**Leicester City Council**

**Haymarket Theatre**

**Soft Market Test Questionnaire**

July 2021



1. **SUMMARY**

**1.1 Background**

The Haymarket Theatre in Leicester was constructed in 1973 as part of the wider Haymarket Shopping Centre development. The theatre has been leased to Leicester City Council since 1973 and has a further 51 years to run until expiry in 2072.

From 1973, Leicester Theatre Trust operated the theatre as a producing theatre until leaving in 2006 to move to the new Curve Theatre building in the city. Various schemes to bring the venue back into use were explored but it remained unused until 2018 when it was sub leased to Haymarket Consortium Limited. The consortium operated the theatre, predominantly as a receiving house, until going into administration in early 2020 and the lease reverting to Leicester City Council.

Since taking the lease back, some consultancy commissioned jointly with Arts Council England has been undertaken with the city’s cultural sector, which along with this broader reaching soft market test will allow all options to be appraised for the future of the building.

Through this soft market test, we are keen to identify and engage with:

1. Organisations that wish to take on the full management of the venue as sole operators.
2. Organisations that do not wish to be the sole operators of the venue but who have an interest in presenting events at the venue
3. Organisations that wish to use all or part of the building for any other use

This will inform the level of interest in both aspects and allow decisions to be made on the way forward.

**1.2 Financial context**

The lease currently has an annual cost of circa £200k per annum associated with it in the form of service charge, rates and basic services.

In terms of revenue funding, Arts Council England have indicated that they are not looking to add to their portfolio of funded theatres in the city.

The city council’s agreement with the last operators (Haymarket Consortium) was that the existing lease costs would initially be borne by the council but would be transferred to the operator within an agreed period so that the council would be free of financial burden regarding the building. The council would be seeking a similar arrangement with any future building operator.

The city council also hold financial interests in several other city cultural buildings, and specifically in this instance, Curve Theatre and De Montfort Hall and would not wish to see a financial issue created in either of those venues through reopening the Haymarket Theatre.

**1.3 Specification**

The theatre has a 902-seat main house which was fully refurbished in 2018 including new seating throughout and supports an intimate audience experience.

The main house has an extensive stage area that incorporates a functioning pit lift and is thought to be one of the largest stages in the country. It also has a large load in/workshop areas to the stage right wing.

A second performance space on the upper foyer, a black box studio theatre, accommodates around 120 seated or 200 standing – although it should be noted that there are currently no seats in place. This level also accommodates a medium sized meeting room and a smaller storage room.

Load in arrangement for both spaces is via a goods lift that runs from the ground loading dock through the main stage on level two and the studio on level five.

Both spaces have good sound infrastructure but relatively little in the way of lighting infrastructure.

Both auditoria are served by ten dressing rooms on level two one of which is wheelchair accessible. Two have an individual shower and toilet, with the remainder sharing communal facilities. There is also a green room and stage door office on this level.

Five varying sized offices are accommodated on level three, along with a number of large storage areas.

Elsewhere in the building are a number of other storage/multiple use rooms of varying sizes and configurations.

The public foyers are large, but narrow in some places. Lifts now serve all public areas from ground floor through to the top of the car park. Two bars are in place, one larger one on the lower foyer that has a small finishing kitchen behind it, which also doubles as the box office; and a second smaller bar on the upper foyer. There are plans to add a further bar to the lower foyer and a dedicated box office.

**1.4 Building condition**

The building was completed in 1973 and is mostly of steel reinforced concrete construction. This makes significant alteration of the building difficult, particularly around the main auditorium which has a raked concrete floor beneath the seating.

Generally, the building condition is in good structural repair and cosmetic refurbishment has been undertaken in some areas recently.

Equipment wise, there is little in the way of stage support equipment such as washing/drying machines, stage management and general equipment such as flats, blacks, or trussing.

The theatres flying sixty bar flying system is currently inoperable and requires full refurbishment or replacement. The fire safety curtain is also currently inoperable, although due for repair later in 2021.

There is currently no seating provision in the studio, nor any public seating or furniture in either the upper or lower foyers.

The stage door access is via an external stairwell on the north side of the building. The stairwell is cosmetically unappealing as an arrival point and attracts some antisocial behaviour.

* 1. **Location**

The theatre is located on Belgrave Gate, one of Leicester’s oldest streets which runs northwards from the site of the city’s old east gate, following the line of the Fosse Way roman road.

It is the main, northern city centre access route from the ring road and a busy shopping street. The road itself is currently undergoing works to convert to a pedestrianised route which will significantly enhance the public realm.

The shopping offer along Belgrave Gate is mostly made up of value retailers, with brands like Argos, Greggs, Poundland and Cash Converters located directly opposite the theatre, as well as many independent fast food and discount stores. There is currently little night-time economy in the vicinity of the theatre aside from the fast-food outlets.

The theatre building itself is part of the Haymarket Shopping complex (constructed at the same time as theatre) and which currently offers shopping brands such as B&M, CEX, Heron Foods, Primark and Matalan.

A new 67-bed Travelodge opened in 2021 in the converted upper floors of the old Haymarket House above the shopping centre.

A major refurbishment of the Haymarket car park which serves the theatre, shopping centre and hotel was carried out by the city council and completed in 2020.

* 1. **Building Use**

The building’s construction clearly lends itself to events being presented on stage to a seated audience, but beyond this there is no fixed idea as to what purpose the building could or should be used for, and the council would like to hear from operators in any industry that feel that they could successfully operate or present events, either in all or part the building.

* 1. **Key outcomes**
* That the Haymarket Theatre reopens.
* That the council’s financial obligations to the building are significantly reduced, or ideally, eliminated.
* That the reopened Haymarket Theatre does not create a financial issue at existing venues that the council holds a financial interest in, principally in the case of theatres, Curve Theatre and De Montfort Hall.
1. **SOFT MARKET TESTING QUESTIONAIRE**

The council would like to hear from potential operators or partners who have innovative ideas and/or those already delivering similar services in other locations in order to support the development of a specification and potentially, a future procurement opportunity.

The attached questionnaire is an information gathering exercise which will help inform our commissioning decisions and the feedback will be used to help us to shape our thinking and ascertain the viability of various potential models for the theatre.

**2.1 Confidentiality and Freedom of Information**

Please be aware that we are subject to the disclosure requirements of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FoIA) and information held is potentially liable to disclosure under that Act.  For this reason, it is advised that any information you consider to be commercially sensitive and confidential is labelled as such in your response.  In the event that a request is subsequently made for disclosure under the FoIA, any information considered commercially sensitive and which may prejudice the commercial interests of the provider would not be disclosed in accordance with Section 43 of the FoIA.

**2.2 Future Procurement**

Interested parties will not be prejudiced by any response or failure to respond to this soft market testing exercise and a response to this does not guarantee any invitation to participate in any future procurement process that the council may conduct.

This notice does not constitute a call for competition to procure any services for the council and are not bound to accept any proposals offered. The council will not be liable for any costs, fees or expenses incurred by any party participating in the soft market testing. This exercise, and participation in it, does not imply, signify, or constitute a contractual arrangement of any kind with any party.

Any procurement of any services by the council in due course will be carried out strictly in accordance with the provisions of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 or Concessions Contracts Regulations 2016 including any statutory amendments taking effect after the date of this notice.

**2.3 Responding**

The council is looking for responses to the questions below from any interested parties. There are 18 questions in total; you do not need to answer all questions; however, the more information you provide the more information we will have to assist in developing the specification(s) and any future procurement model.

Questions 1 to 11 are for respondents interested in becoming the sole operator of the theatre, questions 12 to 18 are for respondents wishing to promote or organise individual events at the theatre but not operate it; and questions 19 to 22 are for respondents interested in using all or part of the building for any other use.

You can answer all sections that are relevant to you or your organisation.

Please expand the response boxes as necessary, you are also welcome to add any additional comments at the end.

Please complete and return this questionnaire and return by e-mail by 4pm on **Wednesday 18 August** **to the Procurement Services Team at** neil.bayliss@leicester.gov.uk **with the subject heading: Soft Market Test: Haymarket Theatre, Leicester.Leicester City Council**



**Haymarket Theatre, Leicester**

**Soft Market Test Questionnaire July 2021**

**About you and your organisation:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Name:  |   |
| Organisation:  |  |
| Organisation size e.g. whether SME, local, regional, or national operator |  |
| Address:  |  |
| Company registration number: |  |
| Email Address:  |  |
| Telephone Number: |  |
| Website (if available): |  |
| Overview of services currently provided:  |  |

**Your views**

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| --- |
| 1. What is your interest in using the Haymarket Theatre building (tick all that apply)
 |
|  Sole theatre operator (please see to questions 2 to 11) Event promoter (please see to questions 12 to 18) Use of building for something else (please see questions 19 to 22) |
| *QUESTIONS 2 – 11 FOR SOLE THEATRE OPERATORS* |
| 1. What experience does you or your company have of running a venue the size and scale of the Haymarket Theatre?
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| 1. Are you currently operating a comparable venue? If so, can you give us details of which venue/s and (if relevant) for who?
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| 1. Financially, how would you expect any contract to be structured for operating the Haymarket, or what types of arrangement would you consider, and on what duration, e.g. straight lease deal, profit share, etc.? If you have any comparable examples or estimates for Haymarket this would be helpful.
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| 1. Would your contractual expectations require initial or ongoing revenue or capital investment from the council? This could be a management fee, ‘rent free’ period, or any other type of payment from or financial partnership with the council? If so on what basis and for what duration? Are you able to provide any indications as to duration/amount etc.?
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| 1. The theatre needs substantial capital investment in its core infrastructure to be fully operational. Would your company be willing and able to invest this capital, and if so on what basis?
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| 1. Given all the information provided in the summary section of this document, what would your approach to usage or event programming be at the Haymarket?
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| 1. Are there any elements of the project which you think would be particularly or significantly challenging to deliver?
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| 1. If the council were to make no further capital investment in the building would you still have an interest becoming the operator? And would that position change if the council were to co-invest with you?
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| 1. If the council were to make no revenue investment available would you still have an interest becoming the operator?
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| 1. Do you have any other comments or feedback?
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| *QUESTIONS 12 – 18 FOR PROMOTERS/EVENT ORGANISERS*  |
| 1. What experience of event promoting/organising do you have at a venue of this scale, and what types of events would you look to promote/organise at the Haymarket Theatre?
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| 1. Is the type of event you would like to present currently provided elsewhere in the city/region, either by yourself or another organisation? If so, can you give details.
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| 1. What financial arrangements would you be looking to operate under, e.g. straight hires, profit share, funded, etc.?
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| 1. How would you fund this project, or would you be looking for investment – and if so, to what level?
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| 1. Do you currently operate any other cultural activities either in the city or elsewhere? Please provide an overview.
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| 1. Do you have any views on how the theatre should/could be operated?
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| 1. Do you have any other comments or feedback?
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| *QUESTIONS 19 – 22 FOR ORGANISATIONS WISHING TO USE ALL OR PART OF THE BUILDING FOR OTHER USES.* |
| 1. What use would you be interested in using the building for and why?
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| 1. Would you require all or part of the building for this use? If part, please specify.
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| 1. How would you want the hire, rental or any other financial arrangement to operate for this use?
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|  |
| 1. Do you have any other comments or feedback?
 |
|  |

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