

# Proposal for Council Asset Transfer – Trowbridge Town Hall



**Trowbridge Town Hall Group**

**February 2012**

## Introduction

This submission is made by the Trowbridge Town Hall Group (“TTHG”) to seek a strategic partnership with Wiltshire Council to effect an asset transfer of Trowbridge Town Hall. TTHG intends to make a formal application for asset transfer but needs first to undertake a robust feasibility exercise under the guidance of the Asset Transfer Unit (“ATU”). The purpose of this submission is to seek the commitment of the Council to work with TTHG and allow it the necessary time and opportunity to undertake the feasibility process required to complete the application.

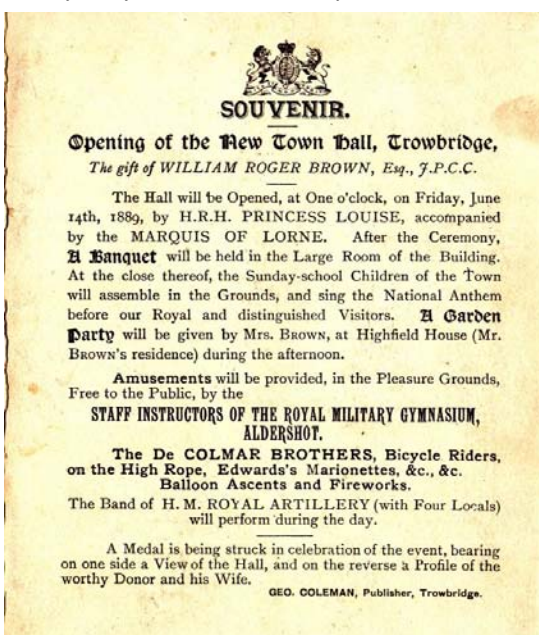
Our vision is to create a public facility in the centre of town which complements and enhances the existing civic, commercial and leisure infrastructure, centred around the provision of a venue for the professional arts.

## Background

Trowbridge Town Hall was given to the people of Trowbridge by Sir William Roger Brown, a wealthy local clothier and philanthropist. At the ceremony to mark the laying of the foundation, timed to commemorate also the golden jubilee of Queen Victoria, Mrs Brown announced, to loud cheers:

“In the name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost, I declare this stone well and truly laid, that on it a Town Hall may be erected for the benefit of the inhabitants of Trowbridge, as a memorial of the blessings vouchsafed to us, the people of England, during the fifty years of Her Majesty’s reign, completed on this day. God Save the Queen!”

The opening, two years later in June 1889, was awaited with great anticipation. Princess Louise, daughter of Queen Victoria, was invited to preside and the town went to great lengths to celebrate the occasion. A processional route was laid out through the town with masts and scarlet cloths every 25 yards and a triumphal arch erected on Wicker Hill. Shops and houses were bedecked with



flowers. Shops and factories were closed for the day and entertainments were laid on in the park. The building represented a sense of great pride, confidence and ambition in a town that had not only grown wealthy but, by the time of the opening, had also become the county town.

Over the next century or so, the building remained a central part of life in Trowbridge with the building holding dances, meetings and concerts in addition to its civic function. Centenary celebrations in 1989 extended over five days, including a re-enactment of the opening ceremony by schoolchildren, exhibitions, street markets, bands and a centenary ball.

Today, however, the building stands anonymous and completely disconnected from town life. Given over to use as a magistrates court in the 1970’s the

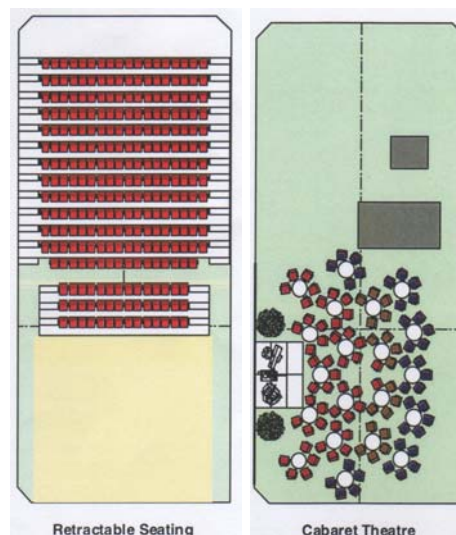
building has become effectively closed to the public with the consequence that few residents below the age of around 50 and none of the many people who have moved to the town in recent years are likely ever to have been inside.

The Council's declaration that it wishes to dispose of the building presents a golden opportunity to regain the building for the benefit of the people of Trowbridge as Roger Brown intended. The Trowbridge Town Hall Group was formed following a public meeting held in September 2011 and our aim is to grasp this opportunity with both hands.

### **Our Vision**

Our proposal is to create a cultural facility in the building with a key focus on the provision of a professional arts venue and a place for emerging artists to develop. Spaces will be multi-use where possible to encourage a wide spectrum of supplementary uses (and revenue streams) and a central location for community activities, clubs, workshops, etc. Our aim is not only to return the building to community use but to bring a cultural amenity to the town that is currently lacking, raise the profile of Trowbridge in the region and create a catalyst for subsidiary activity in the town centre.

The building's suitability as an arts venue has been considered by theatre design consultants, TheatrePlan LLP. The building incorporates a number of spaces of differing sizes which lend themselves very well to this use and potentially with limited intervention/alteration. Their outline plans (see appendix A) propose a theatre space within the Great Hall which, with retractable seating, could also be used for dance, cabaret or large functions, the Council Chamber as a studio theatre, the Supper Room as a dance studio and some of the smaller rooms used for incubation spaces for up-and-coming artists. We would look to secure the basement as a youth-led space for young people to run and use with the support of the arts professionals running the rest of the venue.



Indicative Layouts for the Great Hall

Flexibility and multiple use of space is considered key to financial viability because it will maximise use of the building and broaden the range of potential revenue streams and capital funding. We have held initial meetings with Nash Partnership, architects and urban regeneration specialists and we will engage them to prepare a strategic plan on this basis. They have identified the potential for forging strategic partnerships between activities within the building and organisations outside and there is currently a timely opportunity to consider how the building might fit into the Trowbridge Masterplan being commissioned by Transforming Trowbridge and the Community Campus proposals.

The following will be key design considerations in the realisation of our vision:

- Ensuring improved access into and around the building for people of all abilities;
- Working to minimise the environmental impact of the building both in construction and in use;
- Engaging the community in learning and participating in the heritage value of the building;
- Working in partnership with the custodians of the Sensory Garden.

### **Who we are**

The Trowbridge Town Hall Group was formed essentially as a steering group. Our members include:

- Tracy Sullivan: Former director of The Arc Theatre, Development Manager for Wiltshire Arts Promoters (a network of professional arts organisations from across Wiltshire) and Project Officer for the Trowbridge Community Area Partnership.
- Ian Walker; a chartered quantity surveyor specialising in the conservation and reuse of historical buildings; trustee of the Warminster Preservation Trust.
- Mary Pearce; ex town-councillor, head and owner of Roundstone School; member of the Sensory Garden Steering Group
- Glyn Bridges; retired teacher, Town Councillor, Chairman of the Trowbridge Civic Society, Wiltshire Rural Music School, the Town Council's Museum and Tourism Committee and the Trowbridge Almshouses Trust.
- John Knight; town and county councillor; Trowbridge deputy Mayor; 30 years in the building industry. Active supporter of the various Town Hall projects since 2003.
- Andrew Bryant; town councillor and chairman of the Trowbridge Arts Festival
- Rosemary Hawkes: Specialist Supply Teacher in Primary Education; experienced in writing promotional copy for youth theatre
- Jonathan Hawkes: communications engineer with practical experience of building renovation, particularly in an arts context. Web designer.
- Diana King: Former manager of a government office in the town; committee member of BA14 Culture and Trowbridge Civic Society.

In shaping our plans we have received initial professional advice from:

- Nash Partnership, a Bath-based architectural practice with a strong track record in urban regeneration, reuse of redundant buildings and the conservation of heritage buildings
- TheatrePlan, consultancy for performing arts venues. A specialist consultancy providing advisory and design services to performing arts companies, venue managements, architects, project managers and engineers. They specialise in creating theatres, opera houses and music venues, conference centres and education facilities in existing and listed buildings, found spaces and new structures
- Arts partners from across the county

### **What we have achieved so far**

In preparation for this application and the processes that would follow the Council's approval, we have taken several important steps already:

1. Initial meeting held with Wiltshire Council Strategic Property Services, held 21 December 2011, which resulted in broad support for our proposal.
2. Following contact with the Asset Transfer Unit in January 2012, our application for their free consultation sessions was approved on 30 January 2012 and our first session was held on 14 February with representatives of Wiltshire Council and the Town Hall Group in attendance.
3. Grant funding totalling £16,000 has been allocated by the Trowbridge Area Board and Trowbridge Communities Area Future ("TCAF") for the purposes of undertaking the feasibility study.
4. Advice has been sought and received from Wiltshire Historic Buildings Trust.
5. Initial consultations with Nash Partnership Architects to assist us in mapping out a strategy towards our vision and undertaking the feasibility study.
6. Initial consultations with TheatrePlan LLP to consider suitability of space within the building for various arts uses.
7. Consultation with the Director of Transforming Trowbridge.
8. Research into feasibility work previously undertaken on the town hall.
9. Creation of a web site (currently: [www.hawkes.gb.com/townhall/history.html](http://www.hawkes.gb.com/townhall/history.html)).

### **Action Plan**

Following our first consultation session with our Asset Transfer Unit consultant, we have mapped out a preliminary action plan. This provides for a step-by-step approach with staged approvals to proceed by Wiltshire Council.

#### **Stage 1 – Pre-feasibility stage (Approximating to RIBA Design Stage A)**

#### **Target Date: September 2012; funding already in place**

In this phase we will undertake research to establish potential uses for the building around our core vision of provision for the arts and formulate an outline business plan and a delivery strategy. We will also need to evolve from an informal body of concerned residents into a properly structured and legally constituted organisation with the appropriate skills and capacity to take the project forward and with the necessary credibility to gain the support of potential funding organisations. Our objectives include the following (not necessarily in chronological order):

- 
1. Establishing a board with the necessary skills, experience and capacity to take the project forward. We will advertise for candidates and undertake a selection process with advice from the ATU.
  2. Establishing contact with other groups who have successfully achieved completed projects. This will also inform our selection process for board members.
  3. Establishing a formal governance structure and constitution.
  4. Undertaking consultation with the local community, community groups, civic and quasi-civic bodies (including Transforming Trowbridge and the Community Operations Board) to identify needs and opportunities, including potential strategic 'fit' with wider policy objectives (such as, for example, campus services and the proposed Trowbridge Masterplan).
  5. Setting out a key role for the Town Hall in meeting these needs and objectives.
  6. Establishing contact with potential funding organisations
  7. Alongside the above, encourage public interest and involvement in the project by developing the web site, involving the press and holding open days in the building.
  8. Assessing options for patterns of use of the spaces within the building.
  9. Formulating an outline business plan including revenue streams and capital and running costs.
  10. Making pre-application enquiries to potential funding bodies to establish likelihood of achieving funding.
  11. Submitting details to Wiltshire Council and seeking approval to proceed to project development phase.

Stage 2 – Full feasibility/ project development stage (Approximating to RIBA Design Stages B and C)

**Target Date: 12-14 months after completion of Stage 1, funding to be sought from the Lottery, Arts Council and Community Right to Bid funds through the ATU/ Locality**

In this phase we will further develop our proposals to a stage where we can apply for capital funding from grant aiding bodies. This will include:

1. Applying for project development funding to enable us to appoint professional design and cost consultants in order to further develop the scheme.
2. Appointing design and cost consultants.
3. Developing the scheme to RIBA design stage C which includes preparation of the concept design (including proposals for structural and building services) and a preliminary cost plan. Developing the business plan accordingly.

4. Submitting details to Wiltshire Council and seeking approval to proceed.

#### Stage 3 – Finalising Proposals (Approximating to RIBA Work stage D)

In this phase we will further develop the scheme to a stage where funders can give the go-ahead to procurement and project delivery. It is difficult at this time to suggest a target delivery date as we are likely to be applying to numerous grant-aiding bodies and will be subject to their timetables.

1. Formally applying for capital funding.
2. Provided funding is secured, developing the scheme to RIBA Work Stage D which includes development of the concept designs and the cost plan.
3. Securing go-ahead from funders and Wiltshire Council.

#### Stage 4 – Procurement and project delivery

#### **Our Partnership with Wiltshire Council and what we are Seeking**

We do not underestimate the challenges of achieving a successful transfer of this building. Success will rely on the positive and sustained collaboration between TTHG and the Council. At this stage, we need:

1. A commitment, by way of a memorandum of understanding or similar, to transfer the tenure of the building to the Trowbridge Town Hall Group (or the properly constituted not-for-profit organisation that supersedes it) in the event that we establish a viable project. This is necessary in order to give funders and other organisations and individuals the confidence to offer their financial and other support to the project.
2. Time to undertake the various stages of the action plan described above and to make a formal application for asset transfer.
3. A commitment that the Council will continue to maintain the building and meet the costs of maintenance until the asset transfer can be completed or unless the process is terminated.

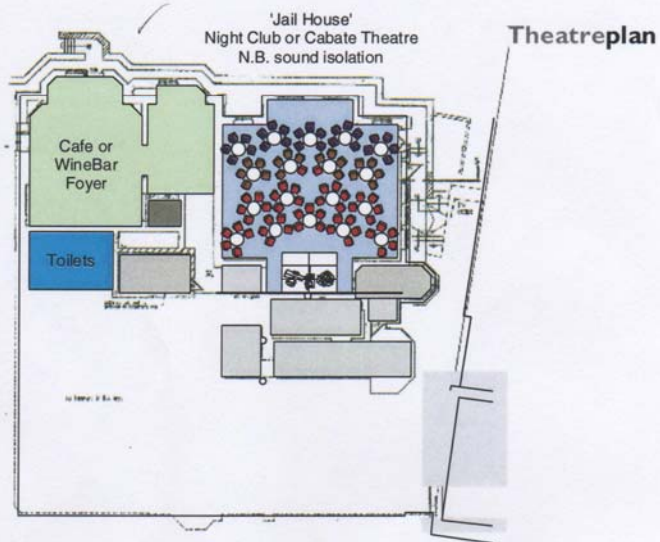
## **Appendix A**

### **TheatrePlan LLP Indicative Layout Plans**

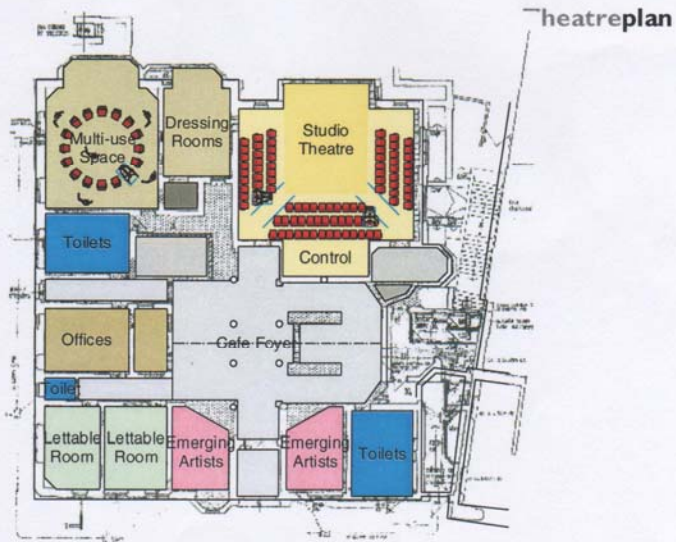


## Trowbridge Town Hall

Sketch Usage Diagrams  
13 October 2011

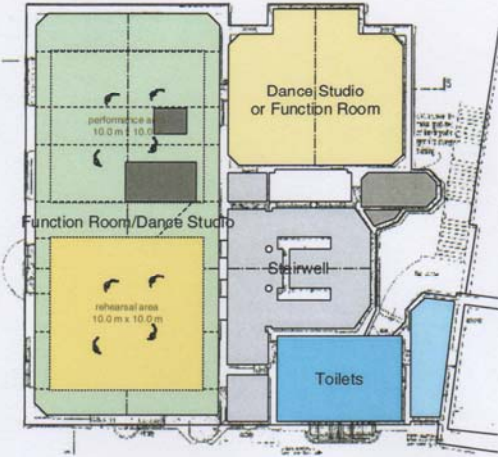


Basement Plan



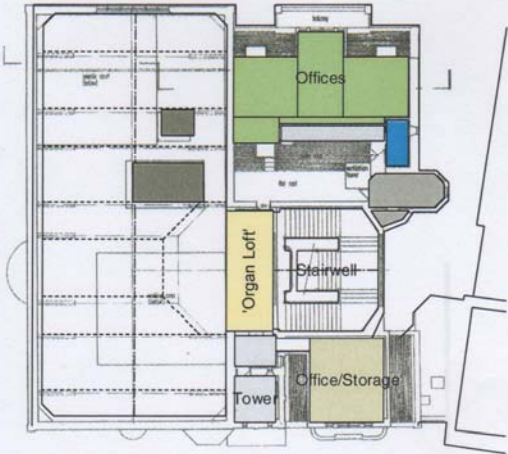
Ground Floor Plan

Theatreplan



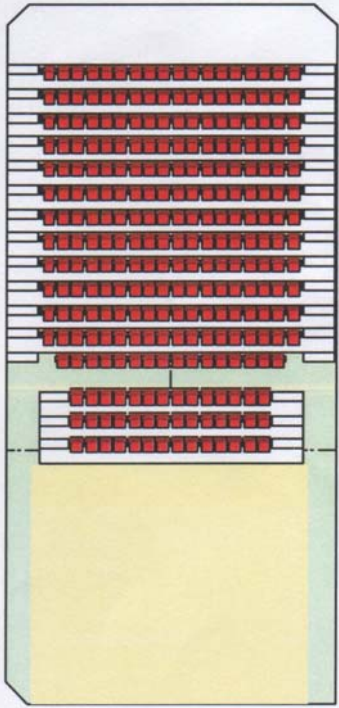
First Floor Plan

Theatreplan

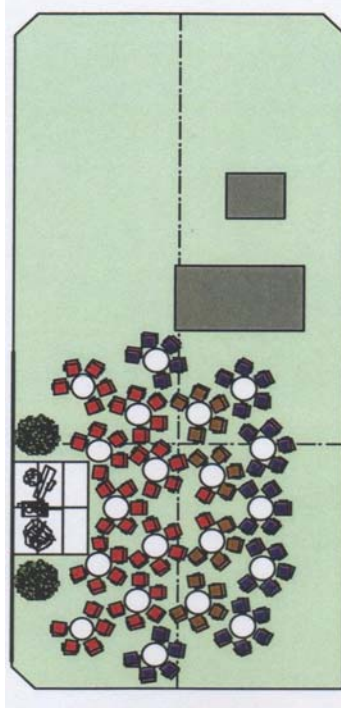


Second Floor Plan

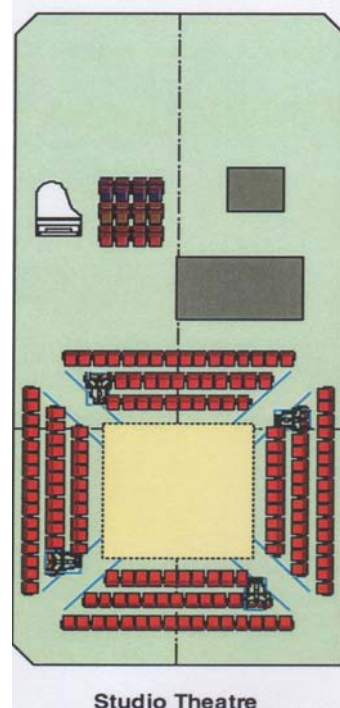
Theatreplan



Retractable Seating



Cabaret Theatre



Studio Theatre

Alternative Layouts For Great Hall



Section