

## For publication

### Arrangements for Reopening of Chesterfield Theatres and Venues

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Meeting:	Community, Customer and Organisational Scrutiny Committee
Date:	10 September, 2020
Cabinet portfolio:	Town Centres and Visitor Economy
Report by:	Arts and Venues Manager

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<b>Purpose of reviewing the topic</b>	To consider the arrangements for the reopening of Chesterfield Theatres and Venues following the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown and during ongoing restrictions, taking account of the Council Plan priorities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ 'Making Chesterfield a thriving borough'</li><li>○ 'Improving quality of life for local people'</li><li>○ 'Providing value for money services.</li></ul>
<b>Objectives of the review</b>	To contribute to consideration of options for reopening of the theatres and venues, and to consider the potential impact on the longer-term marketing and pricing strategies for Chesterfield Theatres and on the development of the venues and the arts and culture offer.
<b>Key Issues for review</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Comparison with similar venues (e.g. as cinema and for live shows)</li><li>• Progress on opening for live shows and venues for hire</li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Progress on opening community room venues</li><li>• Contingency plans / alternatives if further restrictions required</li><li>• Longer term impact on strategy to develop offer of venues and arts &amp; culture</li></ul>
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## 1.0 **Background**

- 1.1 Chesterfield Venues, which comprises Winding Wheel Theatre, Pomegranate Theatre, Hasland Village Hall, Assembly rooms, and the Rest Rooms, closed on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2020, in line with the Government guidance due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 1.2 Show ticket holders were contacted on a show by show basis and offered refunds for cancelled shows. Venue hirers were contacted and offered refunds for cancelled bookings.
- 1.3 Initially a small team of staff worked at the main venues on a daily basis and ensured all health and safety checks were completed and regular maintenance tasks done. A further 12 staff continued to work from home. This group included managers, marketing, box office, administrative and programming staff. A further 31 staff were placed on furlough. This group included sales assistants, customer assistants, stage crew, and some caretakers.
- 1.4 The Council was awarded £35,000 grant by the Arts Council for marketing costs to promote the re-opening of Chesterfield Theatres.

## 2.0 **Current position and key milestones**

2.1 The Council re-opened the Pomegranate Theatre in a Covid Secure socially distanced way on 24<sup>th</sup> July 2020 with a limited programme of cinema films and recorded broadcasts and has hired out the Winding Wheel Theatre regularly to the NHS for Blood Donations.

2.2 Now that the Government has allowed theatre performances indoors in a socially distanced way, we are planning to re-open both theatres for “live events”, albeit with reduced seating capacities during the Autumn 2020. Depending on the seat and booking configuration, there will be a capacity of approximately 160 to 200 seats at the Pomegranate Theatre and between 250 to 350 seats at the Winding Wheel Theatre.

3.0 The first live shows scheduled to take place are part of the Autumn Play Season, which takes place from Tuesday 13 October until Saturday 14 November at the Pomegranate Theatre. The season includes three plays : *Love Upon The Throne, Dead Certain* and *Live Bed Show*. These will all feature performers, drawn from the same social bubble, in order to help limit contact with other performers and audiences. Other live shows are scheduled to take place at both the Winding Wheel Theatre and Pomegranate Theatre from October onwards.

3.1 The Winding Wheel Theatre also opened for venue hire in a Covid Secure socially distanced way as from 1<sup>st</sup> September, and arrangements are being made for both regular and new customers to hire rooms at the venue for a limited range of activities according to Government guidelines.

3.2 Officers are currently working on plans for re-opening both Hasland Village Hall , and the Assembly Rooms.

#### 4.0 **Comparison with similar venues**

4.1 Different councils have taken a wide range of approaches towards the management and operation of the venues, which they own and operate during the pandemic.

4.2 A number of similar sized local authority operated, or funded venues have re-opened their venues as cinemas. This has included Dorking Halls, Elgiva Theatre Chesham, Worthing Theatres, Theatre Severn Shrewsbury, Westlands Centre Yeovil.

4.3 Some of these venues are also planning to stage live events during the Autumn with a socially distanced audience.

4.4 In addition, other theatres including Bristol Old Vic Theatre, Kings Theatre Portsmouth , the National Theatre, Southwark Playhouse and Donmar Warehouse in London are planning to stage live events as well.

4.5 However, some local venues are currently closed including Buxton Opera House, Palace Theatre Mansfield, Derby Theatre, and Sheffield Theatres.

4.6 Like many other arts organisations, we have applied to the Arts Council for a grant from the Cultural Recovery Fund to support our work from October 2020 to March 2021.

#### 5.0 **Contingency plans / alternatives if further restrictions required**

5.1 If there is a further national or local lockdown, all activities planned and agreed during the current conditions will be either re-scheduled to a later date or cancelled. Having gone through the original lockdown we have developed robust processes for carrying out this work effectively with the external promoters and our customers.

#### 6.0 **Longer term impact on strategy to develop offer of venues and arts & culture**

6.1 Our current strategy is to re-open the venues, and engage with our customers as much as possible, and to work hard to generate demand for the all activities we have on offer.

6.2 Due to the significant amount of shows and events, which were re-scheduled earlier in the year, we have a varied and entertaining programme planned for 2021.

6.3 At this stage it is not clear what the medium term to long term impact of the pandemic will be on customer behaviour, and the demand for theatre and cinema tickets.

#### 7.0 **Conclusion**

- 7.1 The Council has already reopened the Pomegranate Theatre for cinema screenings, and the Winding Wheel Theatre for venue hire, and is planning to stage live events at both theatres from October onwards. It is planning to re-open Hasland Village Hall and the Assembly Rooms during September.

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