

Motion to Full Council – 9 April 2013

Theatre and Arts Policy for Community Engagement in Taunton's Cultural Quarter

Motion proposed by Councillor Steve Ross and seconded by Councillor Eddie Gaines

The public response to the closure of the Brewhouse Theatre and Arts Centre has demonstrated that our community wants a theatre space in central Taunton to be preserved and go forward. Collective action is necessary to address short term challenges and identify and meet our community's aspirations for theatre and the arts in Taunton Deane.

This Council recognises that it has a key role in supporting the provision of theatre and the arts in Taunton but that it should not be managing it. The Executive is commissioning a feasibility study about the future of theatre in central Taunton, engaging external consultants.

Suggestions that Taunton Deane Borough Council (TDBC) might bid for the Brewhouse Theatre lease have confused matters for local groups already going forward with ideas for what follows the Brewhouse Theatre and Arts Centre. While it would not be the Council's intention, lack of clarity risks obstructing community initiatives in respect of what is next for the Brewhouse.

New groups that have been set up: 'Count Me In' and 'Tone Theatre Association' are making proposals for the way forward. Other established groups have also expressed interest in shaping the future of the theatre and arts after the Administration of the Brewhouse (TAPA, the Cultural Consortium, social enterprises, community interest companies, local educational establishments and other arts and educational organisations in Taunton Deane). A mechanism should be put in place to bring together and support these groups from our community to present a united offering.

Key principles that have emerged from community discussions about any new arts and theatre offering in central Taunton suggest that any organisation delivering this should aim:-

- To create and facilitate a theatre and arts centre that is welcoming, inclusive and open to all sections of the community in the centre of Taunton.
- To enhance the theatre and arts centres reputation, maintain a high profile, and become a vital component of the public and cultural life of Taunton and of the wider community of Somerset.

- To programme, promote and produce work that both satisfies and challenges audiences and Members.
- To offer opportunities to develop performance and other creative skills, in both young people and adults and develop talent through new work and new ways of working.
- To collaborate with other partners, as sponsors, co-producers or funders to enhance and extend the quality and scope of productions and other activities to support economic growth of Taunton and promote well-being.
- To celebrate the diversity of talent in Taunton, Somerset and beyond through high quality programming focused on a balanced mix of art forms and media, productions, exhibitions and other activities provided by professional and amateur organisations as well as individuals from all sectors of the arts and entertainment industry.
- To maintain and enhance the fabric and building of the former Brewhouse Theatre through the efficient running and financial viability of the organisation.
- To celebrate the diversity of talent in Taunton, Somerset and beyond through high quality programming focused on a balanced mix of art forms and media, productions, exhibitions and other activities.

These are points from our community that Councillors will likely subscribe to and that our community can ill afford consultants fees for us to clarify.

Our community needs clear leadership and to understand the direction of this Council's policy towards the Brewhouse administration and what comes next.

Motion 1

1. This Council's policy will be to facilitate the provision of community led theatre and arts activities in Taunton Deane.
2. In relation to the closure of the Brewhouse, the Council will deliver that policy by pledging its support for the formation of a new community led organisation, the 'new CLO', that is subsequently established as a charitable organisation involving all interested local individuals and organisations, to operate the theatre and arts centre currently known as the Brewhouse in the future.
3. This Council will support the work of the new CLO by allowing its representatives to work with officers on the scope and delivery of a

feasibility study with TDBC for the future of theatre and the arts in the cultural quarter of Taunton.

4. The Council will commit its ring fenced funding in 2013/2014, previously targeted at the Brewhouse to be used by the new CLO if either the Council or new CLO secures a lease of the Brewhouse Theatre building.

Motion 2

5. The Council will bid to the Administrator and secure a lease, fixtures and fittings on behalf of the community it represents before facilitating the future operation of the Brewhouse by the new CLO.
6. If the Council decides to bid to the Administrator and is successful in its bid it will endeavour to transfer the lease to the CLO (but retain freehold ownership) at the earliest opportunity subject to that organisation providing best value to the Council and our community.

Motion 3

7. If Councillors reject Motion 2 and do not decide to bid for the lease, fixtures and fittings of the Brewhouse Theatre, it will be this Council's policy to support the new CLO in their bid to the Administrator to secure the lease, fixtures and fittings.