

ANNUAL COUNCIL MEETING

28 JULY 2020

Public Questions

1. The following questions have been asked Friends of the Alexandra Theatre

Question 1

Following the publication of the plans for the redevelopment of the Alexandra Theatre and Market Hall, to what extent is there any option to amend such plans that have been submitted with the Future High Streets Funding bid?

Response from Portfolio Holder for Business, Economy & Tourism

In order to secure the £10m funding from FHSF, detailed plans will need to be developed and planning permission sought and approved. A great deal of work has been done working with specialists who have vast experience of redevelopment schemes that have rejuvenated those towns, increasing both footfall and income. The Alexandra and Market Hall buildings will remain and internal reconfiguration made to increase and extend the use as part of the evolving Market and Cultural Quarter offer within the town. The cinema will, of course, be relocated to a new, fit for purpose, high tech cinema offer close by, which will be fully DDA compliant and provide an altogether more comfortable experience for the audience.

Question 2

Following recent communication, would the council be willing and able to prepare a monetary target that an independent group, such as FoTAT, would be required to raise in order to take over the theatre and run as a Community Hub Arts Theatre?

Response from Portfolio Holder for Business, Economy & Tourism

The business case was prepared pre-Covid and the findings were that such a facility would need subsidy in the short term and not viable in the medium to long term. The Newton's Place project is now complete; this new community hub in the town centre has taken years to raise the necessary capital and carry out the works required. In the current financial climate, theatres around the country are struggling now, more than ever to remain open. We need to be realistic that funding a community hub without a guarantee of income would be extremely difficult, threaten the longer term future of both the Alexandra and Market Hall buildings.

The FHSF Team at TDC were responsible for the new Pavilions in Teignmouth. For some in the town, losing the old Carlton Theatre was a blow, however, Pavilions is now a much loved, hugely successful space enjoyed by thousands over the years. During the planning for Pavilions, team members visited many small theatres around the West Country and know first-hand just how difficult it is to fund a small theatre and ensure the future of such buildings without large subsidies.

Question 3

What was/is the position of advice when in discussion with Quarterbridge regarding the plans? Was/is it to focus on those parts which would simply maximise the projected economic outcome (retail) and putting needs of the community in a secondary position, whilst completing a degree of 'box-checking exercises', such as offering a 'flexible multi-use entertainments space', to ensure that this side of proceedings is covered and hence presenting a reluctance to deviate from the plan at this point in time?

Response from Portfolio Holder for Business, Economy & Tourism

The flexible entertainments space is most certainly not a box ticking exercise, and the team working on this project are all passionate about Newton Abbot and securing its future. The discussions with Quarterbridge were based around the desire, both from TDC and the local community over the past 10 years to regenerate Newton Abbot, and through the development of the FHSF business case it provided an opportunity to review how the Alexandra and Market Hall buildings can be re-established as a social and entertainment space, alongside an enhanced market and food and beverage offer.

The buildings are currently not sustainable or viable in the current layout and design; we are fully aware that retail and markets alone in town centres is not enough to attract footfall and secure the buildings future. They need to once again provide a flexible social, community and commercial space, as originally intended when built.

The social and economic benefits of the plans form a key part of a comprehensive package of proposals across the town as part of the business case which has been developed for the Future High Street Funding. The improvements extend to include greenery and seating within Market Square and the ability to host various events, live entertainment and performances from the Square, into the Alexandra and Market Hall buildings. Alongside the new cinema and Market Walk we are providing a destination for the wider area, helping to secure the town's future.

We want to provide a showcase for the many local artists in and around Newton Abbot. There will be space including theatre in the round, musical performances dance and comedy, further supported by a place for the community to shop, eat, drink and socialise.

Newton Abbot prides itself on being an Historic Market Town, dating back almost 800 years but it needs to adapt. The development of a Markets Quarter alongside the evolving Culture Quarter within the town will help strengthen the town for the

future and we would look forward to working with representatives from FoTAT, to ensure the entertainment space works well for all.

The following questions have been asked Newton Abbot and District Musical Comedy Society

Question 1

We understand that 'Quarterbridge', as experts in markets and retail, is the lead consultant for the regeneration of the Alexandra Theatre. Do you consider that they have enough experience in the provision of arts and social entertainment?

Response from Portfolio Holder for Business, Economy & Tourism

Quarterbridge has a strong understanding and experience in the costings and viability of building operation costs, particularly historic buildings. In order to build a strong business case, for a successful bid, the costs and benefits ratio must support realistic outcomes that offer good levels of benefits in relation to cost inputs. The buildings are currently not sustainable or viable in the current layout and design; we are fully aware that retail and markets alone in town centres is not enough to attract footfall and secure the buildings future. They need to once again provide a flexible social, community and commercial space, as originally intended when built. Entertainment and events are an integral part of the business case.

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Question 2

Are all Council members familiar with the business case produced by 'The Fruit Tree' company, commissioned by Teignbridge District Council? If so, what are their views on the economic viability of the Alexandra Theatre as a social hub which is highlighted within the report?

Response from Portfolio Holder for Business, Economy & Tourism

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