

## ANGUS COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENTAL AND LEISURE SERVICES COMMITTEE – 23 NOVEMBER 2004  
RESOURCES AND CENTRAL SERVICES COMMITTEE – 2 DECEMBER 2004

## ARBROATH WEBSTER THEATRE REFURBISHMENT

## REPORT BY THE DIRECTORS OF LEISURE AND PROPERTY SERVICES

**ABSTRACT**

This report updates members on the public consultation held on the Webster Theatre refurbishment proposals and invites the Committees to decide upon which option to proceed with.

**1. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Committees agree to:-

- a) note the public consultation conducted
- b) note the amended seating in options A and B
- c) taking account of the above, decide upon which option to proceed with.

**2. BACKGROUND**

A report (995/04) on the proposed refurbishment was discussed and agreed at Angus Council's Environmental and Leisure Services Committee on 31 August 2004 and at the Resources and Central Services Committee of 9 September 2004.

It was agreed that two options would go forward for public consultation and to that end displays of the proposals were set up in Arbroath Library and the Webster Theatre from Monday 27 September – Saturday 13 November with questionnaires for public completion. A public meeting to which all user groups were invited was held in the Assembly Hall, the Webster Theatre on 29 September. This was well attended with some 60 people present. Officials met with the newly formed Webster Theatre Users' Group on Monday 18 October, and a further presentation by officials was made to the Arbroath Area Forum on Tuesday 26 October, when only 11 members of the public were present.

The initial consultation was due to be completed on 25 October, but this was extended to 29 October to permit those present at the Area Forum to respond to the questionnaires. This was further extended to take account of the large numbers attending the Minstrels concerts during the first two weeks of November and the consultation was closed on Monday 15 November.

The consultation with users of the theatre resulted in 372 responses with the result overwhelmingly in favour of Option B.

Option A	33	9%
Option B	322	86%
Neither	17	5%

The general opinion of the 5% who support neither option feel that the theatre requires only cosmetic upgrading and replacement seating.

The consultation process was extended beyond its original period to allow for a greater theatre constituency to respond. The Angus Black & White Minstrels agreed to insert questionnaires into each of their programmes for the duration of their 12 performance run, they would expect to sell around 5000 programmes in that period.

Without discussion with Angus Council the Minstrels included a slip within the programmes indicating that they strongly preferred Option B.

It is therefore relevant to look at the results from the responses both outwith and exclusive to the Minstrels.

### Public Consultation

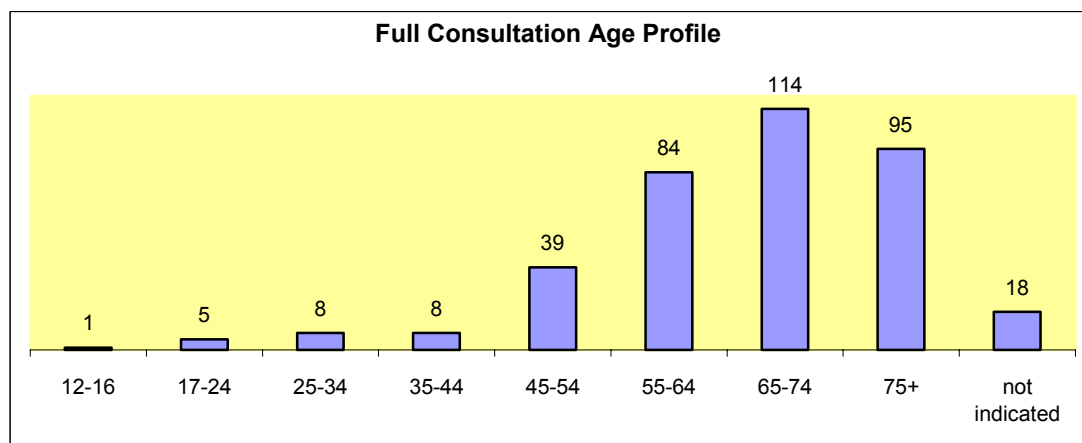
Option A	13	19%
Option B	42	60%
Neither	14	21%
<b>Total</b>	<b>69</b>	

### Angus Black & White Minstrels

Option A	20	7%
Option B	280	92%
Neither	3	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>303</b>	

While both indicate a strong preference for Option B, the Public Consultation shows a much less pronounced distribution of opinion.

The age range of respondents shows a marked weighting toward the over 55s with almost 80% of respondents being in this age range.



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One reason consistently put forward by those favouring Option "B" and the retention of the balcony is that over 500 people are required at each performance in order that the show is viable.

Analysis shows that far fewer performances with over 500 present take place than is often thought. There has been a total of 78 performances at the theatre from 10/10/2003 – 17/10/2004. The attendance analysis is noted below.

Under 401	69%
401-500	9%
500+	22%

Of the 31% [24 shows] of performances over 401:

Abbey Music	5
Minstrels	12
Angus Council	2
Appolinari Dance School	1
Stagecraft Dance School	1
James Hutcheson	1
Breath of Scotland	1
Arbroath Instrumental Band	1

The two Angus Council performances relate to Schools concerts organised by the Education Department, it is probable that these performances will be either relocated to another venue or modified downward in scale due to the large number of pupils who wish to participate.

Much has been made in comment through the press and in the returned questionnaires regarding the viability of the theatre should the capacity of the theatre significantly reduce below 500.

While some organisations may be able to sustain either small ticket increases and/or extend their runs there is no doubt that organisations that raise funds for charities will have the amount available for donation reduced. For example, the Minstrels are currently charging £8 per ticket and can expect to sell out each of their 12 shows, this will realise a gross income in the region of £56,000 from ticket sales alone. Option A [412 seats] and Option B [505 seats] will return £40,000 and £48,000 respectively, which are still significant sums. Ticket prices would increase to approximately £11 (Option A), or £9 (Option B) to realise income in the region of the current level.

It is also useful to scrutinise the unit cost of a ticket for a performance where the act or production has been 'bought in'. The table below shows typical overheads and costs for such a performance and it is important to note that it is based on selling two thirds of the current capacity [i.e. currently any sales over 400 seats will be clear profit].

PRS	£500	£400	£300	£250	£200
staff	£160	£160	£160	£160	£160
tickets	£60	£60	£60	£60	£60
advertising	£350	£350	£350	£350	£350
sound/light	£700	£700	£700	£700	£700
theatre hire	£248	£248	£248	£248	£248
artist	£8,000	£6,000	£4,000	£3,000	£2,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>£10,018</b>	<b>£7,918</b>	<b>£5,818</b>	<b>£4,768</b>	<b>£3,718</b>
Unit Cost	£25.05	£19.80	£14.55	£11.92	£9.30

PRS = 3% of total box office plus VAT

While artists' fees and show costs are negotiable most 'buy-ins' that a theatre such as the Webster would expect to host would be in the region of £3000 or less, only high profile artists would attract a higher figure and that would not be expected to be beyond £5000.

As an example, for a production where the 'buy in' is £3000 then a ticket price of £12 would break even at 400 seats sold, any sales beyond that would make the event profitable. A ticket price of £15 for the same event would yield a profit of £1200 for only 400 seats sold, if all 580 seats were sold then a profit would accrue of almost £4000.

Additionally, it is important to note that box office split arrangements are a common means of attracting productions to a venue. This arrangement is typically on the basis of the venue and the artiste/production company dividing the income generated from ticket sales. The ratio of split and any

financial guarantees being negotiable. A recent example of a box office split arrangement is for a provincial theatre with a capacity of some 300 seats. A well known Scottish musical duo took a 70:30 split arrangement in their favour with a guarantee of £1500 i.e. they were guaranteed to receive £1500 should their 70% of tickets sales provide them with a lesser figure. Ticket price was £10 and significantly more than the guarantee was realised.

## **Possible Increases to Proposed Seat Numbers**

### **Option A**

Having re-assessed the scheme design, there is limited opportunity to increase the seating numbers within option A. However, some additional seating has been created by ramping the corridor slightly in order to lower the floor level below the entrance tunnel. This allows the installation of an additional row of seats behind the tunnel balustrade. In addition, minor adjustments adjacent to the sound desk allows the inclusion of an additional 2 seats. The total maximum number of seats within option A is now 412.

### **Option B**

The removal of the new lighting box allows the installation of an additional 14 seats. The front of the lighting box is relocated to the front of the former follow spot location. In addition, the back row of the balcony is removed so that the balustrade in front of the lighting box can be lowered. This provides the lighting box with a slightly better view of the stage than at present but sight lines to the stage are still restricted. At stalls level, minor adjustments adjacent to the sound desk and the realignment of some of the seating to the rear of the auditorium will bring the total number of seats in option B to approximately 505. If further increases in the number of seats are required the only other alternative would be to consider the removal of the central balustrade in the balcony and include grab rails at the end of each aisle.

If additional seating is incorporated in option B it will be necessary to increase the female toilet provision. This will impact slightly on the layout of the foyer.

All alterations to increase seat numbers in options A and B do involve compromise to some of the other proposed improvements to the theatre.

### **Advantages of Option A over Option B**

All seats have sight lines in accordance with current design standards and best practice guidelines.  
The increased size of the foyer allows the theatre to become a social occasion.  
The improvements to circulation reduces the risk of overcrowding and congestion.  
The improved access to the assembly rooms and the foyer from the theatre encourages the audience to visit the bars and café areas before the performance and during the interval. For many theatres these areas are the greatest revenue generators.  
Significant technical improvements to the theatre including;  
Optimum location for the sound desk.  
Eliminates variations in acoustic quality within the auditorium experienced to the rear of the balcony and to the rear of the stalls.  
The lighting box has a clear view of the stage and offers a suitable projection location.  
The greater volume above the seating allows the installation of technical decks and lighting bridges.  
All gantries can be accessed from the lighting box and back stage. Allowing easy access to back stage, lighting bridge and lighting box.  
Disabled access to the auditorium is improved by the elimination of the stairs within the entrance corridor.

### **Disadvantages of Option A**

Considerable reduction of existing seat numbers.

### **Advantages of Option B over Option A**

Maintains the maximum number of seats.

### **Disadvantages of Option B**

A high proportion of the seats have sightlines below current design standards and best practice guidelines.

Congestion and over crowding is a problem in the entrance area and within circulation spaces. Only limit technical improvements to the theatre.  
 There is no access from back stage to the lighting box. The lighting bridge can only be accessed by ladder or drop down hatch. This has legislative Health and Safety issues.  
 If the lighting box is not relocated it will still have restricted sight lines to the stage.  
 The location of the sound desk means that the sound technician will not be able to assess the quality of sound at balcony level.  
 There is no opportunity to expand the social aspect of the Theatre.  
 70% of performances have audience numbers below 400 and empty seats have a depressing effect on both performers and audience alike.

## Proposed Amendments to Options A & B

### Third Floor Level

Third floor level is to maintain staff accommodation and a small multi-purpose/ rehearsal room. However, it is recommended that the studio facility and retractable seating option be omitted from the third floor. The acoustic problems associated with the incorporation of these facilities would outweigh the advantages.

### Backstage

Access to the auditorium from back stage to be created in both options A & B.

Backstage technical storage area to be created in both options A & B.

Improved access from the band pit to back stage storage area to be incorporated.

The existing disabled toilet in the fire exit is to be converted to a first aid room. A new disabled toilet is provided in a more acceptable location.

## 3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no additional financial implications from this report. Members are reminded that Report 995/04 identified capital costs in the order of £3.2 million are required to progress either option A or Option B. Additionally Report 995/04 highlighted a funding package as follows:

General Fund

Leisure Services Capital Fund Budget

	<u>£m</u>	<u>%</u>
<u>General Fund:</u>		
Leisure Services Capital Budget	0.500	16
Capital injection from Miscellaneous Other Services Revenue Budget	1.650	51
Contribution from Local Capital Fund	<u>0.262</u>	<u>8</u>
	<u>2.412</u>	<u>75</u>
<u>Arbroath Common Good Fund:</u>		
Upfront capital contribution	0.250	8
Capital injection from Revenue Account	<u>0.550</u>	<u>17</u>
	<u>0.800</u>	<u>25</u>
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Total funding available	3.212	
Cost Ceiling	3.200	
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Contingency	0.012	
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## 4. HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

There are no human rights implications.

## **5. CONSULTATION**

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

**JOHN R ZIMNY**  
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**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.