

# The Tropicana

## Operator Contract and Lease procurement



**Descriptive Document (Document 2)**

**August 2024**

**Contract for the operation of the Tropicana,  
Weston-super-Mare**

**Tender reference: DN740601**

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## 1) Introduction

### a) Background

- i) This marketing pack signifies the procurement process to secure a long-term Operator for the Tropicana. The pack includes site details, including up to date information about the current multi-million pounds investment programme, and information about the procurement process.
- ii) The Tropicana is an iconic seafront landmark and hub of entertainment, arts and culture. Initially opening in 1937 as a swimming pool, the events venue today attracts around 40,000-50,000 people a year to over 100 events. The venue hosts a wide variety of event types including entertainment, music, arts, culture, theatre, comedy, funfairs, corporate and community events. The venue proudly hosted the international phenomena of Dismaland and SEEMONSTER exhibitions.
- iii) The Tropicana is owned by North Somerset Council (the council) and is currently operated by a small in-house team, which hires out the internal and outside space to external event organisers. It is expected that a specialist operator would bring additional vibrancy to this unique facility.
- iv) In 2023, the council was awarded £20m funding (matched by £3m) from the UK government for a programme of 6 investments across Weston-super-Mare. The greatest investment is allocated the Tropicana to enable its viable operation for the future. This includes major repairs and improvements such as providing purpose built indoor and outdoor entertainment spaces, while increasing capacity. For up-to-date news information about the project, visit [www.n-somerset.gov.uk/tropicana](http://www.n-somerset.gov.uk/tropicana).
- v) Other major placemaking projects include refurbishment of the listed Birnbeck Pier allow the public to visit and for the RNLI to have a lifeboat station on the island again; improvement plans at Grove Park and Marine Lake and further town centre works aim to attract visitors and create jobs.
- vi) North Somerset is an Arts Council England (ACE) Priority Place for Culture and Arts, with a thriving creative community. This status has the potential to attract investment into cultural programming (aligning with the criteria of ACE's Let's Create strategy). The council has applied for an additional capital grant of £2m from The Cultural Development Fund; a Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) fund administered by ACE, to fund additional fitout works, plus £700k in a revenue grant to contribute to cultural activity within and associated with the site. The funding would be invested in partnership with the Operator and focused on the provision of quality cultural activity that contributes to the venue's year-round long term viability. The type of funded

- activity could include excellent cultural events and activities; creative showcases; industry-led cultural development programmes; and supporting existing cultural infrastructure. The result of this bid is due to be announced in autumn 2024.
- vii) The Operator is welcome to fund additional fitout and capital works to support its future operation of the site, or to fund this activity if the CDF bid, is not successful, with consent from the council.
- viii) For the CDF bid; the council has partnered with Super Culture and Boomsatsuma. Super Culture deliver ambitious, playful and inclusive creative culture in North Somerset through world class festivals, events and live performance; creative talent development and a year-round participation programme that enables local communities to connect, get creative and take a lead in shaping their local cultural provision. Boomsatsuma is West of England's leading specialist provider of creative industries' focused education and training programmes. They provide training, skills development & open access to new jobs in culture through Further and Higher Education courses including Creative & Digital Media, Film & Television, Games, VR & VFX and more. Boomsatsuma works closely with 150+ creative industry partners to ensure that programmes respond to industry needs & priorities. They both deliver excellent cultural events, activities and creative showcases and develop industry-led creative programmes that build capacity for cultural partnerships.
- ix) With the benefit of the investment, and an experienced Operator with industry connections and expertise, the council aims to elevate the Tropicana's status as a nationally significant multi-use entertainment venue.
- x) The Council has appointed specialist venue consultants In Partnership With ([IPW](#)) to support the Tropicana operator procurement and law firm [Bevan Brittan](#) to provide legal support throughout the process.

## b) Objectives

- i) The council's objectives for the procurement are to:
- Procure a long-term viable Operator for 20+ years.
  - Secure an Operator on an operator service contract with appended lease.
  - Reduce the council's revenue costs and provide an income stream in the longer-term.
  - Deliver the objectives of the UK Government funding (previously called the Levelling Up programme) and Super Weston Placemaking Strategy, in particular:

- 
- Select an operator to provide a programme of entertainment, culture and activity which generates a sense of excitement and pride (locally, regionally, and nationally) as to the future of the venue and its offer.
  - Maximise the amount and range of year-round entertainment to diversify the offer across town and the seafront, raise the profile of Weston-super-Mare, boost the visitor economy, and raise the town's placemaking credentials.
  - Increase opportunities for community use of the Tropicana, including as a focal point for cultural activity and creative opportunities for local communities, organisations, and visitors.
  - Ensure the operator will work proactively with NSC teams to ensure the safe and successful operation of the wider seafront and town centre.

## 2) The Tropicana

### a) Unique location

- i) The Tropicana is uniquely located on Weston-super Mare beach, with direct access from the fabulous Promenade which stretches along 2-miles of golden sands. Only 15 minutes-walk from the rail station and 10 minutes-walk from the town centre, it is ideally located to attract new and existing audiences.
- ii) Benefitting from both indoor and outdoor entertainment space, the Tropicana also currently provides a café onto the Promenade and event space bar. The council believes there are lucrative opportunities to create more food & beverage facilities across the site; particularly to service an increased capacity audience and attract people to make the most of the amazing views and sunsets across the bay.
- iii) Weston-super-Mare is easily reached by multiple large audiences including access from Bristol in 20 minutes and London in 2 hours,

### b) Existing facilities

- i) The Tropicana's current total site maximum capacity is c. 3,800 across the site:
  - **Indoor bar and gallery:** which will be demolished and rebuilt.
  - **Outdoor arena:** A walled space of 6,000m<sup>2</sup>, with toilets and raised sea facing terraces.
  - **The Bay Café:** Currently operated by a concessionaire, serving breakfast, brunch, street food, carvery. The café currently operates 7 days a week from 9am to 7pm.
  - Also, indoor spaces currently used for storage, offices and temporary uses, including with direct access to the Promenade.

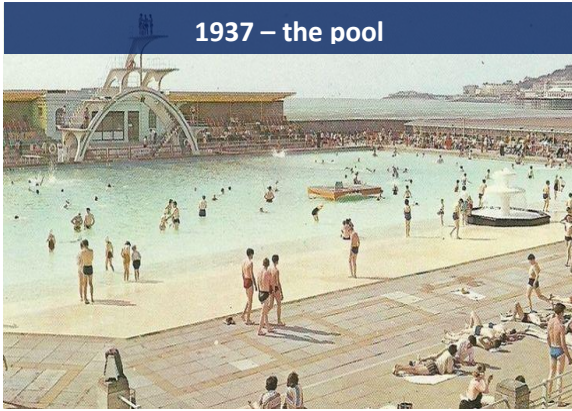


### c) Events and entertainment

- i) The Tropicana is a major venue within the local entertainment and events scene. The site hosts a variety of events including entertainment, music, arts, culture, theatre, comedy, funfairs, corporate and community events.
- ii) In 2022, the venue hosted 109 events, attracting around 50,000 people. In 2023, the venue hosted 69 events, in addition to a 13-week run of the Funland Theme Park, and a 19-week run of Icescape, the UK's largest outdoor covered ice rink.
- iii) The council recognises the importance of entertainment, culture and events to residents and visitors. Its ambition is to see increased activity and footfall once the redevelopment is complete, and the new Operator is in place.

### d) History

- i) The Tropicana is an iconic building on Weston-super-Mare seafront. This unique entertainment venue has hosted notable events and celebrities since it opened in 1937.
- ii) It is affectionately and well known to both local people and summer visitors, many of whom have stories to tell of happy times spent at the Tropicana.
- iii) It has evolved over time according to new architectural styles and tastes. From the 1930s Art Deco diving boards to the 1980s pineapple shaped water chutes within the water park, the Tropicana has accommodated changing interests and pastimes:
  - 1937 – 'The Pool' opened to the public following a £60,000 project, giving the town an outdoor swimming pool. At 950sqm, it was the largest open-air pool in Europe and included Art Deco style diving boards. Hollywood greats visited including Laurel and Hardy, and Diana Dors. Part of the Promenade building remains from this period.
  - 1983 – Following a £1m redevelopment, the Tropicana Pleasure Beach reopened to the public. Diving boards were replaced by a wave machine, pineapple shaped water chutes and a water heater. 7,500 people visited on re-opening day.
  - 2015 – For five weeks in the summer, the Tropicana hosted Dismaland – Bemusement Park, an art installation curated by the world-famous street artist Banksy. This featured original works by Banksy and 58 other artists, including Damien Hirst. It attracted over 150,000 visitors from all over the world, generating £20m in revenue and international acclaim for the area.
  - 2022 – The Tropicana hosted SEEMonster, a retired North Sea rig, transformed into one of the UK's largest public art installations to inspire global conversations about re-use, renewables and the great British weather, attracting over 500,000 visitors and stimulating international interest.





### 3) Plans for improvement

#### a) Investment aims

- i) The council is investing millions of pounds in the Tropicana, using funding awarded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.
- ii) The aim is to elevate the facility's status as a nationally significant year-round multi-use entertainment venue by providing purpose-built indoor and outdoor entertainment spaces and increasing overall site capacity.
- iii) Investment choices are focussed on revenue opportunities to support the site's long-term operational viability.

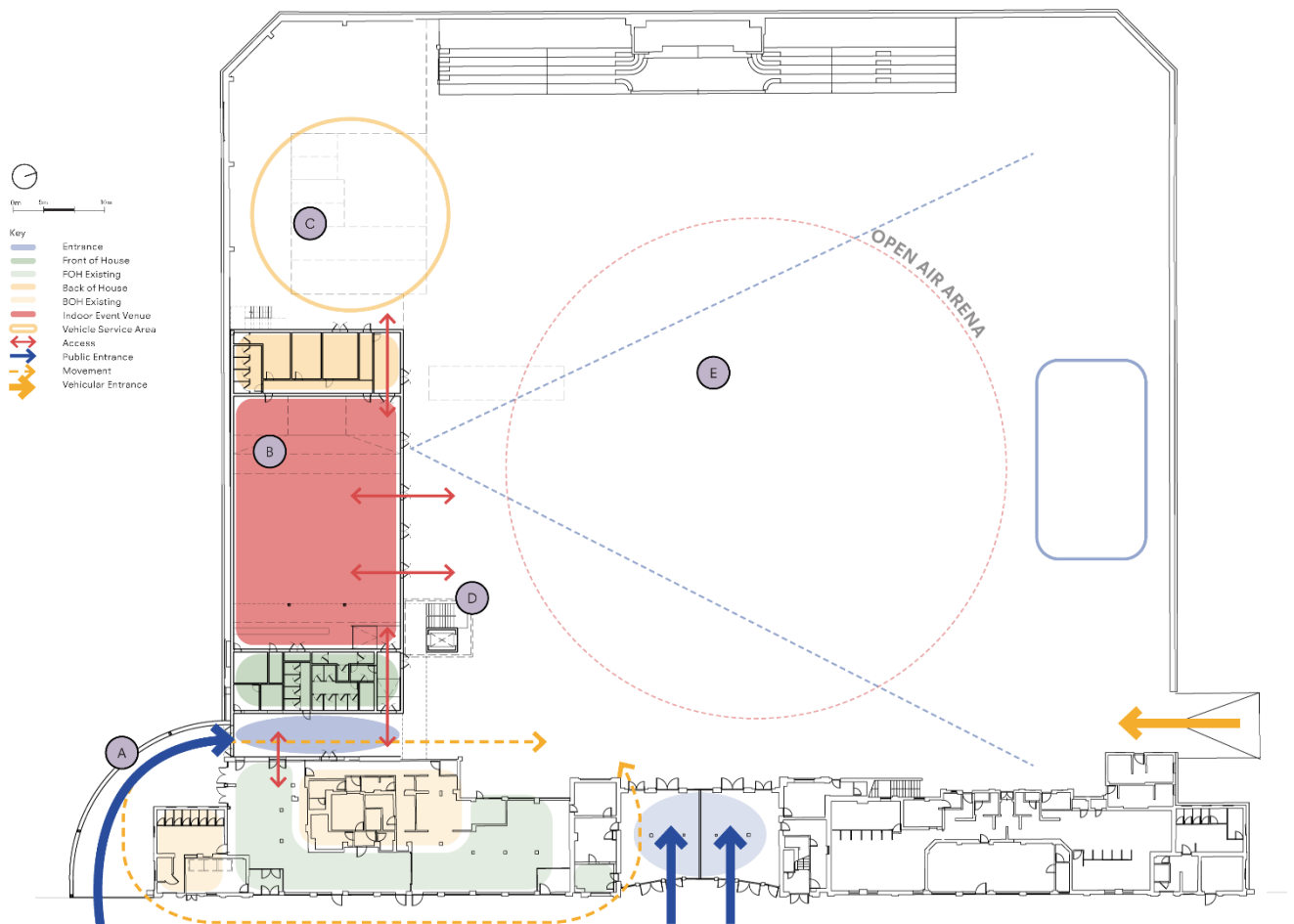
#### b) The Project team

- i) RCKa, an award-winning and highly acclaimed architecture firm, has been appointed to lead a multi-disciplinary team in developing innovative and adaptable proposals to significantly enhance the attractiveness and functionality of the Tropicana. Known for their passion and creativity, RCKa has a track record of producing outstanding designs that the Council believes will captivate the imagination of the local community and draw visitors from near and far to this revitalised landmark.
- ii) The council carried out an expression of interest exercise last year, to understand the market appetite to operate the site. Many EOIs were received, most of which included a tour of the site, which provided significant feedback from potential future operators, much of which has been incorporated into the designs. The tender pack includes the prospectus, feedback and follow-up email, to ensure any bidders not party to the EOI have the same information.
- iii) IPW is also providing additional venue specialist advice, and Inner Circle Consulting supports the council's project management team.
- iv) Atkins Realis provides the Employers Agent function to the council.

#### c) Strategic design principles

- i) An overview of the design is presented in Figure 3.1 (below).
- ii) Please note these are RIBA Stage 2 designs and will develop and be subject to planning permission. Any amendments will be communicated throughout the Operator procurement process.

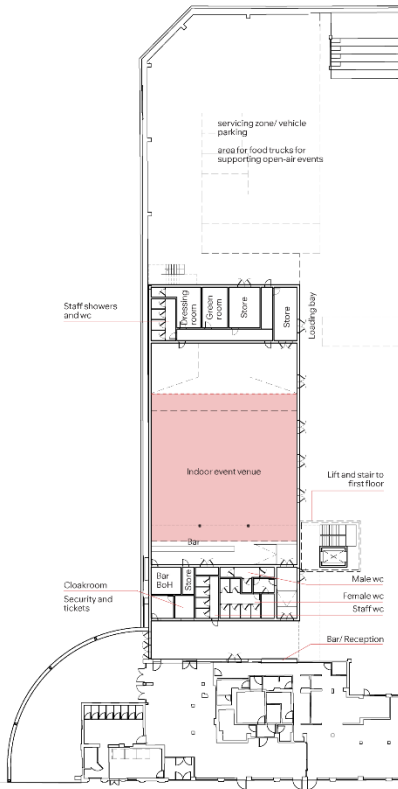
**Figure 3.1 – The Tropicana redevelopment principles** (please note that these are RIBA Stage 2 designs, which will be updated and communicated throughout the planning and construction process).



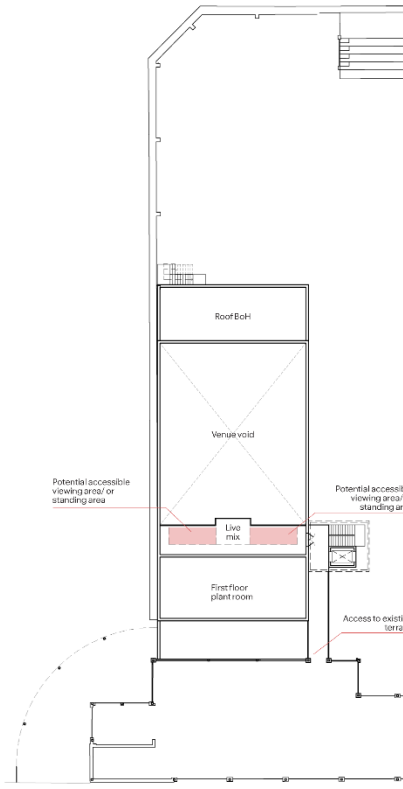
- iii) Site strategy & access: A new southern entrance wing greatly increases site capacity and flexibility. It allows the three key event spaces – heritage Promenade Building / outdoor Arena / new Indoor Event Building – to be used independently or together.
- iv) Site capacity: The new southern entrance wing and existing Promenade lobby will increase overall site capacity to between 5,000 and 6,000, whilst increasing safety and access to all buildings and outdoor spaces.
- v) Outdoor Arena: A unique selling point of the Tropicana in addition to its beach setting within a thriving town, is the site's ability to hold practically any type of large-scale event, as demonstrated over recent years. The design retains this essential quality of a large

- 'blank canvas' to ensure every opportunity is secured to bring local, regional and national visitors together for landmark outdoor events at the Tropicana.
- vi) Economic model: Focusing investment on an indoor event space (alongside consideration of the outdoor Arena and Promenade Building) has been shown to support both the council's aspiration for a year-round venue and increase the financial viability and opportunities for the Operator. This applies equally to the spatial and detailed design of the building, the cost for which is regularly checked against operational benefit.
  - vii) Indoor Event Space: The envelope, structure and services within the existing event space is end of life and will be demolished. A new, highly flexible purpose-built indoor venue will provide contemporary spaces for myriad uses and events. A minimum capacity of 1,000 visitors is based on industry standard formula for live performance events.
  - viii) Technical standards: The new building will be constructed to all current standards and requirements for a public building. It will better contain noise to increase opportunities for amplified music, be taller and better proportioned internally to broaden the type of events and installations and have much improved environmental and energy performance including renewable energy and low carbon heating solutions.
  - ix) Supporting spaces: All areas have been considered to maximise operational performance. Back of house indoor areas are designed with current and specialist operator input, scenario testing has informed strategies for using spaces within the Promenade building (such as extra bar / winter coat store etc.), and space for additional temporary facilities has been allowed for the outdoor Arena and / or specific indoor events e.g. additional equipment, dressing rooms, WCs, food stalls etc.
  - x) Operator collaboration: It is the council's intention to communicate with potential Operators throughout the procurement process, particularly as the detailed design stages commence, to ensure investment decisions are sound and support the site viability aim – communication between interested parties will be key.
  - xi) Indicative floor plans are presented in Figure 3.2 (below).

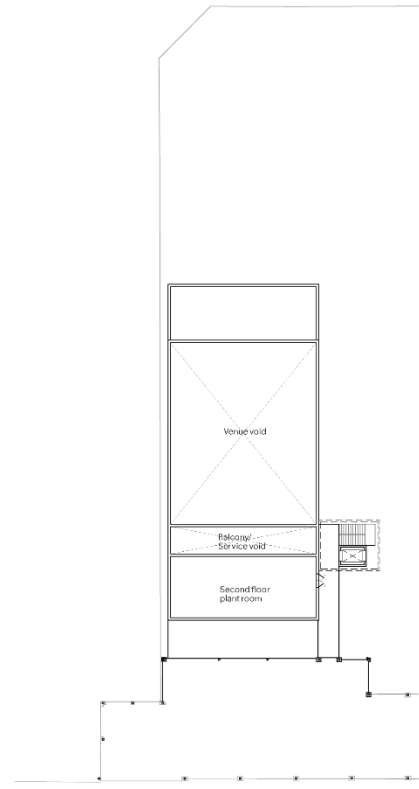
**Figure 3.2 – indicative floor plans**



Ground floor plan - 1:500 at A3



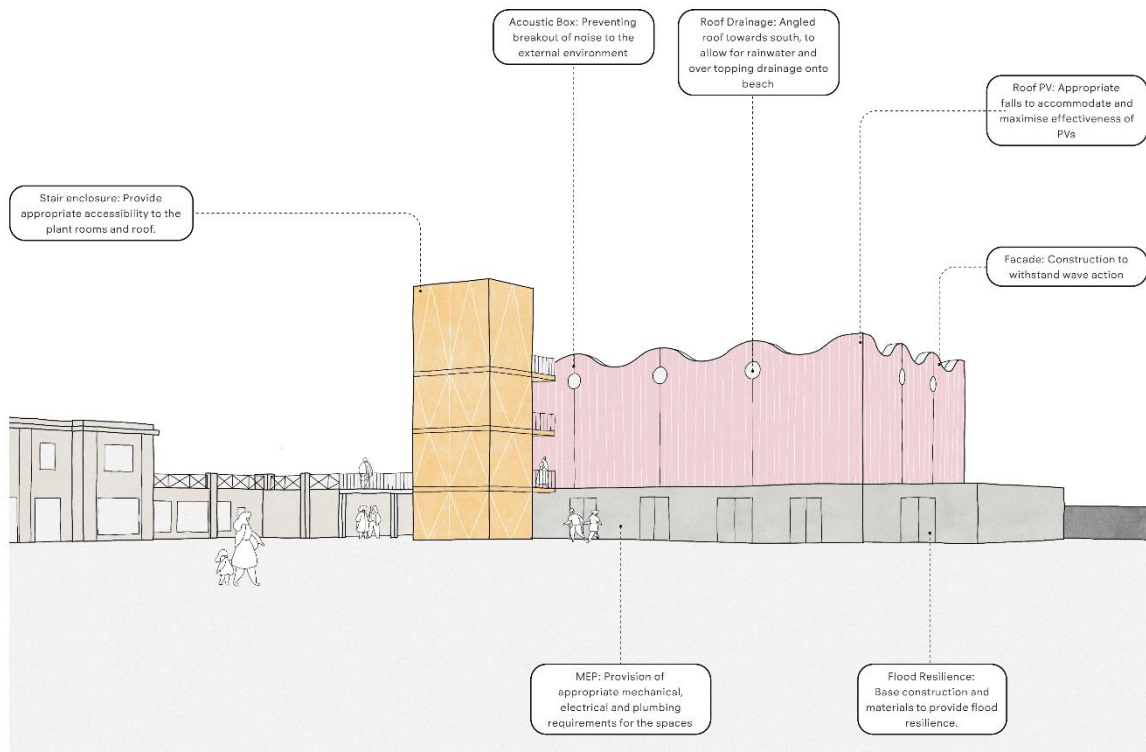
First floor plan - 1:500 at A3



Second floor plan - 1:500 at A3

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- xii) Promenade building: A range of improvements are planned that celebrate the heritage of this iconic beachfront site – connecting to the rich social history of the site that everyone you meet has a story to tell about.
  - xiii) Façade improvements and repairs will be completed, such as re-pointing and painting, and works to improve the 2 roof terraces that offer sunset viewing potential, and design improvements to attract people to the site.
  - xiv) Operational considerations such as improved flood resilience and some Counter Terrorism Mitigation arrangements are also included.
  - xv) Wayfinding & character: The design is being coordinated with other council strategies to ensure signage and wayfinding is improved to ensure the experience of finding the venue for local people and visitors is simple, clear and enjoyable.
  - xvi) Architectural features include a distinct lighting strategy and bold building silhouette to ensure the Tropicana is recognisable from a distance. A characterful stair enclosure on the northern, town side, of the building provides a strong vertical visual marker, which will all compliment the refurbishment of the Promenade building, making it stand out for all the right reasons.

**Figure 3.4 & 3.5: Riba 2-3 design features**



**Table 3.3 – Technical specification**

Spatial Brief			Location	
Area	Description	Requirements	New Build	Existing
Main Event Hall	A flexible space capable of hosting a range of events from live music to conferences.	Capacity of 1000 people plus staff, including bar area, security zone and stage. Stage is 4m deep. Security zone is 2m.	✓	
		Accessible viewing on balcony	✓	
Entrance Lobby and Foyer/ FOH	A welcoming and covered front-facing area for ticket sales and storage of personal items.  Provides a break-out space from the main event hall.	Box Office, with a drop counter. <i>Note this could also be located in the existing building.</i>	✓	✓
		Cloakroom with secure storage.	✓	
		Security		
		<del>Bar/Reception</del>		
		Toilets	✓	✓
		First Aid		✓
Bar/Café Area	A social space for attendees to relax and socialise before an event.	Circulation core with lift, sized for goods	✓	
		As well as entrance foyer bar, the existing Bay Cafe serves compliments the new event space.	✓	✓
Artist Areas	A comfortable and spacious area for performers to relax before and after performances.	Green Room with kitchenette	✓	
		Dressing Room with toilets and showers.	✓	
		Laundry - small with washer, dryer, and ironing facilities		
Office and Staff Areas	Designated spaces for event organizers, promoters, and tour managers to coordinate activities and manage operations.	Staff Toilets, showers, changing	✓	
		Production Office, Director Office, General Office and storage		✓
		Staff Lockers		
Storage and Loading Areas	Adequate space for storing equipment and facilitating efficient load-in and load-out processes, accommodating vehicles such as tour buses and production trucks.	Cleaner stores with sinks	✓	
		General Store	✓	
		Event Store	✓	
		Loading Bay	✓	
		Refuse, servicing and parking areas	✓	
		Plant	✓	
Open Air Arena	'Blank canvas' open-air arena	New entrance access	✓	

*(Nb: bar / reception relocated into main event space hence crossed out of lobby)*

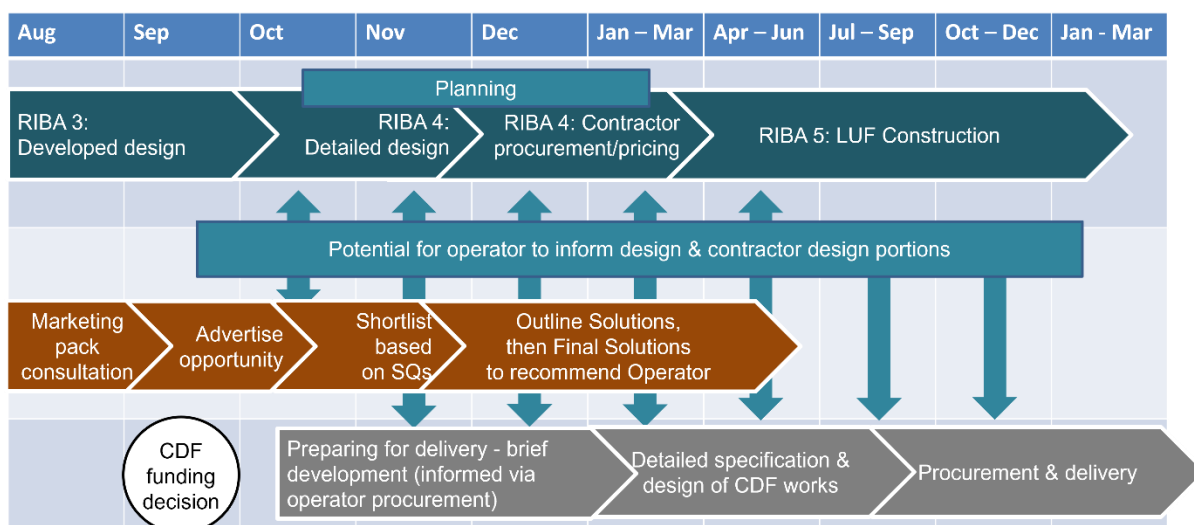
## d) Cultural Development Fund

- i) If the council’s Cultural Development Fund application is successful (result is expected in Autumn 2024), capital investment decisions for this £2 million capital fund will be made jointly with the Operator and will, again be focused on the long-term viability of the site as a culture and entertainment venue.
- ii) Options could include installation of a lift to open the upper floors to the public, further works to create flexible spaces within the Promenade building, and / or installation of fit-out e.g. stage, sound and light equipment; etc.

## e) Project timeline

- i) To allow construction and refurbishment work to take place; the council will temporarily close the Tropicana from October / November 2024.
- ii) Work is currently scheduled to finish by the end of 2025.
- iii) The design, layouts, capacities, and specification are currently at RIBA Stage 2-3 and are subject to change and planning permission.
- iv) Prospective tenderers will be updated throughout the process to ensure they are able to bid appropriately and accordingly.
- v) Figure 3.5 below displays an indicative timeline of all aspects of the Tropicana programme.

**Figure 3.6 The timeline**





## 4. Location and market

### a. The location

- i. The site sits along Marine Parade which wraps the coastline of Weston-super-Mare. It is situated within flood zone 3 and the [Great Weston Conservation Area](#) which is reflected in the designs and construction.

**Figure 4.1 – Town centre location**



- ii. **Weston-super-Mare** is a coastal town in the unitary authority area of North Somerset Council.
- iii. The 60-minute drivetime population encompasses parts of the metropolitan areas of Bristol and Newport.
- iv. Weston College and University Centre Weston (UCW) have an excellent track record of working with businesses to identify future skill gaps, support and train the next generation of highly skilled workers, equipped with the know-how needed to drive future talent and innovation-led growth.
- v. UCW offers 45-degree level programmes and courses across 6 campuses to 30,000+ students. The centre is run by Weston College in partnership with the University of the West of England Bristol and Bath Spa University.
- vi. It's predicted that Weston-super-Mare will soon grow larger than the city of Bath.

**Figure 4.2 – Weston-super-Mare**



- vii. **North Somerset** is a place in transformation, offering extraordinary connectivity, high value and an exceptional quality of life. North Somerset is a gateway to the South West and the world beyond, offering opportunities for investors and entrepreneurs to reach a global audience whilst enjoying a sustainable and balanced lifestyle.
- viii. North Somerset has a growing population, with a 7% increase between the last censuses, with Weston-super-Mare contributing to around 1% of this growth.
- ix. Over the last 5-10 years, increasing numbers of people relocate from Bristol to Weston, attracted by excellent value housing and unbeatable quality of life; this brings additional appetite for culture, leisure and entertainment experiences, and subsequently a strong and growing local culture and arts network.
- x. The North Somerset economy is highly entrepreneurial with ambitious plans for growth
- xi. It is home to a diverse workforce across key sectors and skill levels.

**Figure 4.3 – North Somerset**



- xii. Located in the West of England region, ranked as one of the most desirable areas to live in the UK.

**Figure 4.4 – The West of England**



## **b. Connectivity and accessibility**

- i. The town centre is well connected to the M5 motorway.
- ii. 420 car parking spaces are available along Marine Parade. These spaces operate on a pay and display system run by the council. In addition, over 1,400 over-flow car parking spaces are located on the beach (subject to tidal and beach conditions).
- iii. Table 4.1 (below) shows that Weston-super-Mare is within easy reach of Bristol and other UK cities by car. Bristol Airport is also within 1 hour's drive of Weston-super-Mare.

**Table 4.1 Driving distances**

City	Km/ Miles	Time
Bristol	34 / 21	30 min
Cardiff	88 / 55	1-hour 20 min
Birmingham	169 / 105	2-hour 10 min
London	233 / 145	3-hour 20 min

- iv. The town has a main railway station, which is a 15-minute walk to the Tropicana and a further station at Worle (on the outskirts of Weston) which could offer an ideal park and ride option for larger audiences.
- v. Operated by Great Western Railway (GWR), the station connects to important hubs in the South-West and Wales.

**Table 4.2 Rail distances**

City	Journey time
Bristol	27 mins
Cardiff	1 hour 26 mins
Birmingham	2 hours
London	2 hours 14 mins

- vi. The Tropicana is well connected to the local and regional bus network, with the closest bus stop being a 3-minute walk away.
- vii. The bus network provides fast travel around Weston-super-Mare and offers links across North Somerset, Bristol and further.
- viii. The Airport Flyer bus links Weston-super-Mare to Bristol Airport 364 days a year.
- ix. Visit [www.travelwest.info](http://www.travelwest.info) for route and timetable information.

### c. Visitor footfall and tourism data

- i. The visitor economy plays a significant role in the town, both from residents spending leisure time and visitors attracted to the town, as is demonstrated in the following 2022 estimates (see Table 2.2 below).

**Table 4.3 Value of tourism key facts 2022**

Key facts	Weston-super-Mare	North Somerset
Day visits	4,200,000 Coastal visits – 3,100,000 Urban visits – 1,100,000 Countryside visits - 4,200	6,391,000
Day visitor spend	£158,000,000 Coastal visits - £106,000,000 Urban visits - £51,000,000 Countryside visits - £100,000	£238,200,000
Direct visitor spend	£194,500,000 Food and drink - £76,200,000 Travel - £45,300,000 Shopping - £42,000,000 Attractions / Entertainment - £17,500,000 Accommodation - £13,600,000	£322,800,000
Staying visitors	175,000 UK - 154,000 Overseas - 21,000	416,00
Staying visitor nights	626,500 UK - 488,000 Overseas - 138,000	1,536,000
Staying visitor spend	£36.5m UK - £28.6m Overseas - £7.9m	£84.6m
Other related spend	£4,100,000	£10,200,000
<b>Total visitor related spend</b>	<b>£198,600,000</b>	<b>£333,000,000</b>
Estimated actual employment	3,200	5,433
FTE employment	2,300	3,918

- ii. Weston-super-Mare seafront, where the Tropicana is located, typically sees footfall of over 630,000 people over a 40-week period.
- iii. Major events in the town include the Carnival in November, which attracts around 100,000 people; the Beach Race in October, a two-day event for motorbike racing on the beach that sees 60,000 to 80,000 visitors over the event, and the Café Mambo music festival in September, which attracts 4,000 people over the weekend.

#### d. Hotels

- i. In 2021, North Somerset had 4,891 serviced bed spaces (hotels, B&Bs, etc) and 1,937 self-catering units including camping pitches, lodges, apartments, etc.
- ii. Most local hotels are 3-Star, with plentiful 4- and 5-Star accommodation in surrounding areas.



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## Purpose

This descriptive document (**DD**) is provided by North Somerset Council (the “**council**”) and relates to the procurement process to select an operating partner for the Tropicana.

This DD sets out the background to the project and summarises the key project requirements.

## Disclaimer

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