire		50
4. Postcode maps of current arts attenders		53
5. ACORN category profiles		57
6. Current and future Trends		59

Executive Summary

Section 1: Study brief and methodology

- S 1 The key objective for the study is *“a thorough examination of the need for a new performing arts facility in Carlisle and – broadly speaking – what kind of facility will best meet that need”*.
- S.2 People’s perceptions of what is meant by a ‘performing arts facility’, ‘theatre’ or an ‘arts centre’ vary considerably. This report uses the term ‘theatre’ when specifically referring to a performance space, and to an ‘arts centre’ when referring to the overall building and the potential activities within it.

Section 2: Strategic context

- S.3 The report reviews the current strategic planning contexts as perceived from local, county and regional perspectives with attention also being given to education, creative industry and tourism issues. This review is based on published documents, web research and extensive consultations. There is a striking compatibility, if not convergence, evident across the various strategic perspectives. The language used may differ, with the detail varying dependant on the perspective that is being applied, but there is a clear strategic consensus that can be summarised as follows:
- Carlisle is the sub-regional cultural and economic capital of Cumbria as well as the county town.
 - Carlisle is not currently achieving this potential whether gauged from a local, county, regional or national perspective.
 - One factor in this underachievement is the lack of a high quality and strong profile building offering a range of performing arts facilities for audiences and participants alike. This is a serious gap in Carlisle’s current cultural offer.
 - This gap has a wide ranging strategic impact that undermines attracting or retaining businesses, tourists and students to Carlisle.
 - In order to achieve its potential, it is important that Carlisle has strong linkages between cultural, economic and educational strategies
 - New theatre and arts centre facilities could make a significant contribution to each of these strategic areas, assisting Carlisle to achieve its full potential

Section 3: Current performing arts activity

- S.4 The report surveys current performing arts activity related to both companies and venues – within Carlisle and more broadly within Cumbria – based on extensive consultations with the individuals and organisations concerned. The main characteristics emerging from this survey are:
- S4.1 Carlisle has some amateur and community activity although it is relatively poor in the range of professional work that is available

- S4.2 Amateur performance is based at the West Walls Theatre which, whilst small at 142 seats, is thought to be adequate to meet most current drama needs. The Musical Society however uses The Sands.
- S4.3 Community and participatory activities in the performing arts are dispersed in ad hoc facilities with little access to specialist support
- S4.4 The Sands has the capacity to mount large scale (up to 1450 seats) performances as part of a successful events programme but within a mixed use leisure facility that results in compromises on the quality of experience for both audiences and performers.
- S4.5 The Stanwix Arts Theatre within the Cumbria Institute of the Arts (CIA) has two spaces – 217 and around 80 seats respectively. This has been the main venue in Carlisle for presenting visiting professional companies although the growth in student numbers and the consequent CIA demands on space has made the theatre less available for non-academic use. Availability is likely to decrease further when CIA becomes part of the new university with further increases planned in student numbers
- S4.6 There are other specialist and often small venues – e.g. The Brickyard with an extensive music programme. Tullie House, The Tithe Barn and Source Café are used for occasional performing arts promotions but with little regular programming
- S4.7 Within the wider Carlisle sub-region there are several thriving venues that illustrate the range of what Carlisle is lacking in potential performing arts facilities – e.g. Theatre by the Lake (Keswick), Queens Hall (Hexham), The Brewery (Kendal). The first of these undertakes ‘outreach’ work in Carlisle because it is not available more locally.
- S4.8 It was the overwhelming conclusion of those consulted during the study (selected for a particular knowledge of arts issues) that Carlisle currently lacked what it needed as a theatre or an arts centre space. And 69% of the Citizens’ Panel (not selected for particular arts interests) thought Carlisle should have a new performing arts venue.

Section 4: Current and potential audiences

- S 5 The current distribution and nature of attendances at performing arts events in the Carlisle catchment area have been examined in terms of Area Profile Reports, Mapping Analysis and ACORN (A Classification of Residential Neighbourhoods) postcode profiling (using the InSite software). The main features identified are:
 - S5.1 Nationally around 80% of audiences for performing arts venues come from within a 30 minute drive time. In Carlisle, 88% of attending households have up to a one hour drive time.
 - S5.2 In excess of 25,000 households have purchased tickets for arts events in Carlisle between January 2005 and July 2006. That is a strong and large base from which to develop an audience, provided the approach taken were a fusion of programming and marketing.

- S5.3 Typically, attendance at “any performance in a theatre” by more than 15% of the potential households in a postcode area is considered to be high. For Carlisle, 14 of the top 20 postcode segments show significantly higher results than 15% - rising to 40% in CA3. However, there are over 60 postcodes within the Carlisle catchment area that have significant potential for growth.
- S5.4 The ACORN profiling showed that the Carlisle audience profile tends to be older than the national average with a much higher proportion of people within the social grade C2 and a lower proportion of social grades A, B and C1.
- S 6 Around 1,500 questionnaires were distributed to the Carlisle Citizens’ Panel with 608 completed returns. The majority of respondents (37%) came from the west of the city (CA2) with 27% from rural Carlisle (CA4-8), 20% from the north (CA3) and 16% from the east (CA1).
- S 7 The main views and current attendance patterns shown by the responses are:
- S7.1 13% said that they regularly visit arts events in Carlisle and 15% said that most of the arts events they visit are outside Carlisle
- S7.2 18% of respondents actively participate in the arts – 2% with a professional involvement, 6% amateur and 10% participating for personal enjoyment
- S7.3 Of the 17 performing arts venues listed in the questionnaire, The Sands had by far the highest proportion (84%) of respondents who had attended arts events, followed by Tullie House (52%), West Walls (41%), Theatre by the Lake (38%) and the Stanwix (36%)
- S7.4 69% of respondents answered ‘yes’ to should Carlisle have a new performing arts venue, 11% said ‘no’ and 20% were not sure. Of those saying ‘yes’, the artforms most emphasised were concerts/music, plays, comedy and exhibitions.

Section 5: Potential sites and options

- S 8 The report considers the differences between what is meant by a ‘theatre’ or an ‘arts centre’, and what will best meet Carlisle’s particular needs. It argues that people are more important than buildings in creating and sustaining vibrant cultural activities. That is why successful regeneration has to be led by the use people make of buildings rather than just the buildings themselves. But, the right buildings can act as an important focus and stimulus for that activity – offering a ‘creative hub’.
- S 9 Developing a ‘critical mass’ of creative activity is probably the most important requirement for achieving successful and sustainable growth in cultural activities. Such critical mass is best supported by creating linkages between artistic, educational and economic objectives – between the arts building, the university and the creative industries in Carlisle.

- S 10 The report argues that an arts centre model has significant advantages over a more traditional theatre-only building in achieving these linkages and the critical mass that they can generate. In essence, these advantages are:
- A wider range of arts facilities can be offered supporting different performing and visual arts activities
 - A wider range of people can be attracted to using the facilities as both audiences and participants
 - A wider range of partnerships can be developed linked to educational and creative industry uses as well as artistic use
 - A stronger cultural impact can be created to contribute to broader strategic objectives for the city centre
- S 11 The essential factor is the creation of a vibrant centre of activity, somewhere that people will gather for a whole range of purposes whether simply to have a coffee or to take part in a workshop or to see a performance. It would be open from morning to night as a place to meet and 'do' - not just for performances. A creative focus and hub for the city centre.
- S 12 The potential components of this ideal facility are identified as:
- A performance space with around 400 seats, with the capability to provide for a small orchestra. Flexible seating to enable a range of performance formats allowing for a very broad approach to programming.
 - A smaller, completely flexible studio space which could also serve as a rehearsal room
 - One or two cinema screens. Interest has already been expressed by the new operators of the City Cinema in moving their operation into a new arts facility
 - A range of smaller spaces which could be used for workshops, meetings and, potentially, small conferences.
 - A café/bar providing an informal meeting space, perhaps internet facilities or Wi-Fi, as well as services for customers.
 - A small exhibition/gallery space
 - Office facilities for a number of small arts organisations or individual artists – possibly with shared administrative support. There are many potential models for such managed or 'incubator' work spaces that could be explored.
- S 13 The ideal building must be welcoming, with excellent access and no sense of elitism or exclusivity - a relaxed, responsive place that people are comfortable to use in whatever way best meets their needs. It would be a hub for local artists, somewhere they can meet other creative people and share ideas and inspiration which will, in time, stimulate the growth of thriving creative industries in the city.

S 14 The report reviews the current relevance and feasibility of options identified in previous studies into a potential new theatre for Carlisle:

- the 1994 report on the Stanwix Theatre
- the 1999 options appraisal undertaken by AEA Consulting
- the 2003 feasibility study into development of the Lonsdale Cinema.

The options, where appropriate are carried forward for further current consideration.

S 15 Eight current options are outlined in the report with the main pros and cons of each being listed. A summary conclusion is given as to whether the option should be a priority for further consideration in the next stage of the feasibility study work. The options considered are:

Option 1 Do nothing - status quo

Option 2 Build a new 800+ seat theatre

Option 3 Upgrade The Sands as an 'events' venue

Option 4 A new build facility on The Sands site

Option 5 New build as part of Renaissance developments

Option 6 Redevelop the Lonsdale Cinema

Option 7 Redevelop the Methodist Central Hall

Option 8 New build/redevelopment elsewhere in Carlisle

Possibilities that could be considered include:

- Herbert Atkinson House in Abbey Street
- within Carlisle Renaissance planning
- future University of Cumbria developments

S 16 The options recommended for the next stage are 5, 6, and 7 – with option 3 being a complementary and important addition to whichever of the main options is finally developed. Dependant upon the outcome of further work on the recommended options, consideration should also be given to keep alive option 8.

Option 1 Do nothing – Status Quo

165. **Pros**

- The cheapest option – with no major capital outlay or new revenue requirement
- The easiest option – requiring no Council initiative

166. **Cons**

- This option offers no improvement on the current situation or resolution of related issues
- The needs and aspirations of Carlisle residents would remain unmet
- Current opportunities are missed (Renaissance, available buildings, etc) with the result that creating a new theatre would probably be harder and more expensive to achieve in the future
- Carlisle fails to improve local facilities that have been widely recognised over many years as being needed
- Loss of potential for any new theatre or arts centre to raise the wider profile of the city and sub-region

Conclusion

167. Although it is important to consider a do nothing option, it is not recommended as it would not meet Carlisle's current or future needs.

Option 2 Build a new 800+ seat theatre

168. This option assumes that a new theatre is designed and built on a vacant site without being based on the redevelopment of an existing building. The scale of the building in this option is primarily determined by creating an auditorium of at least 800 seats.

169. **Pros**

- The only way to achieve a new large scale venue as other options are not able to offer 800+ capacity
- Provides the opportunity to create an 'ideal' facility without the compromises that are linked to redevelopment options
- The particular requirements of such a theatre can be incorporated into other development plans (e.g. Renaissance) to include compatible further facilities (e.g. hotel and conference venue)
- A prestigious new large scale theatre could help raise the profile of Carlisle, attracting both visitor and tourist audiences from a wide area

170. **Cons**

- There are very few potentially suitable sites – particularly within the city centre (e.g. The Sands and Rickergate)
- There would be duplication with the current Sands programme and the artistic element of it would have to be greatly reduced
- There is insufficient audience demand to sustain all year round viable use as just a theatre
- There would be high revenue costs associated with the programme required for a large scale theatre
- A large scale theatre would be too large (or certainly not ideal) for effective joint use as a conference facility
- It would primarily be used only in the evenings and not meet the wider 'arts centre' requirements that stimulate use throughout the day
- There would be a potential 'clash' with any new theatre at the Lowther development – particularly if this was of a similar scale

Conclusion

171. The audience demand and local requirements identified by this study, coupled with the high revenue costs involved, suggest that a new theatre of this scale would not best meet the future needs of Carlisle. This option is not recommended for shortlisting in the second stage feasibility work.

Option 3 Upgrade The Sands as an 'events' venue

172. This option would upgrade facilities at the current Sands building with the intention of improving its ability to promote a wide range of large scale, high profile events (NB not just arts events). This would necessarily reduce suitability for some sports use that would need to be provided in more local facilities. The improvements envisaged could include:

- Better front of house and audience facilities
- Upgrading of technical equipment to higher specifications
- Better backstage facilities for staff and visiting artists
- Improve auditorium seating and acoustics

173. Pros

- An improved facility could be achieved at much lower cost than building a new theatre.
- There is a continuing need to be able to promote larger scale arts events within Carlisle – as The Sands currently does
- The current joint use issues between sports and events could be resolved with fewer compromises
- It would enable an expansion of the arts programme as part of a wider entertainment events programme
- The stronger overall events programme could increase earning potential
- An improved facility supports a stronger and higher profile for Carlisle as a sub-regional centre
- Enables sport facilities to be developed more locally with better access

174. Cons

- There would be the cost of developing the alternative local sports facilities required to replace those no longer offered by The Sands
- This option would result in a much improved theatre facility, but still not in a custom built theatre or the wider 'arts centre' requirements

Conclusion

175. This could be the most effective way of Carlisle improving its ability to present larger scale arts events without the costs associated with a new build. It would augment rather than be in competition with the current Sands operation and also support a Council priority of developing community based sports and recreation facilities. It is recommended that this option is further explored in the second stage of the feasibility study in addition to, but not instead of, other options related to a new theatre or arts centre.

Option 4 New build(s) on The Sands site

176. This option is in two parts:

- 4A New theatre (as recommended in the 1999 study)
- 4B Arts Centre – smaller theatre but with workshop/participation spaces

Both options assume that Option 3 is not pursued and therefore the current Sands remains a joint sports/events use facility

177. **Pros**

- There would be cost benefits of a new build in conjunction with the existing Sands facilities
- Further development would concentrate Carlisle's leisure/entertainment events offer on one site
- 4A is similar to Option 2 but smaller scale (this was the preferred option arising from the 1999 study – a 520 seat theatre) It would provide the benefits of a custom designed theatre
- 4B could provide a custom built arts centre facility (if there was space to accommodate the range of facilities needed)
- There would be the potential for the new facility to be an extension of current management arrangements for The Sands

178. **Cons**

- The Sands site is not considered by some to be within the city centre and not ideal to get to in the evenings for non-car users.
- This option would not contribute to developing the heritage/cultural quarter of Carlisle or to animating the city centre
- The profile and impact of a new theatre could be confused or reduced by being regarded as an extension of the current dual arts/sports use of The Sands. An improved version of The Sands (Option 3) does not have this potential problem – it is a 'better' version with a stronger identity of its own.
- There is a possible ethos/policy/programme clash between the arts/sports/events aspects of the site. It could be that separate governance arrangements would be preferable for the different facilities.

Conclusion

179. Although there are advantages to further development of the Sands site, they could be stronger and cheaper through Option 3 than through these new build options. It is not recommended that this option is pursued unless the other preferred options prove not to be viable.

Option 5 New build within Renaissance development

180. This option would result in a custom built new theatre and/or arts centre facility as part of the developments being proposed by Carlisle Renaissance. The site originally suggested in the Renaissance Prospectus for a possible theatre was in Rickergate although it is not included in the latest consultation proposals. The main difference between this option and that outlined as Option 2 is that a smaller, mid-scale theatre (around 400 seats) is envisaged with greater emphasis being placed on the creation of related arts centre facilities.

181. **Pros**

- This option could create an ‘ideal’ facility – as a theatre and arts centre - without compromises linked to other options that are related to the limitations of particular buildings
- The theatre/arts centre proposals can be incorporated into other Council development plans and the finance packages associated with them (e.g. through Renaissance)
- The location strongly supports development of the adjacent heritage/cultural quarter and a new theatre or arts centre could be a central focus for it.

182. **Cons**

- As only one element within a much broader development project, the theatre and arts centre facility would be dependent on the overall project and could be compromised by multi-use requirements (e.g. conference centre)
- It could be vulnerable to being dropped if regarded by developers as more problematical than ‘easier’ and more profitable development element of the overall scheme
- It is probably a longer term option than the development of a single theatre site due to the complexity of the overall Rickergate development.

Conclusions

183. This has the potential to be one the strongest options that could most closely meet the City Council’s requirements – albeit on a longer timescale than less complex options.

184. A new theatre or arts centre is important to the Council’s future cultural aspirations for the city and Renaissance is the chosen mechanism for achieving regeneration of the city centre. It is therefore essential that there should be a link between the two – whether or not Renaissance decides to proceed with a theatre or arts centre as part of the Rickergate project. This option – and close linkage of a new theatre with Renaissance – is recommended for further exploration in the second stage feasibility work.

Option 6 Redevelop the Lonsdale Cinema

185. This option has ‘history’ as referred to earlier in this report. In essence, the Lonsdale building opened in 1931 as a 2,000 seat cinema and in recent years has been a large bingo hall downstairs with three cinemas upstairs (capacities 375, 265 and 56 seats). It is therefore both large and basically designed for public entertainment purposes,
186. Previous proposals have been related to a) saving the building (and the period art deco features within it) and b) converting it into use as an arts centre. Each objective has a particular support group with the Save the Lonsdale Campaign being primarily interested in the former and the Carlisle Lonsdale Arts Centre Trust in the latter.
187. **Pros**
- The building offers significant volume and potential for either a theatre or arts centre development – perhaps the largest such site in central Carlisle
 - There are relatively few apparent or major restrictions to redesigning use of the interior space for a wide range of arts facilities
 - There is potentially good external access to the site for vehicular access and ‘get ins’
 - It has a good position in the city centre close to rail and bus stations and with parking nearby
 - Redevelopment of the site for cultural purposes could act as a catalyst for the Warwick Road area – distinct from neighbouring Botchergate
 - Considerable public support already exists in favour of a theatre/arts centre development on this site
188. **Cons**
- The site is currently owned by a developer who is not interested in development of an arts facility but wants to knock it down and build apartments
 - Listing status has been applied for and if granted could lead to the developer reconsidering the intended use - but still seeking to maximise commercial gain
 - Initial indications are that listing is unlikely and therefore acquisition of the site could be both difficult and expensive

Conclusion

189. The Lonsdale *could* be the largest and easiest to convert site in the city centre. It *could* make an excellent theatre and arts centre with the capacity to incorporate all the suggested ‘ideal’ elements. Issues related to ownership, acquisition and listing however create uncertainties as to the viability of this option although it is recommended that the option is further explored in the next stage.

Option 7 Redevelop the Methodist Central Hall

190. This option would convert the former church on Fisher Street into a performance space and arts centre. The church itself used to seat about 500 people and there are substantial ancillary buildings related to the previous church hall and basement areas.

191. **Pros**

- It is a striking building with an excellent location within the heritage/cultural quarter and the potential to act as a catalyst for significant redevelopment in the area
- It is available for potential redevelopment and with few alternative or commercial options to compete with arts usage as it is not well suited to residential or retail development
- There is the potential volume and footprint for a flexible arts facility although the actual nature and size of these requires more technical investigation
- Development partners that are specific to this part of the city centre and to this option may be available

192. **Cons**

- The building is already Grade 2 listed with restrictions likely on the redevelopment that is permitted – particularly related to the balcony. These could prove insurmountable or very costly
- There are audience and technical access difficulties associated with the site – particularly if it is not possible to incorporate neighbouring buildings in the development
- Views vary as to how difficult or remote parking spaces are in relation to the location

Conclusion

193. The site and building have many potential synergies with development of the cultural/heritage quarter. The extent and severity of listing/design considerations should be explored within the next stage. If they can be resolved, then this could be a strong and attractive option.

Option 8 New build/redevelopment elsewhere in Carlisle

194. No other specific sites are currently being suggested for a new theatre or arts centre. However, should the above options prove to be unsuitable or unviable then further consideration should be given to other possibilities in the next stage. The most likely possibilities could arise from:

- within Carlisle Renaissance planning
- potentially suitable property that becomes available
- future University of Cumbria developments