



Theatre options commentary

Worthing Civic Quarter

September 2007

This paper provides commentary to options illustrated in the Worthing Venue Matrix issued by Charcoalblue in June 07 and revised in September 07.

Charcoalblue have worked with EDAW throughout the summer 2007 to investigate a series of wide-ranging options and scenarios for the Civic Quarter. Each option has significant implications in terms of ownership, management, budget, business planning and the future development of the performing arts in Worthing.

It is recommended that the options form the basis of a feasibility study in which the sustainability, architecture, urban impact and business viability can be tested.

Option 1

Retention and refurbish

Each of the performance spaces is given a modest refurbishment. Theatre systems are replaced to current standards, and where necessary any health and safety issues are resolved within the existing building.

This option does not change the status quo in terms of number of venues or performance programming, but halts any degeneration of the buildings and will provide a safe working environment for the theatre staff.

The extent of the refurbishments is largely dependant on budget. A comprehensive audit of each venue would assess where money is best spent to enable the facilities to continue safely and efficiently receiving shows in the future.

Option 2

Assembly Hall and Connaught upgrade

The Assembly Hall is given a comprehensive refurbishment and upgrade to a high standard. Remodelled public spaces will improve the audience experience, whilst upgraded back-of-house accommodation will improve the management and operation of the building.

Modern theatrical systems are to be installed in the Assembly Hall, including an allowance for safe high level access for scenic suspension above the stage. This option does not include a flyloft or flytower, as the auditorium is not designed to relate to such a structure and the audience experience would deteriorate.

Sightlines and the flexibility of the Assembly Hall auditorium is enhanced with a new retractable seating system, maintaining the existing seat count but in a seating rake, rather than flat floor. The time required for the change-over from seated to flat floor improves significantly, saving labour costs and increasing revenue opportunities throughout the day.



Despite these improvements to the platform and seating, the Assembly Hall space is not appropriate for lyric performances (drama, panto, musical theatre etc) or productions requiring any scenic effect beyond simple suspension.

The Connaught is refurbished as a medium scale touring house with improved acoustics and theatre systems. The auditorium will require a detailed analysis to establish if and how the capacity could be extended and how the overall audience experience can be enhanced.

It is anticipated the Pavilion is either sold to a Pier operator (but recognised that the venue would become direct competitor to the Assembly Hall) or another use sought for the building.

Option 3a

New insertion inside Assembly Hall and remodelled Pavilion Theatre

The existing footprint of the Assembly Hall is retained, but the auditorium and stage are completely remodelled allowing a new theatre space to be created within the listed building.

The Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester is created within the Cotton Exchange building in Manchester. Whilst this is a unique in-the-round producing theatre and not a receiving house, it is an excellent example of combining bold new architecture within a historic environment.



Manchester Royal Exchange Theatre

Charcoalblue are currently working with Keith Williams Architects on the remodelling of the Marlowe Theatre, Canterbury, where the existing flytower and auditorium side walls are retained but a new engaging theatre is inserted increasing the seat count and improving the theatrical experience of the audience.

The new Assembly Hall will be an exciting dynamic space for theatre and the new architecture a contrast to the existing facade. The auditorium will be arranged over two or three levels bringing audience closer to the stage. A new flytower (or flyloft) is constructed above the stage allowing for a wide range of programming including drama and musical theatre.



The theatre environment will be of a high standard allowing conferences to be catered for, but due to the constraints of the existing footprint it will be without significant additional accommodation.

A flat floor arrangement is not anticipated within this option as it is suggested the seating be fixed to maintain the integrity of the theatre.

The extent of the stage systems and flying need detailed consultation and analysis. The difference between a flytower and a flyloft are significant, but both offer a level scenic ability. Programme, operation and technical budget need reviewing against what the existing building can take architecturally. A full flytower could be in the region of 20-25m high, whilst a flyloft; offering safe access, fixed suspension and limited flying is much lower.

The acoustic requirements of the new space will differ from the existing and may not be appropriate for orchestral works. The room will however be able to cater for amplified music productions, mid-scale opera and musical theatre.

It is anticipated the Pavilion will similarly be remodelled to provide a new intimate and flexible space for drama and touring theatre. The seating area and stage will also be flexible enough to allow non-amplified music events including a limited classical programme of work, and flat floor events.

It is recognised the Pavilion has significant shortcomings in terms of its technical requirements, but these should be balanced against its prime position and relationship to the pier and seafront.

Option 3b

New Assembly Hall (as 3a) with studio, refurbished Pavilion

As with option 3a, the remodelled Assembly Hall occupies the existing site, however this arrangement includes a small scale studio theatre adjacent to the Assembly Hall seating 300 in a flexible format.

The Connaught is not retained as a performance space in this option, the new studio allows for modest touring of small scale intimate drama works, community events and DJ-nights. As with option 3a, another use would need to be found for the building.

The Pavilion is simply refurbished in this scenario offering a prominent location for headliner acts and is retained as a flat floor venue.

Option 4

New build flexible Concert Theatre with studio

The existing Assembly Hall is demolished to make way for a new multi-purpose Concert Theatre. The new auditorium and stage are designed to allow number #1 touring productions of musical theatre, drama, opera and headliners acts. The theatre is also appropriate for concert events throughout the year.

Front of house accommodation wraps around the performance space allowing the building to be animated throughout the daytime, a new cafe and restaurant draw people into the building.



As with option 3a and b, conference programming is included, however with this new-build option there is a greater opportunity for conference related accommodation, such as dedicated break-out spaces.

A new back of house block will house the get-in and the stage support accommodation with stage level dressing rooms (with natural daylight) and be fully accessible. The get-in is reconfigured to allow easy truck access.

The new theatre will seat 1,200 seats over three levels. The arrangement of the seating will be suitable for all lyric performances, allowing a genuine audience/performer relationship for drama with excellent sightlines and acoustics for musical theatre and opera.

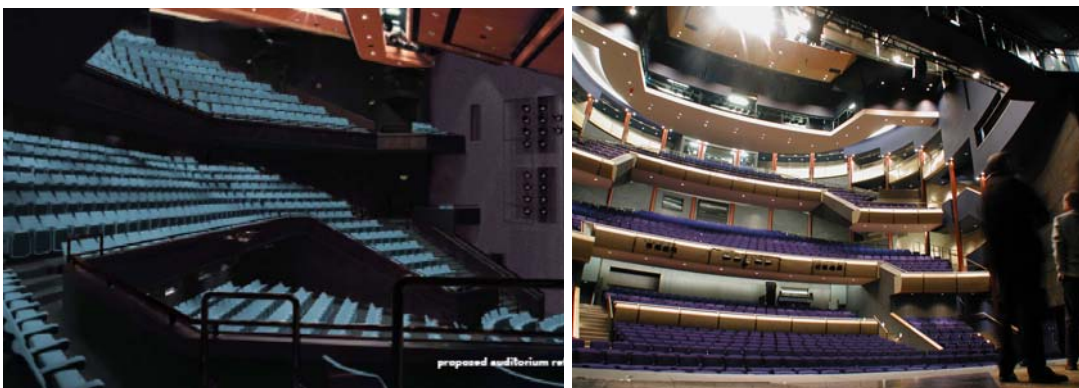
The auditorium allows for a flat floor, but it is suggested this not by using a retractable seating system but rather using a system of seat wagons giving a solidity to the alternate room formats.

A dedicated 150 seat flexible studio theatre will provide a small scale environment for drama, new writing, small scale music events, band and DJ nights and amateur productions. It might double up as a flat floor space or rehearsal room for the main stage. The second space will retain its own character, may have natural daylight, it will not be a black box.

In this option neither the Connaught or Pavilion are retained as performance spaces.

It should be noted that demolishing a listed structure is not a task to consider lightly and is a process laden with risk. However with due consultation, and if there is a strong case to be made then demolition and replacement may be possible. Charcoalblue is currently working with Bennetts architects on the RSC's £100m redevelopment in Stratford upon Avon. This project features the demolition of a Grade II listed 1932 auditorium, but retains the foyers as part of the new scheme.

Built examples of this type of theatre range in their design from fully flexible moving architecture, to adjustment of smaller elements to allow for the varied programme. Dergate in Northampton, Cerritos PAC in the US are both extreme examples of a single room space catering for theatre, concert, in-the-round and flat floor needs.



Theatre Royal, Plymouth and Milton Keynes Theatre

The Theatre Royal, Plymouth is a flexible receiving house catering for lyric productions, including musical theatre, drama and opera. The theatre can adjust its overall seat count by lowering the architectural ceiling to omit the balcony. Similarly, the new Milton Keynes



Theatre has a similar level of flexibility with a comparable programme to the Worthing theatres, including symphony works.

Interesting precedents, in terms of theatre design and programme include the Lowry, Salford; Theatre Royal, Newcastle; Leeds Grand; Welsh Millennium Centre, Cardiff and The Old Vic, London.

Option 5

Remodelled Pavilion and Connaught

The intention of this option is to explore a scenario that does not include the Assembly Hall within the master plan. It is recognised that the building is listed and that another use for the space is challenging, but in reviewing alternate options it should form part of the analysis allowing the Pavilion, which is arguably the most prominent of the three spaces to be retained.

The Pavilion is internally remodelled to enhance the audience environment, whilst its limited support spaces are upgraded and increased using additional accommodation on the pier.

The Pavilion's location lends itself to the headliner acts it currently caters for, these events are retained but the programme is expanded through delicate but significant changes to the auditorium.



RSC's temporary Courtyard Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon and Bouffes du Nord, Paris

The new Pavilion could take the form of a 'found' space - a new performance environment inside the existing fabric, the feel of the room is perhaps more industrial and the architecture dramatic. Charcoalblue's temporary home for the RSC, the Courtyard Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon and Peter Brookes remodelling of the historic Bouffes du Nord in Paris offer distinct approaches.

The Connaught is retained as the principle drama mid-scale touring house as described in option #2.

The proposed remodelling of the Pavilion makes several assumptions which require thorough analysis and to be further tested. The viability of the existing building, the reduced seat count and the programming suggestions should be reviewed against a long-term business plan for both performance spaces.

End

Charcoalblue, 24th September 2007

07026 Worthing - Venue matrix

rev 23 Sep 07

Option		Existing capacity	New capacity	Description	One-nighter	Pantomime	Children's Shows	Musicals	Opera	Ballet / Dance	Plays	Comedy	Classical music	other music	flat floor events	Amateurs	Conference	Film
Option 1 - Retention and refurbish																		
Assembly Hall	✓	930	900	Refurbished	Y								Y	Y	Y		Y	
Connaught	✓	500	500	Refurbished		Y	Y	Y			Y	Y				Y	Y	Y
Pavilion	✓	850	850	Refurbished	Y	Y	Y					Y		Y	Y		Y	
Option 2 - Assembly Hall and Connaught upgrade																		
Assembly Hall	✓	930	950	Refurbished/upgrade	Y							Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	
Connaught	✓	500	500	Refurbished/upgrade		Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y					Y	Y
Pavilion	X	850	n/a	Other use/demolish?														
Option 3a - new insertion inside Assembly Hall and remodelled Pavillion Theatre																		
Assembly Hall	✓	930	1,000	New insertion with flytower/loft	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y		Y	Y	
Connaught	X	500	n/a	Other use/demolish?														
Pavilion	✓	850	600	Remodelled to new Theatre space		Y	Y			Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
Option 3b - New Assembly Hall (as 3a) with studio, refurbished Pavillion																		
Assembly Hall	✓	930	1,000	New insertion with flytower/loft	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y		Y	Y	
New studio	✓		300	New flexible studio			Y				Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Connaught	X	500		Other use/demolish?														
Pavilion	✓	850	850	Refurbished	Y	Y	Y					Y		Y	Y		Y	
Option 4 - New build flexible Concert Theatre with studio																		
Assembly Hall	✓	930	1,200	New construction	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	
New studio	✓		150	New flexible studio			Y				Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Connaught	X	500		Other use/demolish?														
Pavilion	X	850	850	Other use/demolish?														
Option 5 - Remodelled Pavillion and Connaught																		
Assembly Hall	X	930		Other use/demolish?														
Connaught	✓	500	500	Remodelled	Y								Y	Y	Y		Y	
Pavilion	✓	850	800	Remodelled		Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y