

## ANGUS COUNCIL

RECREATION & CULTURAL SERVICES COMMITTEE – 6 JUNE 2002  
PERSONNEL & PROPERTY SERVICES COMMITTEE – 18 JUNE 2002

## REPORT BY THE DIRECTORS OF LEISURE SERVICES AND PROPERTY SERVICES

## UPGRADING OF THE WEBSTER THEATRE, ARBROATH

**ABSTRACT**

This report proposes an upgrading to the Webster Theatre, Arbroath, in order to bring it up to minimum reasonable modern standards and seeks approval for officers to carry out further detailed work on costs and funding with a view to bringing forward a further report for consideration.

**1. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Committee is asked to:-

- 1.1 approve in principle the upgrading of the Webster Theatre, Arbroath.
- 1.2 note that this project will be developed in accordance with the Council's Capital Project Appraisal procedures.
- 1.3 agree that officers undertake further necessary work to firm up on costs and identify funding arrangements.
- 1.4 agree that applications for external funding be submitted where appropriate
- 1.5 note that a fully costed project will be brought back for consideration.

**2. BACKGROUND /FINDINGS**

The Webster Theatre, Arbroath was extensively developed from the Webster Memorial Hall, originally built in 1867, by Arbroath Town Council, and opened by HRH Princess Margaret in 1970. Since then the theatre has played a huge part in the cultural life of Arbroath, and indeed Angus, and many thousands of people, locals and visitors alike have enjoyed a wide variety of performing arts events held there. Many artistes and acts cut their teeth in "The Webster", including Jimmy Tarbuck and the Alexander Brothers, and other famous acts forged a firm relationship with the theatre, the Corries and Andy Stewart for example.

While its use by both community and indeed professional organisations remains undiminished, it is now many years since any serious alterations were made to the theatre in order to bring it up to minimum reasonable modern standards.

Meetings held with the various user organisations were held throughout the late 1990's and from these discussions, Property Services drew up a series of plans of important improvements. Discussions with the Scottish Arts Council (SAC) followed, and possible avenues of funding were explored, but changes in SAC personnel and policy did not assist in bringing a Webster upgrading project forward.

During the budget process for the 2001/2 financial year, the needs of the Webster and the other halls were recognised, and the then Acting Director of Cultural Services and Director of Property services were to investigate the needs and obtain estimates for the required works. During 2001 this survey was undertaken, and a Fabric Report on the Webster Theatre was produced, identifying some £0.5 million of work required to upgrade the building to the minimum reasonable modern standards.

These works are fairly extensive, but do include a significant amount of work of a health and safety nature, and include long-needed improvements to the stage/orchestra pit, the provision of showers and the installation of a lift to all floors. The upgrading of the rooms on the upper floor will encourage more use by arts groups, bringing in activities and workshops and additional income from user groups. Hiring these rooms to organisations for longer periods may also be considered.

In no way can these works be considered excessive, and they will bring the Webster Theatre back into the mainstream of cultural life on Scotland's East Coast. Attracting new audiences will also assist with the revitalisation of this coastal town, especially in terms of cultural tourism, and will fit in well with the

improvements already made to Arbroath Abbey, and those envisaged at Arbroath Harbour, effectively creating a cultural corridor. Annual events such as SeaFest and The Hairst can only benefit.

In addition, the assembly Hall within the Theatre, which has recently been modestly redecorated may also be worthy of re-assessment. It has both a bar and kitchen, and the Cultural Services Manager presently holds the bar licence. In order to fully exploit the bar services to patrons using the theatre, it is recommended that consideration be given to the franchising of the bar, thus providing an improved service, and also to improve income generation.

It is recommended that the Committee agrees to the project in principle, and the Directors of Leisure and Property Services in consultation with other appropriate officers be instructed to fully cost the proposals, bring together a funding package (including seeking external funding where appropriate), all in accordance with the Council's Capital Project Appraisal procedures, and to bring the project back to Committee for further consideration.

### **3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

At this stage it is not possible to be definitive about costs and funding. A potential cost of £0.5million would however require significant external funding given the constraints on the Council's resources. The Webster Theatre is an Arbroath Common Good Fund property, and it may be that this Fund could be used to meet part of the project costs. Funding for the project costs will be sought from a number of external funding bodies, including the private sector if appropriate.

Detailed consideration of the project will be carried out in accordance with the Council's recently agreed Capital Project Appraisal (CPA Procedures).

### **4. HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS**

There are no human rights implications associated with this report.

### **5. CONSULTATION**

The Chief Executive, the Director of Law and Administration and the Director of Finance have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

### **6. CONCLUSION**

The proposed upgrading of the Webster Theatre, Arbroath is to be welcomed. This project will see much needed improvement to this building which already plays a significant part in the cultural life of Angus. It will also link the Abbey and Harbour developments, providing a cultural corridor in Arbroath which will influence SeaFest and the Hairst and boost cultural tourism.

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**DIRECTOR OF LEISURE SERVICES**

**MIKE LUNNY**  
**DIRECTOR OF PROPERTY SERVICES**

### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

**NOTE:** No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information), were relied on to any material extent in preparing this report.