



EMBARGOED: Thursday 28th January 2021

Theatres Trust announces 2021 Theatres at Risk Register

The Covid-19 pandemic has had devastating effects on the UK theatre industry, causing theatres across the country to close and cancel productions, risking companies and jobs. Theatres Trust, the national advisory body for theatres, has assisted theatres throughout the pandemic with their Theatre Reopening Fund grants, #SaveOurTheatres Crowdfunder campaign, free special advice services and assisting on the DCMS working group powerfully advocating for the needs of the sector. Alongside its Covid response programme, Theatres Trust has continued to support and advocate for theatres on its Theatres at Risk Register, which it publishes each year, highlighting buildings with significant architectural merit and strong community value or potential. Notwithstanding the pandemic, the buildings on the Register, now in its 14th year, remain at significant, and in some cases immediate, risk for other reasons.

This year, 31 theatres appear on this vitally important list with one new addition: Co-op Music Hall in Ramsbottom. Although there have been devastating job losses due to the pandemic, relatively few theatre operators have ceased trading and fortunately none of the buildings left empty look to be in imminent danger, so there are no other new additions. The Theatres at Risk Register supports theatres under threat of demolition, redevelopment or permanent closure across the UK, and calls the public's attention to these buildings, their challenges, opportunities and those who fight for them. Protecting these theatres is an important and ongoing mission for the organisation and the local communities fighting to preserve them.

Every theatre on the list has strong architectural or cultural heritage and, crucially, the potential to be returned to performance use and be a real asset to its community. The Co-op Music Hall in Ramsbottom, near Bury, is a rare and important surviving musical hall from the 1870s. Located on the upper level of a retail and office building, the music hall has been vacant and forgotten for many years, but remains in remarkably good condition. It is now under threat of redevelopment for housing, which would see the sad loss of this remarkable theatre.

Theatres Trust has seen an emerging trend during the pandemic where vacant theatre buildings are sold off by private owners. The second part of 2020 saw Brighton Hippodrome, Garston Empire, Salford Victoria and Theatr Ardudwy all put up for sale. It is too early to draw conclusions, but fortunately in the case of Brighton Hippodrome, the Grade II listed theatre that has topped the list for a number of years, the new owner has started to carry out much needed urgent repair works on the building. Grade II-listed music hall Hulme Hippodrome is also being sold at auction next week, put up for sale by its current owner Gilbert Deya Ministries, which has sadly neglected the building, leaving it in very poor condition. A campaign group has been formed to save the building, which includes Oli Wilson, son of Factory Records founder Tony Wilson, which has ambitions to turn the building into a museum celebrating Manchester's Musical Heritage. The auction guide price is an unrealistic £950,000, and there is a real worry the building will be sold to a developer who does not appreciate its cultural and architectural value. Theatres Trust hopes for constructive collaboration with all owners to secure a positive future for these important theatres.

Following a difficult year for the theatre sector, none of the theatres on the 2020 list will be removed, but positive steps have been made by several theatres, particularly those receiving additional support through the Theatres Trust's Theatres at Risk Capacity Building Programme, which provides grants and in-depth advice for the crucial early stages of revival projects. Derby Hippodrome is a Grade II listed variety theatre built in 1914 and a rare surviving example from the era when buildings were constructed for both live theatre and cinema. It has the potential to be rebuilt and restored to live performance use and provide Derby with a large cultural hub suitable for staging productions, which the city currently lacks. Thanks to funding from the Capacity Building Programme, Derby Hippodrome Restoration Trust has been able to appoint consultants to undertake a viability study, an important step in the journey to renovate and re-open this important space.

Leith Theatre is further along its journey to reopening, but its future is not yet secure. While unable to open for most of 2020, Leith Theatre has built on its position as a community venue, entering into a partnership with Empty Kitchens, Full Hearts CIC, allowing the charity to use the kitchen and hall to feed those in need, and has been used as a filming location for several music videos. During lockdown it operated as a foodbank and collected materials for masks. Theatres Trust Capacity Building support has helped the organisation to develop its skills in finance, fundraising and audience development.

Grade II-listed Burnley Empire, the town's last surviving Victorian theatre, received funding in 2019 from the Capacity Building Programme and has continued to make steady progress towards returning to community use. Building works have started and it has been included in Burnley's High Streets Heritage Action Zone, an indicator that it is seen as a vital part of the area's regeneration.

Musician and actor Gary Kemp, who is a Trustee for Theatres Trust, says, *As a performer I know how vital theatre buildings are, adding immeasurably to the atmosphere of a show, whether it is music or drama. Every building on the Theatres at Risk list is part of the UK's cultural and social heritage, but each also holds a special position in their community and with the right support could once more be central to a sense of local pride.*

Theatres Trust Director Jon Morgan says, *This past year has shown that communities value places where they can come together and that audiences miss live performances. While the theatre sector still has challenging days ahead, Theatres Trust believes that theatre will come back stronger than ever and that each building on the Theatres at Risk list has real potential to be a valuable asset to its community, to bring much needed footfall to its town centre and spark regeneration of its area as part of the recovery post-Covid.*

Theatres on the list such as Morecambe Winter Gardens, Swindon Mechanics' Institute and Walthamstow Granada made progress due to a collaborative approach whereby campaign groups, key stakeholders and local authorities recognise the community and economic value and potential of their local asset. Where this is not recognised the impact is substantial – Dudley Hippodrome is included as a site for redevelopment in a council bid for building a new university hub, and Enfield Council has approved a planning application that will see the Intimate Theatre in Palmers Green demolished – the Theatres Trust has escalated the case to the Secretary of State, who has the power to overrule the local authority decision.

Theatres Trust, the national advisory body for theatres, who compile the Register, is calling for more collaborative creative partnerships between local authorities, theatre owners and operators and community groups to protect all theatres on the list. Collaboration is vital moving forwards both for saving theatres on the Theatres at Risk Register as well as helping theatres manage the continuing challenges of Covid-19.

The theatres appearing on the 2021 register are as follows:

Brighton Hippodrome
Theatre Royal Margate
Victoria Pavilion/Winter Gardens, Morecambe
Dudley Hippodrome
Victoria Theatre, Salford
Spilsby Theatre
Streatham Hill Theatre, London
Groundlings Theatre, Portsea
Theatr Ardudwy, Harlech

Winter Gardens Pavilion, Blackpool
Burnley Empire
Plymouth Palace
Hulme Hippodrome
Century Theatre, Coalville
Walthamstow Granada, London
Leith Theatre
King's Theatre, Dundee
Tottenham Palace Theatre, London
Conwy Civic Hall
Mechanics' Institute, Swindon
Intimate Theatre, London
Co-op Music Hall, Ramsbottom - **NEW**
Kings Theatre, Kirkcaldy
Tameside Hippodrome, Ashton-under-Lyne
North Pier Pavilion, Blackpool
Garston Empire, Liverpool
Doncaster Grand
Swansea Palace
Derby Hippodrome
Theatre Royal, Hyde
Theatre Royal, Manchester

Assessment criteria for each theatre is available via www.theatrust.org.uk/how-we-help/theatres-at-risk/theatres-at-risk-assessment-criteria and full case studies on each can be seen on the Theatres Trust website.

Notes to Editors

Website	www.theatrust.org.uk
Twitter	@TheatresTrust, #theatresatrisk
Facebook	/theatres.trust
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Photo credit	Burnley Empire, courtesy of Ben Hamlin, North Films

Theatres Trust

Theatres Trust is the national advisory public body for theatres. They believe that current and future generations should have access to good quality theatre buildings where they can be inspired by, and enjoy, live performance. They champion the future of live performance by protecting and supporting excellent theatre buildings which meet the needs of their communities. They do this by providing advice on the design, planning, development and sustainability of theatres, campaigning on behalf of theatres old and new and offering financial assistance through grants.

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