

# **Carlisle Lonsdale**

## **Arts Centre Trust**

A Presentation to  
**Overview & Scrutiny Committee**  
on the potential for the redevelopment  
of the Lonsdale Building

By

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17<sup>th</sup> July 2003

## Introduction

On 27<sup>th</sup> March, a presentation was made to this Committee on behalf of Carlisle Lonsdale Arts Centre Trust (CLACT) as to the development of a piece of work examining the possible future use of an important building located in the centre of Carlisle. The Lonsdale Cinema and Gala Bingo building is undoubtedly important to the social and recreational life of the City and the continuation of this use in this building may be in doubt given the decision of Gala to relocate to a new purpose-built venue.

As presented in the paper provided by the Trust, my work is broadly tasked around responding to four simple questions: -

- Can the building be adapted to a more general arts/cultural use?
- If this were to happen, what activities could take place in the building and who would come?
- How could such a building and programme of activities be managed?
- Is the underlying concept financially viable?

The Trust was successful in securing a level of funding (£ 5,000) allowing for a broad-brush examination of the concept and the possible impact of a revitalised Lonsdale venue upon Carlisle and the catchment area it serves. An agreement was made with CLACT for the consultancy work to combine contact time in Carlisle with desk research and telephone interviews. In the event, it was considered that a series of public fora as initially envisaged could be perceived as premature as the building is still being occupied and, as discussed at the March Overview & Scrutiny, we are wary of raising a level of expectation that may not be met.

The following Paper updates this Committee and draws from the Final Report, which is approaching a conclusion. In particular I have paid attention to matters that were raised during the last Presentation namely: -

- What could the new building look like? What could it programme? What could be described as its essential nature?
- How could the building operate? What operational or organisational model would it follow?
- How viable could the venture be and would its establishment have a negative impact upon other venues / organisations in the City?
- How could the works be funded? What scale of subsidy could be required to maintain the proposed venue?

## The Building

There has been some discussion as to the essential nature of the concept underlying the Lonsdale building's new use. As advised in March, CLACT has always believed that the vital ingredient is to maintain the building as a key provider of social and recreational opportunity for the people, all the people, of Carlisle. Since the building's initial construction, the Lonsdale has been an avenue for relaxation be it in the form of a Picture Palace or, latterly, mixed cinema and bingo.

The challenge now is to allow the building's use to move with the times so that the activities reflect the essentially integrated nature of the population. In the previous report to this Committee, we advised that we envisaged an eclectic programme within the building that keyed around three themes: -

- ❑ Art and culture – theatre, cinema, dance, music, visual arts. For example, touring in of professional productions and the staging locally/regionally produced work
- ❑ Community – support for voluntary organisations, hire of rehearsal studios and performance area, resources, meeting and working spaces, vocational, educational and recreational opportunities. For example, serviced office spaces for casual hire, allowing local/regional bands and groups rehearse and record in quality surroundings at realistic cost, series of activities (possibly art and craft based) managed by the Lonsdale but programmed in collaboration with local networks and providers of Continuing Education.
- ❑ Social cohesion – support, resources and opportunities for groups, bodies and agencies working with excluded communities. For instance, arts and disability, arts in health, training and accreditation for emerging artists coming from these communities probably in partnership with professional groups such as Prism Arts or public agencies such as Health and Social Services.

Externally, the building would look quite similar to the present. It will have been renovated to a certain extent and probably feature a piece, or pieces, of significant artwork commissioned as part of the capital programme. There will still be two entrances (or possibly a single entrance splitting into two) one leading to the cinema as at present and one leading into the performance spaces. Subject to a structural survey it is believed that the new performance auditoria (1 x 400 seat and 1 x 90 seat) would be grouped in the existing bingo area with offices, studios and the like also arranged within the existing envelope, or requiring minimal external works.

The programme would basically be split along the lines discussed above. The exact relationship between the existing cinema operation and the potentially new organisation is discussed below but, following a telephone conversation earlier today (9<sup>th</sup> July), I am given to understand that the present situation could best be described as fluid.

## Carlisle Lonsdale Arts Centre Trust

During the course of this work I have examined a series of other venues through visits and desk research across the country to get a feel for what has worked and what has not worked programme wise. For information, these venues were: -

- Lawrence Batley Theatre, Huddersfield
- Brewery Arts Centre, Kendal
- Theatre by the Lake, Keswick
- Citadel Arts Centre, St Helens
- Dukes Theatre, Lancaster
- The Castle Arts Centre, Wellingborough
- Salisbury Arts Centre, Salisbury
- The Lighthouse (formerly Poole Arts Centre), Poole
- The Landmark Arts Centre, Ilfracombe
- The Riverhead Theatre, Louth
- Arena Arts Centre, Wolverhampton
- Battersea Arts Centre, London
- Phoenix Arts Centre, Leicester
- Arts Centre, Colchester
- The Brewhouse, Taunton
- Old Fire Station, Oxford
- Bowen West Theatre, Bedford
- Midlands Arts Centre, Birmingham
- Trinity Arts Centre, Gainsborough
- Green Room, Manchester
- Cornerhouse, Manchester
- The Arches, Glasgow
- Studio Theatre and Gallery, Leeds
- Crucible and Lyceum Theatres, Sheffield
- The Showcase, Sheffield (regional independent film theatre)
- Pictureville, Bradford (regional independent film theatre)
- Valley Community Theatre, Liverpool
- Drama Centre, Portsmouth
- Thornes Park Arts Centre, Wakefield.

There were a number of key themes that came through, in brief: -

- There is a constant need to keep users and audiences involved in programming usually through focus groups with Board/Trustee representation.
- A mixed programme (professional, semi-professional and non-professional) is needed to keep audiences at a sustainable level.
- A strong link between touring-in product and education/outreach activities is vital if the investment in the touring production (could be in excess of £ 1,000 per night) is to be realised as providing good value for money.
- Cinema is a vital tool in the marketing portfolio as it represents the art form enjoying the widest support.
- High profile, local/regional political support is absolutely vital if the venue concerned is serious about having a solid future.

So, what does all this mean for the proposed Lonsdale development?

It means that it is probably unlikely that a bespoke arts initiative (such as a new theatre – lyric or otherwise) will be sustainable in the future and therefore the investment in such a venture may be called into question. In a place such as Carlisle, the model offering the greatest degree of confidence appears to be a building having artistic or cultural opportunity at its heart but having a programme that reflects the diverse interests and aspirations of the community in which the building is located.

As reflected in one of the recently published Briefings by the Audit Commission (A Fruitful Partnership, Effective Partnership Working), part of the secret to successful capacity building is through building partner participation. If a mechanism can be determined that locks local and regional people into the building – its events and activities will be attended for the simple reason that such events and activities have been informed through, and by, the community.

### **The Operation**

The building's operation (ownership, governance and organisation) is clearly a key ingredient. The finer detail involved in this will be the subject of a later study but we have sufficient information to explore some of the issues at stake and, possibly, their resolution.

If we look at ownership first. The simplest option is for an organisation, let us call this CLACT for the purposes of simplicity, to acquire the building on a freehold basis and to operate it either as a Charitable Trust or Company Limited by Guarantee with Charitable Status. This situation assumes that CLACT has secured the building outright, probably on vacant possession, or had the freehold bequeathed to them by a third party. The building could then be operated on a prosaic basis through a trading company.

The second model is for a third party to acquire the building on a vacant possession basis and to lease the building to, say, CLACT on a landlord basis – CLACT being responsible for managing the asset, paying a regular peppercorn rent but the landlord being responsible for the externals. There are a number of precedents for this one of the most recent being the acquisition of the Lawrence Batley Theatre by Kirklees District Council for the Lawrence Batley Theatre Trust. In effect the District Council has extended a low interest loan to the Trust in much the same way as a mortgage. The Trust has the theatre on a leasehold basis that converts to a freehold basis once the 'loan' is repaid. The repayment mechanism is locked into the Theatre's finances with an annual amount being paid direct to the District Council.

The third model is for the building to be owned by a third party and leased to, say, CLACT (either *in toto* or partially) with the third party possibly being resident in the building (for instance the existing cinema provider) or absent.



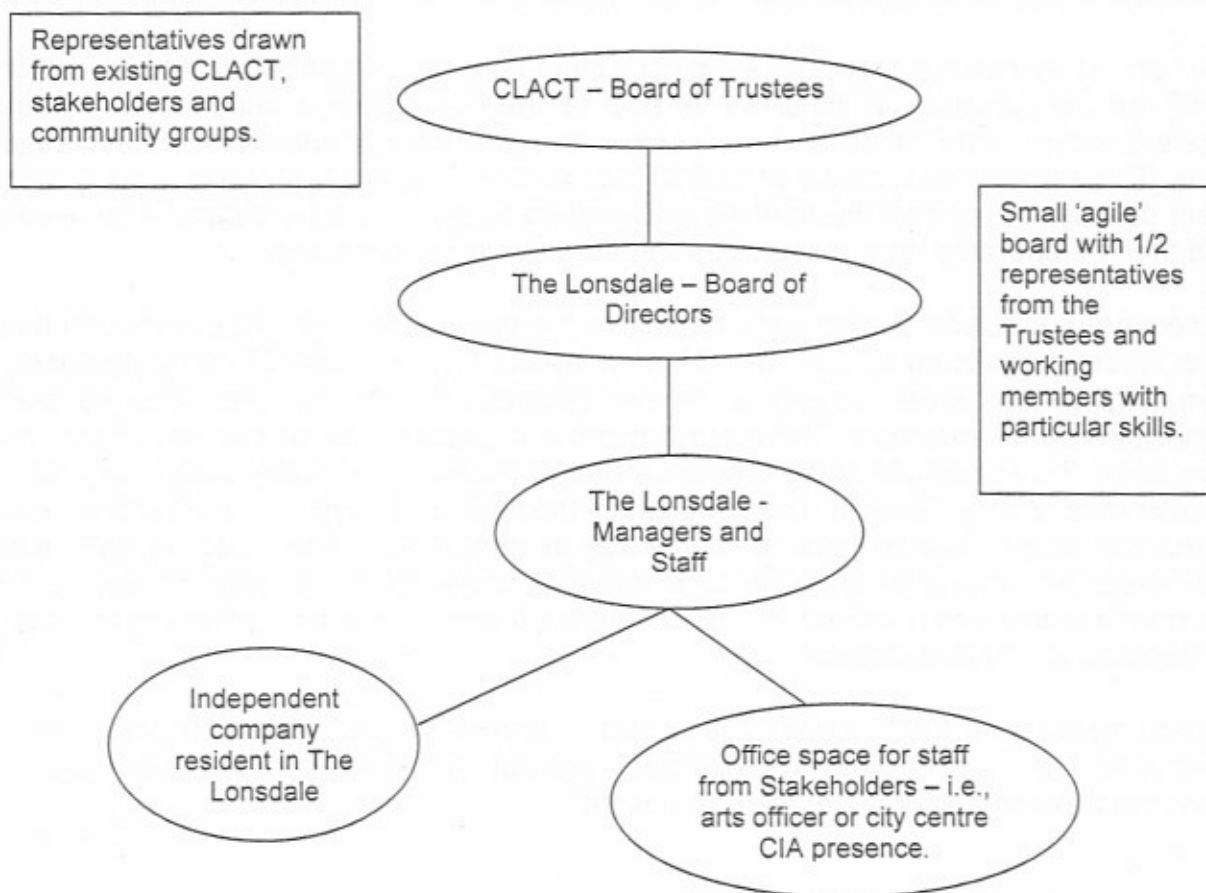
## Carlisle Lonsdale Arts Centre Trust

Once we have settled upon ownership, we move towards governance. In some ways, the question of governance follows directly from how the building is owned. The simplest model of governance would be for, say, CLACT to own the building outright and operate either as a Company Limited by Guarantee with Charitable Status or via a Charitable Trust through a commercial holding company.

Such a situation would open up the maximum funding opportunities (through sponsorship, donations and the formal arts funding system) whilst taking the best advantage of existing VAT and Corporation Tax rules and regulations. In this manner, CLACT would operate as a Trust and trade through, for instance, **The Lonsdale** (suggestion made in responses to the recent Citizens Panel questionnaire).

**The Lonsdale** could employ staff and provide the day-to-day leadership in the building. It would directly work with other tenants, for instance, Prism Arts or an arts in health initiative as well as providing casual office space for an arts officer or the co-ordinator of a major project, perhaps funded through Learning & Skills Council funding.

This model could be described in the following simple schematic: -



There are various other models that would be examined should the overall development were to be progressed. These would tie in with the varying principals of ownership. But, even if the freehold for the building was to lie with a third party, there is no reason to believe that the above model could not be accommodated in some form.

Now that we have examined ownership and governance we can turn to the day-to-day staffing operation of the building. Depending upon the ownership model adopted, it is likely that the overall organisational / operational process would be similar to that introduced above. There are two basic methods for progressing from here: -

- Professional staffing – if it were decided that the building, let us call it **The Lonsdale** for arguments sake, were to be fully staffed by paid professionals it is likely that the establishment would comprise something like a minimum of 11 paid individuals in part time and full time occupations. This would include a Director, Administrator, Technical Manager, Technician, Projectionist, Front of House Manager, Receptionist, Education Officer, Marketing Officer, Business Development Manager, Finance Officer and a support Officer working with the Front of House and Marketing/Education departments. The cost of this would be in the order of £240,000. This reflects staffing models in other Arts Centres programming a mix of performance work, cinema, outreach and education activities as well as in-house events and courses.
- Professional / voluntary staffing – the alternative is to adopt the model employed to excellent effect in, for instance Louth Riverhead Theatre and many of the campus-based arts centres such as Leeds, Wolverhampton, Portsmouth and Wakefield. In this model we have an establishment similar to that presented in March (3.5 full time equivalent posts) accounting for a salary bill in the region of £ 50,000 -£ 60,000 with a variety of tasks being undertaken by volunteers (marketing, education, front of house, reception, etc) or being undertaken by students as part of their degree studies (for instance in Leicester, Leeds, Bradford and Warwick Universities) or being the subject of ad hoc freelance employment. There is an additional cost inherent in this process in terms of training and accreditation but these combined with the anticipated salary bill would still be significantly lower than the model described above.

The answer probably lies in the middle but both of the models mentioned above work and work to good effect. A professional level of service can still be maintained without the need for recourse for a fully employed staff team. One of the benefits of the second approach is that the building becomes a living space in which members of the community are intimately involved in the comings and goings and develop a very real sense of ownership. This then reflects upon the levels of visitor numbers, sizes of audience and hirers of resources and amenities.

### A viable venue?

So, we have developed an idea of **The Lonsdale** as an operating building through a sense of ownership and an understanding of its governance. Does this necessarily translate through to the building being viable and sustainable without detracting from what already exists?

In work undertaken to support the Theatre Futures (1994), AEA (1999) reports and the various National Lottery Applications an audience for the performing arts in Carlisle has been established. There may be a need to carry out some back checking on some of the detail but I believe we can be confident that the broad thrust of the work is still valid. That is [a] there is a need for an additional performance space in the City and that [b] the development of an additional space would not negatively impact upon the existing infrastructure.

In discussions with CIA and regional theatres/arts centres it is clear to me that there is little perception of competition. As noted in the 1999 AEA report, there could be competition with Theatre by the Lake if Carlisle were considering a 500 – 600 seat bespoke theatre/performance venue. But, as arising through my work and as concluded by AEA it is unlikely that such a venture could be maintained without significant levels of public subsidy or dangerously high year-on-year speculative fundraising targets.

It is my belief and understanding that programming opportunities within the Stanwix will become even more difficult as pressure for the space build from the students and course leaders in the College. Certainly, in discussions with local artists and a significant arts company, it is clear that there are just not the windows in the Stanwix's programming year for local/regional product. This reflects a trend in campus-based theatres throughout the country with the extreme situation being evidenced at LIPA in Liverpool where it is now extremely difficult for local artists to have access to the many high quality studios contained in that building.

The development of a purpose-built gallery and exhibition space within **The Lonsdale** does not appear to be considered as a threat to existing providers. Indeed through conversations, it appears that an additional quality space in Carlisle would be of benefit to, say, Tullie House, as it would open up possibilities of co-programming.

Finally we come to the activities that are driven by the needs and requirements of the community served by Carlisle City Council. Discussions with students at the CIA, Prism Arts, Grizedale Arts, Health and Social Services and possible funders such as Learning & Skills Council, underline the dearth of good quality spaces to make work and to bring people together through the creation of this work in the City.

There is, on the basis of my work to date and of my experience on over 150 capital schemes on behalf of Arts Council England, no doubt that were a facility such as that proposed be placed in the very heart of the City that there would be a strong level of interest translating itself into high levels of take-up of programming opportunities.



## Finances

Things so often come down to money and there is no question that this initiative is little different. I would like to examine this issue from the following perspectives: -

- **Capital** – in the March presentation I offered a guide cost for the proposed venture in the area of £ 3,8 million. An architect (Allen Todd, Leeds) has examined this figure and its development and they concur that this appears to be a fairly accurate order of cost subject to survey. By the time I present this to the Committee I will have had an opportunity to meet with the architect with the existing valuation file and can report back on this meeting if necessary. This sum would deliver the level of accommodation referred to previously and a copy of this schedule is attached for Information. Given that it is unlikely that more than £ 500,000 will be forthcoming from Arts Council England and the much-reduced National Lottery Awards a funding target in excess of £ 3 million is possible.

This is undoubtedly daunting and one that will require serious attention. However, it is, in my judgement achievable once the scale of **The Lonsdale** is understood and is endorsed by key stakeholders. Early discussions with the regional development and investment agencies have been fruitful in that the need for a facility such as that envisaged within this Briefing Paper is acknowledged. The presence of a building such as **The Lonsdale** would complement the already strong external image of Carlisle and would, I understand, assist in the attraction of new investment or the recruitment of key individuals. Therefore, it is not beyond reason that this importance will translate into funding.

In West Yorkshire, for instance, significant investment in the cultural infrastructure has been made by Yorkshire Forward (in excess of £ 3,000,000 in Bradford alone). In discussions with Northwest Development Agency I was advised that the presence of a vibrant and distinctive culture in the region is imperative. As NWDA recently announced *"...enhance regeneration and economic development. Work includes capital investment in cultural projects, development of cultural skills and utilising our cultural assets to drive regional growth."* So, I believe there are clear opportunities for significant elements of the capital fund to be acquired and the follow-up work will take this promising start further.

So, I believe it is possible to explore the future funding target in terms of: -

Arts Council England	£ 500,000
Regional Development Initiatives	£ 1 – 2,000,000
European Funding	£ 250,000
Regional Capital Sponsorship	£ 250,000 – 500,000
General Fundraising	£ 250,000
Other sources	£ 300,000 - £ 1,600,000

- **Revenue** – again, in March, I presented an option that returned a subsidy requirement in the order of £ 45,000. This was, I believe, somewhat lower than as indicated in earlier assessments. The key issue to recognise here is that **The Lonsdale** is not intended to be a performance arts venues in the shape of Theatre by the Lake or the Lawrence Batley Theatre both of which are in receipt of significant levels of subsidy.

If we are to move to an option that is based on a staffing level not dissimilar that presented as model 1 on page 6 there will be a minimum subsidy requirement in the area of £ 200,000 – a figure that begins to line up with the projections made, by amongst others, AEA. If, however, we are able to accommodate an arrangement similar to that envisaged in model 2, it is likely that the subsidy level could be as low as £ 50 - £ 60,000.

In work recently undertaken for a range of clients, Local Authorities and arts venues alike, I believe a steady trend is emerging. In the past, venues – in fact many arts organisations – receive levels of subsidy significantly less than their core costs. The gap is made up by running a number of activities through the building concerned with each activity making a contribution to the core costs of the organisation. This tends to work well when there is a high volume of activity being managed and co-ordinated by a relatively small staff team and maximum use is made of freelance artists.

This situation is inherently unstable – it's a bit like credit card debt. Payments can be made (normally part payment per month) providing employment is stable. Once employment becomes unstable, income drops and the person finds it difficult to keep up with interest never mind capital. So it is with many arts organisations and it is a situation we must avoid if at all possible if **The Lonsdale** is to come into being. Therefore, there needs to be a reasoned debate at the outset on the question of year-on-year subsidy for the proposed venue necessarily with Carlisle City Council, Cumbria County Council and Arts Council England North West.

Given the present climate (in terms of pressure upon the arts funding and local authority bodies) I believe it is difficult to foresee how what is essentially a new venture will succeed in attracting in the order of £ 200,000 annual subsidy on a regular basis from 'day-one'. There also seems little point in producing a cash flow that takes the gap between income, subsidy and expenditure and call this 'annual fundraising' – in the case of **The Lonsdale** this could well account for an annual target in the region of £ 150,000.

So, perhaps, this meeting today could be the start of this discursive process as, in my experience, a thorough understanding of the scale of availability of revenue subsidy as early as possible is a major contributory factor in the development of a successful scheme. This equally applies to discussions with bodies such as Learning & Skills Council, Departments of Health, Education and Social Service as well as enlightened donors such as Esmée Fairbairn, Lloyds TSB Foundation and Calouste Gulbenkian.

## Concluding comments

So, where does this leave us?

In my view, there is an unequivocally strong case behind the establishment of a new performance space in a city-centre site working in collaboration with the Stanwix and partnership with what could be described as the Region's producing and touring ecology. In addition, there is, even at this early stage, an equally strong case to be made for the provision of spaces for local artists to rehearse, practice, perform and exhibit their art in a local, high quality building.

There is also a clear need for high quality resources to support the ongoing work of organisations such as Prism Arts and the innovative presenting / programming strategy developed by the incumbent arts development officer by placing good quality work in non-traditional spaces. Similarly, there is a need to provide challenging cultural, recreational, leisure and social activities for people who, as a matter of course, are not provided with quality environments that validate their individual lives.

Traditionally it is believed that constructing a building from scratch is more expensive (i.e., less cost effective) than refurbishing/renovating an existing building. This is believed to be doubly true when one is considering a building enjoying a high profile in the community such as that accommodating the Lonsdale Cinema and Bingo Hall.

In my view, the need is clear, as is the lack of competition. In part this is down to the fact that potential competitors have the possibility of becoming key stakeholders (CIA, Tullie House, local and regional artists) and thus becoming involved in the enterprise as a whole.

The capital funding is clearly a significant hurdle that needs to be cleared, as is the question of revenue subsidy. But, on the basis of the work undertaken to date, I believe that the nature and operation of the building together with the multiplicity of interests located in the possible activities provides potential funders with an effective vehicle by which they can provide value for money investment opportunities.

This Briefing Paper is a narrative summary of my Final Report. As indicated in the status report provided by CLACT, there is a body of work to be undertaken next that will provide the level of detail that clearly needs to be delivered. In order to provide Members with some additional information, I have attached an outline Brief and Fee base for a programme of work that would respond to the questions contained in CLACT's report.

Arthur Stafford  
10<sup>th</sup> July 2003

Carlisle Lonsdale Arts Centre Trust – Draft Stage 2 Budget for  
Development Study into the future of the Lonsdale Building as an Arts Centre

<i>Work Area</i>		<i>Discipline</i>	<i>Days</i>		<i>Total Cost</i>
<b>R E S E A R C H</b>	Internally	<i>Lead Consultant</i>	4		1,600
	Regionally	<i>Market Research</i>	20		19,740
	Nationally	<i>Market Research</i>	25		
<b>A R C H I T E C T U R A L</b>	Existing Buildings	<i>Architect</i>	8		3,200
	Future Needs	<i>Architect &amp; Lead Consultant</i>	9		3,600
	Future Buildings	<i>Architect &amp; Lead Consultant</i>	3		1,200
	Phasing Works	<i>Architect &amp; Lead Consultant</i>	3		1,200
<b>O R G A N I S A T I O N</b>	Transitional Arrangements	<i>Lead Consultant &amp; Human Resources</i>	6 4		2,400 1,000
	Post Completion Arrangements – Provisional	<i>Lead Consultant &amp; Human Resources</i>	3 4		1,200 1,200
	Managing the Works	<i>Lead Consultant</i>	5		2,000
	Capital Works	<i>Architect VAT Theatre Consultant Lead Consultant</i>	7 1 5 6		2,800 500 2,000 2,400
<b>C O S T I N G S</b>	Post Completion	<i>Lead Consultant</i>	6		2,400
	<b>Summary of Costs and Contingencies.</b>	<b>Sub Total</b>			48,440
		<b>Contingency for Expenses, Travel, Accom.</b>			3,560
		<b>TOTAL PROJECT COST</b>			<b>52,000</b>

## SCOPE OF ACCOMMODATION (1)

### 1. PRIMARY ACTIVITY

<b>Main Theatre</b>	To seat 400. Fixed seating with end stage proscenium format. Orchestra pit with fixed level floor. Small frontstage with access from side stage outside main curtain line. Prompt position required.
<b>Stage Area</b>	To suit small-scale theatre, dance and music performance work. Timber floor – sprung. Proscenium width minimum 6500mm x 4800mm height. Facility for hanging and trucking in flats.
<b>Side Stage</b>	Full height side stage required to both wings. Width to get-in side as large as possible.
<b>Flexible Theatre</b>	To seat 90. Flexible seating. Access from side stage outside main curtain line. Intimacy of auditorium important.
<b>Stage Area</b>	As with Main Theatre but width of Proscenium to be set at 6000mm.
<b>Side Stage</b>	As with Main Theatre.
<b>Artists Studios</b>	3 x studios each being wet and dry capable.
<b>Music Studios</b>	3 x studios.
<b>Gallery</b>	Simple rectangular gallery capable of low-to-medium specification works.
<b>Cinema</b>	2 x screens Fixed seating with end-on format.



## SCOPE OF ACCOMMODATION (2)

### 2. SUPPORT ACTIVITY

<b>Get-ins</b>	Separate get-in for each theatre if possible with acoustic separation from the stage.
<b>Control Room</b>	Acoustically separated from the auditorium. Facility for opening window to listen to acoustic. Backstage tannoy to feed to control room. Separate dimmer room to be provided. Accessible.
<b>Workshop</b>	Props and general craft workshop with separate storage area. Ventilated paint store required.
<b>Costumes</b>	Large costume making and storage area and oversize doors. Air control – rooflights preferable – and direct access to dressing rooms via lift.
<b>Green Room</b>	Comfortably appointed, 'ad hoc' space for performers.
<b>Dressing Rooms</b>	4 to be provided all to be accessible. All to include wash basins.
<b>Foyer / Entrance</b>	Open and welcoming with easy access to the Box Office, coats, theatres, cinema and bar/coffee bar.
<b>Box Office</b>	Room for 3 people. Deep counter to house computer arranged for customers to see screen. Discreet high security cabinet safe and storage for brochures /flyers. Ad hoc exhibition space in this area.
<b>Bar/Coffee Bar</b>	Separate ice cream/coffee/chocolate bar and drinks bar to be provided adjacent to the foyer area. Drinks bar to have small food preparation area (no cooking). Ad hoc exhibition space in this area.
<b>Coats</b>	If possible, adjacent to the Box Office counter.

## SCOPE OF ACCOMMODATION (3)

### 3. ADMINISTRATION AND ANCILLARY

<b>Building Office</b>	Should have a general view of site access if possible. Suitable for 2/3 people and have a floor safe installed.
<b>Rented Offices</b>	3 stand alone offices suitable for short, medium and long-term rental. Each office suitable for 2/3 people and c/w standard office equipment and accommodation.
<b>Toilets</b>	1 multiple gents. 1 multiple ladies. 2 accessible single urinals with handbasins. 2 accessible showers and handbasins.
<b>Storage</b>	1 storage area serving the Building Office. 1 storage area serving each of the Rented Offices. 1 storage area serving each of the auditoria.
<b>Community Area</b>	To be defined. Possibly consisting of general information point – suitable for presentations and exhibitions from Agencies, City Council, CIA, etc – informal meeting point with the public.
<b>Young People</b>	To be discussed – an area suitable for crèche, ad hoc childcare, limited drop-off zone for under 12's, etc. To be staffed and managed by a franchise organisation – outreach team from existing Nursery?
<b>Hot Desks / Cyber café</b>	To be researched and discussed. Area containing 3 / 4 stand alone administration desks suitable for very short term hiring (1 day plus) c/w internet capability. For community and general use.