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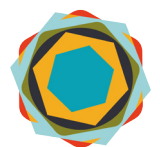
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The Albany Theatre Development: delivering culture and sustainability for the City of Coventry



A Feasibility Study



Foreword

Dr Tom Fleming, Tom Fleming Creative Consultants, London

Without a vibrant artistic and cultural sector at all levels there would be no successful creative economy. The vibrancy of the cultural world as a whole suffuses all kinds of activities with the imagination that makes the country's commercial creative economy full of ideas, innovation and success.

(Geoffrey Crossick, speech at Goldsmiths College, 2013).

The Albany Theatre, Coventry, is like so many other great arts organisations across the UK. It develops incredible cultural experiences on an appreciably smaller budget than would suggest is possible; it engages and inspires some of the most vulnerable in society, while helping to mobilise a creative economy of self-starting and entrepreneurial practitioners; and it represents a set of ideas, values and identities which reflect a progressive sense of the kind of city most of us would like to live and work in – or at least find time to visit. Yet, like many other great arts organisations across the UK, it is now faced with the challenge of converting this value into a sustainable business model. In other words, it needs to *drive* change as much as respond to change.

This is because the Albany Theatre – which is to say, the people who invest large parts of their time in making it work – is involved in a continual process of creative development, which doesn't easily allow the time or resources to effectively describe and then *measure* the types of value that it generates. Huge amounts of energy and resources need to be allocated toward experimenting with creative practice, then reaching out and engaging audiences, and then working with such audiences so they actively participate in shaping new experiences (that for some are truly transformational). Huge amounts of attention must also be diverted toward the processes of brokerage – nurturing and connecting talent, encouraging collaboration, and generating new types of creative content, which in turn deliver spillover effects to the creative economy of the city. The Albany Theatre, like so many other great arts organisations, will struggle to tell its story precisely because it is completely invested, and bound up, in what it does well: *delivering cultural value by empowering talented people to express themselves*.

This feasibility study, however, marks an important stage in the Albany's maturity as an organisation. In articulating the value of the Albany Theatre in precise terms, and in doing so explaining not just what the Albany does for Coventry, but what it is capable of doing, we begin to understand the scenario Geoffrey Crossick pointed to in my opening quote. We begin to understand how an arts organisation can be a catalyst for something much greater – an embryonic creative economy, emerging from a city and delivering value across that city's policy aims. What does this mean in concrete terms? This means much more than reaching out to people and places that currently exhibit the least engagement in the arts, and enabling them to develop new experiences and relationships. It means more than engaging communities and organisations to develop the skills, capacity and confidence required for long term, locally-driven arts provision. It will involve:

- Mobilising aspirations for excellence in artistic practice and in the types of partnership, organisations and infrastructure, which collectively contribute to the arts ecology and creative economy in a developing city.
- Brokering and embedding new types of partnership – which span the subsidised, amateur and commercial sectors; and which are intercultural, interdisciplinary and built to last.
- Developing new accessible and potentially transferable knowledge for the wider arts sector on effective engagement tools, partnership working, strategic commissioning and approaches to innovation.
- Demonstrating overall the power of the arts to enrich the lives of individuals and for other new or emerging organisations to also initiate positive change in Coventry's dense urban communities.

For a city like Coventry, which has the talent (and a *diversity advantage* with its intercultural communities), the geo-physical location, the young people, and an increasingly energetic and animated cultural scene, the Albany Theatre will be an essential mechanism in shaping a positive future. As this feasibility study articulates, it can do this as a *place to inspire* and as a *place to create*. This it does already. But for the emerging creative economy of the city to thrive, The Albany will also need to be allowed, more openly, vividly and tangibly, to offer civic value. It will need, more effectively, to connect the communities it currently serves to a new generation of creative entrepreneurs, 'makers' and animators, who can together define the future identity and economy of the city.

This current feasibility study both identifies the opportunity (which of course also involves a diagnostic of the challenges) and sets out the practical ways forward in securing the future of the organisation. If operationalised, these will generate a range of immediate benefits and more effectively leverage its value to give credibility to Coventry's UK City of Culture aspirations. Played right, the Albany Theatre can become a **new hub for cultural innovations** and a router and amplifier for some of the best cultural talent in the city. It can build on its current strengths to become the most open, engaging and inspirational setting for active participation in the arts, plus civic engagement in the community, plus a catalyst for consolidating the forces that make for a city's creative economy. It can then nurture local talent for a range of cultural and creative industries, diversifying the city's broader economy, and reinvigorating the city's identity. *Coventry must again become nationally recognised as a city of innovation.*

tom fleming / creative consultancy

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1: Executive Summary

1: This feasibility study uses a narrative analysis approach to assess the Albany Theatre Trust's strategic aims. It re-articulates these aims in the context of their current requirements for capital development. The purpose of this study is to determine the coherence, veracity and workability of these aims and requirements in the context of the City's own policy aims.

2: In its short three-year lifespan, the Albany Theatre has achieved stability and consistency in both productivity and governance. It has demonstrated a viable role for a community arts-based cultural organisation in the city of Coventry. It has devised a unique cultural offer for the City's urban communities.

3: The Albany Theatre is housed in an outstanding and unique facility, and is in a highly favourable position, situated on the edge of the city's core and connected to two major residential districts. In the context of the legal and development implications of the site's ownership – and the encroaching commercialisation of this once-public building – the Albany Theatre is justified in constructing a bold plan for development.

4: The Albany Theatre's bold plan for development is not simply a desire for more resources and a greater facility: it is a plan for growth and delivery on the City's current policy aims, defined through the Albany's 'Arts for Life' agenda. The Albany's plan for growth has two central features: (a) it is a plan for survival through development – the option of a reduction in size threatens the very basis of the Albany's strategic aims as well as its current operations; and (b) the plan for development involves a growth in the program of activities along with the building and facility. Activity, productivity and space are inextricably related.

5: The report tabulates and assesses the background, terms, finances and implications of the Albany's plan, and defines its delivery against the City's policy aims. It concludes that the Albany Theatre is at a critical juncture if not in a highly vulnerable position. However, it possesses the resources, strategic framework, and community of committed practitioners that can generate significant value for the City. This value is not merely for the cultural sector itself, but extends to a concrete contribution to the City's social communities and its embryonic creative economy.

Note: a comprehensive summary of the Albany Theatre Trust's financial position and preliminary designs for the development plan are contained in the Albany's own *Proposal* document.

2: The Authors and Occasion of this report

In September 2014, this report's principal author, Dr Jonathan Vickery, participated in an event organised by the Warwick Creative Exchange (in association with Coventry Artspace and Warwick Arts Centre). The event was called 'All Roads lead to Coventry'; the Albany Theatre was one port of call on the event's itinerary. A subsequent dialogue presented an opportunity for students at Warwick University's Centre for Cultural Policy Studies to conduct research on the Albany Theatre's civic role and creative future in the city of Coventry. Two student research projects provided a wealth of inspiration and ideas, leading to a substantial Scoping Report on the Albany's development by Dr Vickery (published in November 2015).

In January 2016, the Albany Theatre contacted Dr Vickery and requested an independent feasibility study on their further aspirations for development, involving a physical expansion within the existing building and the development of the artistic vision and Outreach agenda. This report involves a considerable prior knowledge of the Albany Theatre, and cannot help but reflect the very positive regard in which the Albany Theatre is held at Warwick. It therefore cannot pretend to be entirely disinterested. This report does claim, however, neutrality, as none of the authors or contributors are connected to the ongoing work of the Albany Theatre on any level, nor are involved in theatre or community arts as such. Our interest has remained exclusively in the viability of the Albany Theatre as a young but powerful player in Coventry's cultural sector, and in the success of Coventry city in developing a motivated and aspirant cultural sector in the framework of a competitive bid for the UK City of Culture 2021.

While the current situation and opportunity for development and expansion facing the Albany Theatre is intrinsically unrelated to the event of the UK City of Culture 2021 bid, the bid is a significant occasion for reflection on the opportunities the city provides for cultural aspiration and development. The original Creative Exchange event was inspired by the prospect of (and implications of) the UK City of Culture bid, and was animated throughout by two concerns. The first was that Coventry's national 'image' did not articulate a true reflection of the density of cultural production in the city. Coventry's national cultural profile should be much greater. The second was that the city itself is not fully engaged with, nor exploiting, the potential productivity of its creative and cultural sectors. Furthermore, a question lingering throughout Creative Exchange events concerned the popular policy term 'creative economy', and what it means in the context of Coventry. To what extent does Coventry possess a 'creative economy' – and further, to what extent does that creative economy provide leadership and innovation for other spheres of the city life, social as well as cultural.

Our positive regard for the Albany Theatre is inspired in part by the fact that the City is at the heart of its organisational aims, and also its artistic program and development aspirations. The City's creative economy will be the main beneficiary of an expansion in the Albany's activity. And significantly, the vision of a creative economy in the Albany Theatre framework is a vision of open access participation, not just closed networks of mature professionals. The Albany Theatre aims to become an open space for the development of social well-being and inclusive urban development through cultural participation. It also demonstrates a model of sustainability for the arts – through stakeholders and committed contributing professionals, through volunteers, community groups and all those availing themselves of the opportunity for arts education and skills development.

This feasibility study is therefore set against this backdrop. It does not provide a stack of statistical data or empirical evidence for all of its claims. Rather, it draws on both student and academic research of both the Albany Theatre and Coventry's cultural life. It is grounded on two assumptions, which it claims are self-evident. The first assumption is that Coventry City's physical scale and density can present immediate challenges for arts and other cultural organisations to develop in both size and impact. In other words, the growth of culture and the creative industries in Coventry is stunted, and requires concerted action from policy makers, practitioners, researchers and other cultural sector actors. The second assumption is that Coventry city, to become the successful, vibrant, city it aspires to be, requires a concerted capacity building of the spaces, places and agencies who are the catalysts of culture and the creative industries development.

This report, while neutral, is intentionally animated by the Albany Theatre's own convictions on the role of culture and the arts in the city – as articulated through its vision, mission statement, values and extensive program of activities. This we deem to be appropriate, given how (as we indicate), the Albany Theatre's organisational aims are commensurate with a broad range of Coventry's City Council policy aims. These aims are, broadly, for the arts and culture to generate an impact beyond the orbit of the arts and cultural 'sectors'. And further, that the arts and culture play an active role in extending their own sustainability.

The Albany Theatre's '**Arts for Life**' agenda is indicative of this. It articulates a belief in the social impact of the arts, and its plans for development are both organisational and physical of which sustainability is an intrinsic part.

Dr Jonathan Vickery, Associate Professor and Director of the masters in Arts, Enterprise and Development, Centre for Cultural Policy Studies, University of Warwick, Coventry.

Emilia Moniszko, Kalejdoskop East-West (arts platform), Coventry.

Dr Tom Fleming, Tom Fleming Creative Consultancy, The Colourworks, Abbot Street, London.

3: The Terms and Criteria of this report

This is not a comprehensive feasibility study (which would require, for example, a full technical resource analysis, a market demand assessment and full schedule of implementation of the proposed strategic development). A full feasibility was not, at this time, deemed necessary. The reason is that what is proposed below is entirely commensurate with the Albany Theatre Trust's strategic aspirations, and involves the building facility in which they are already housed, and is based on capabilities and resources they either currently possess or through their recent track-record of rapid success and professionalism, can credibly claim to warrant.

This report was written in dialogue with, and largely based on interviews with, the Albany Theatre's executive staff and administrative staff. Its method is largely conceptual and conducted as a *narrative assessment of the Albany Theatre Trust's strategic aims for development, delivering on the city's policy agenda*. **The purpose of the study is to determine the coherence, veracity and workability of the Albany's strategic aims in the context of the current needs of the City's urban cultural development.** The study is based on dialogue and interviews with Albany members on the subject of their recent work, track record, strength of organisational identity and management, along with a reading of the reports and self-assessments the Albany has produced.

The Albany Theatre Trust is confident in managing the next substantive phase of the theatre's development, and this can only become clear throughout the report. The report is also set against the backdrop of the cultural requirements of the city of Coventry as articulated in its policy frameworks. It draws on the current reports, statements and financial accounts of the Albany Theatre Trust. It is guided by general orientation and focus of feasibility studies for cultural organisations, taking into account competency in organisational management and administration, quality of delivery and artistic production, the existence of growing and active communities of interest (including audiences), a broader public interest, and/or expressions of engagement from the city; and, importantly, the organisation's operational sustainability in the context of its development aspirations.

These all motivate the way this feasibility study was researched and was written, but the study also takes into account the Albany Theatre's distinctiveness and mission. Its official Mission statement is comprised of just three words. *We amplify these words by way of defining this report's aims:*

To acknowledge the ambition, determination and aspiration of the Albany Theatre (and Albany Theatre Trust) in delivering on its twin development aims: this report investigates how the Albany can generate high impact community theatre (involving ancillary outreach activities) and create a cultural hub for the city – a significant cultural resource for Coventry's urban communities.

Key Word: *Inspire*

To represent the energy, industriousness and accomplishment of the Albany Theatre in its short history (its staff, volunteer corps, audiences and participating communities): this report investigates how a new capital development is intrinsically related to the development of their core competencies in city-based community theatre.

Key word: *Create*

To breach the gulf between amateur and professional, and generate artistic excellence through participation and social engagement: this report aims to assess the Albany Theatre's professional, intellectual and creative resources, and its operational ability in establishing a space for skills and talent development, enterprise and innovation, research and education, using community arts in tandem with major performances and shows.

Key word: *Cultivate*

These three key words – **Inspire, Create and Cultivate** – form the Mission statement of the Albany Theatre Trust. This mission is simple, direct and effective. It is aimed at the city and its social communities. The *Vision Statement* of the Albany Theatre indicates the policy framework through which this mission is made into a practical reality. It states, in bold terms, that the Albany's strategic aims will bring a distinctive and valuable dimension to Coventry's cultural offer.

Vision

To promote well-being through *Arts for Life*



4: Why the Albany? An Introduction

The Albany Theatre possesses four characteristics essential for success– a unique cultural offer in the city, past and present support of key individuals and City Council representatives, an experienced and dedicated community of practitioners, and a substantial facility in a favourable location. A good overview of the Albany can be found on their website:

<http://albanytheatre.co.uk/>

In the location and site of the old City College Theatre, the Albany Theatre opened its doors in February 2013. In three years it has created a unique community of practice, appealing to a wide range of participants as well as audiences. A City Council intervention ensured that as the site passed into private ownership an obligation to maintain a public interest in the building was retained. Provision for the Theatre, though now insufficient, was successful in securing the premises. Despite huge challenges, the creation of a charitable trust – The Albany Theatre Trust – has since generated a vision and an aspiration of civic proportion. The Albany Theatre now houses a cultural enterprise that is effectively targeting specific policy aims for both artistic innovations in the sphere of community arts as well as city cultural policies. The Albany Theatre Trust has constructed a determined and credible plan for development and expansion.

Currently, the Albany Theatre Trust presides over a culturally impressive Art-Deco theatre auditorium, professional level lighting, PA and scenography production, dressing rooms, offices, administrative and management staff, a range of volunteers. This is managed by a professionally experienced Board.

Albany Theatre Trust Directors

David Meredith – Chair

Claudette Bryanston– Vice Chair

Chris Arnold

Chris Beale

Clive Benfield

Tracie Coombs

Sandra Godley

Andy Hardy

Councillor David Kershaw

Laurence Moore

Over 170 volunteers have worked within the theatre, and almost 80,000 people have attended events since the current theatre's inception in February 2013. Thousands of young people have used the theatre: last year over 5,400 people performed on the stage, over 85% of them children and young people; last summer over 1100 young people took part in an expansive and adventurous program. The Albany Theatre Trust generates its own revenues, and is currently in receipt of a grant for 2015-16 by Coventry City Council, a larger commitment of support from the 29th May 1961 Charity, as well as smaller project-based funding from Arts Council England and others. This funding has also been invested in a Theatre Outreach Coordinator and Theatre Fundraising Coordinator, building the Theatre's organisational capacity. *The Albany Theatre Strategic Plan* (2012) first set out the new aspirational aims of a determined new Albany Theatre Trust – to surpass the capabilities and remits of past community theatres, and to become a significant, active and resilient agency delivering on city's main policies.

As a theatre, The Albany's published *Objectives* are as follows:

- ◇ to enrich the cultural life of Coventry.
- ◇ to support and reflect all members of our community.
- ◇ to create for all volunteering and training opportunities to engage with the arts.
- ◇ to provide an inclusive high quality programme that represents all performance-related arts to make the most of our resources.

As a new cultural enterprise, The Albany has aimed for:

- Develop financial resilience, independence and the power to commission and make new culture happen in the city.
- Extend its significant network of volunteers, Associates and Advisors, city community and social networks, in coordination with its main stakeholders (Coventry City Council, XLB Limited, professional touring companies, community groups, volunteers and amateur performance groups).
- Transcend the limitations of previous models of community and volunteer organisations, and continuing to pioneer professionalism, innovation and best practice in cultural management, providing huge opportunities for skills, education and work experience.

These aims have evolved through a huge investment by a committed group of people, their professionalism registered in their organisational management publications:

- (a) The Albany Theatre Strategic Plan (2012).
- (b) The Albany Theatre Business Plan (2015-16).
- (c) The Albany Theatre Vision statement (2016).
- (d) The Albany Theatre 'Arts for Life' statement (2015).
- (e) Commissioned studies – including Robothams feasibility survey and design proposals.

The Albany Theatre has developed a coherent *Vision Statement*, which is empowered by the consent and aspirations of its many participants:

Our vision is: for the residents of Coventry to engage with the Albany Theatre through a programme of relevant and interesting performances and events regardless of social background or access requirements; for participation in Arts for Life to promote wellbeing, community cohesion and active citizenship. – To promote strong and involved communities, reduce the impact of extreme poverty and to support the most vulnerable people in our city; contributing to improved health and well being of local residents and reducing health inequalities. The new Outreach team at the Albany Theatre seeks to encourage those who cannot easily access the arts; people who are limited by financial means, disability or who come from backgrounds where theatre-going is not a traditional pastime...



'Arts for Life' is the Albany Theatre's strategy framework: The Theatre has engineered a unique approach to community arts in the City of Coventry, emerging from both its intrinsic interests in local people and its strategic positioning between the cultural offer of the Warwick Arts Centre and the Belgrade Theatre. To say that the Albany is primarily interested in people seems to state something obvious and common to all arts organisations. This is not the case. In an age of increasing regulatory demands and rising costs, many arts organisations understandably become absorbed in their own operational continuity and their own limited constituencies, expanding out perhaps only in terms of 'outreach' and 'audience development'. While the Albany certainly faces challenges faced by other arts organisations, and certainly benefits from new methods of 'outreach' and 'audience development', its very model of production is centred around active participation and the involvement of people, from the city, region and beyond. As a largely voluntary arts-based organisation, the Albany Theatre has pioneered a means of flourishing through lean production budgets, hard working and committed stakeholders and partners, enthusiastic and sacrificial volunteers, motivated communities and local interest groups. This means that its operations, program, and even its management, are inclusive and involving of an expanding constituency. And while professional standards, values and trends in theatre production remain critical to the Albany's credibility, it has nonetheless remained focussed on the 'human' value of the arts – the affirmation, recognition, participation, collegiality, skills and education, that reward those who invest their time, creativity and energies. This approach has been effectively articulated in a new and vital policy framework – Health and Well-Being.

My view in shaping the artistic direction of the theatre is that the Albany can serve the cultural appetite in Coventry best by incubating new audiences, which will become not only our audience but subsequently the audiences of The Belgrade Theatre and Warwick Arts Centre. 'New audiences' can of course include anybody. However Arts for Life is much more than simply 'arts for everyone'. It asserts that the arts are for those for whom their well being is threatened – by poor physical or mental health, for example – and for which the arts can offer huge benefits.

– Claudette Bryanston, Programming Outreach and Artistic Direction

While the Health and Well-Being agenda (as a national policy framework) is still in its infancy the Albany is intent on innovating in this policy arena. 'Arts for Life', as clarifies Trust Chairman and Theatre Chief Executive David Meredith, "...is a vital aim, that will increase the range of opportunities for people to access arts, culture, leisure, music, events and associated activities, and by supporting active citizens as volunteers will continue to help local people into work". This is not social engagement as a political obligation or a way of increasing ticket sales – it is open participation and a tangible contribution to the health and well-being of the city's local residents and others. Through broad opportunities for involvement (through technical, artistic, administrative, social and communications-based work) the Albany Theatre contributes to individual empowerment for life – and so, a reduction in health inequalities, alleviates the impact of poverty through providing resources, provides a space of supportive, affirmative, personal development, generates opportunities for skills, education and employability, and generally helps acculturate newcomers, learning behavioural, communication and social values and norms.

The Arts for Life agenda is a locally-grounded agenda. It will raise the profile of Coventry as a space of innovation in high-impact culture and a model of sustainability for arts organisations. The Albany's inspirational work with schools and young people has already made a tangible impact on improved educational outcomes, and further, the emerging relevance of knowledge-based skills to the economy will see the Albany devise projects that help support business growth and the enhancement of the city centre.

In 2016 the Albany Theatre will be continuing to build on its agenda of promoting well being by working with local groups and focussing on those who are vulnerable because of social marginalisation, age or disability. They will continue to build a knowledge-base in this area, and in the four years that follow, they will be determined to extend the range of their engaged communities and current spectrum of social concerns. This will include a season, or festival, for the greater understanding of mental health, so as to break down social stigma, and also work specifically with the refugee centre to promote social cohesion.



5: Why a 'Community' approach to the arts?

Arts for Life, positions the Albany within local concerns – where wholly professional arts will always exceed the local. At every level, (social outreach, administration, production, management) the Albany Theatre beckons the locale of Coventry to become involved. The Arts Council England funded *Spon Spun Festival* of new writing (the first in May 2016) is an example of this targeted local engagement with ten community groups from the area.



The Albany Theatre hosts popular touring shows, community productions, children's theatre, live music and is about to launch the Albany Film Club, to be known as the *Albany Picture House*. It also facilitates the production of performances on-site, offering opportunities to professionals, retired professionals, students and a vast range of members from Coventry's urban communities – particularly working communities and ethnic, religious or other culturally-specific groups.

The Albany's approach to the arts is historically commensurate with the aims and practices of community arts and theatre – particularly in ways that breach the chasm that seems still to exist between 'amateur' and professional. As 'community' arts, the Albany's values centre on:

- (i) A place-based and location-sensitive artistic practice.
- (ii) A consciousness of the social contexts of these practices.
- (iii) A willingness to engage with all levels of experience, education, skills and ages.
- (iv) The aspiration for culture to generate social and urban impact.
- (v) Cultural participation, offering opportunities to increase citizenship, ethical responsibility and employability.

However, it would be a misunderstanding to categorise the Albany merely in these traditional 'community arts' terms. The Albany has *innovated* on their community roots:

- (vi) Engaging with universities, colleges and schools – generating opportunities for research, as well as education.
- (v) Engaging with policy frameworks, particularly Coventry city's aspirations to be a national leader in certain key areas [see below]
- (vii) Engaging in cultural diversity as a creative practice, in a city where migrations, diasporas and ethnic communities are no longer a 'minority' interest but a significant factor for a developing urban economy.

I started as a general volunteer at The Albany Theatre in 2012. There was no water, electricity or heating and we were faced with a huge clean-up operation. The community spirit of my fellow volunteers was inspiring. People from all walks of life were pitching in with a common goal – to bring the theatre back to life and preserve it for future generations. I've met some wonderful people whilst a volunteer and now have the fantastic opportunity of working with them as a paid member of the Albany Theatre staff.

– Alex (staff member)

The geo-physical location of the Albany Theatre is highly favourable and highly valued in the context of the Albany's strategic aims. As a facility, it simply has too much potential to remain static. It is situated on one of the main arterial routes leading into the City centre. It is interconnected with two parts of the city that represent the contrasting social dimensions of the city – Earlsdon and Spon End, added to which are the two major hotels and the university accommodation and offices, including the QCDA building. Thousands of vehicles pass the Albany daily, and the area is served well by public transport links, such as several bus routes, and is close to the train station. The Theatre has a huge adjacent secure public car park, and a convenient front of house drop off for disabled patrons. It is also in the catchment area for a range of state and private primary and secondary schools.

In a previous Scoping study commissioned by the Albany Theatre (Vickery, November 2014) a basic statistical assessment was undertaken by way of ascertaining strategic priorities appropriate to Coventry's social demographic. A number of conclusions were drawn, among which were (i) Coventry is a city that registers acute and pervasive social trends and changes, many of which emerge in response to rapid economic change (such as employment opportunities, or inward migration); (ii) Coventry is a diverse city – it perpetuates a fascinating historical narrative of its resilience and emergence (as medieval centre of power and commerce; as the Phoenix rising from the ashes of World War Two), but this unified narrative appears to contrast increasingly with the city's social diversity and multitude of histories, in turn indicating how the city is in danger of becoming a landscape of disconnected social segments; (iii) Coventry is a city that registers regional social stratification – it is a 'class'-based city (albeit with two huge and successful universities); and (iv) Coventry is a global city, yet to effectively uncover and manage its true cultural panorama.

As a response to the complexity facing the city and its possible futures, the Albany Theatre's strategic approach to growth will prioritise an approach to cultural diversity that allows cultural participants to experience expanded horizons in the form of the city's 'global' cultural landscape. And secondly, the Albany will accompany growth in size and activities with intellectual growth – informed by research and knowledge, becoming a hub for a creative knowledge economy. The growth of the Albany Theatre will become a growth in the city's understanding of itself and its role in the world – global civil society and the global community of artists and arts organisations working for development, rights, equalities and well-being.

6: What has the Albany achieved in the last three years?

The Albany, in three years, has established an impressive community theatre, with two or three major productions a month, and which has attracted the commendations and support of a significant range of people in the city. Through this, and through national and university networks, the Albany is now a well-known innovator in community theatre.

The Albany Theatre is a lovely venue which is lucky to have a very passionate and committed voluntary committee willing to give their time and energy to working for its success. Having performed in London, Birmingham, Manchester, Chicago, Boston and New York, as well as touring all over Ireland, we can honestly say that the welcome we received in Albany was second to none.

– Eileen for The Crokey Hill Club

The Albany is determined to capitalise on its current hard-won success factors:

- a determined community of practice – of professionals, retired, early career and volunteers.
- professional expertise and administrative back up in strategic management, consultancy, research, marketing and communications, and community engagement.
- a community of partners and stakeholders, from the City Council, to the universities and beyond.
- a facility that guarantees both social engagement (situated just outside the City ring road) as well as high visibility.

Table 1: *The Albany Theatre's Key Performance Indicators*

| Overall data | 2013-14 | 2014-15 | 2015-16 | 2013-16 |
|---------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| No of events | 37 | 64 | 65 | 170 |
| No of event days | 55 | 97 | 104 | 256 |
| Audience total | 19,808 | 30,488 | 28,443 | 78,739 |
| Average audience/event | 310 | 314 | 263 | 303 |
| Box Office Revenue | £187,160 | £279,992 | £322,688 | £789,840 |
| Albany Income | £62,786 | £102,491 | £98,124 | £263,401 |
| Average audience/month | 1651 | 2541 | 2370 | 2187 |
| Average Albany Income/event day | £981 | £1,057 | £909 | £1,013 |
| Average Albany Income/month | £5,232 | £8,424 | £8,177 | £7,317 |
| Highest audience month | 5613 | 5758 | 4587 | 5758 |
| Highest Revenue month | £51,625 | £60,048 | £54,810 | £60,048 |
| Highest Albany Income month | £15,458 | £14,337 | £15,915 | £15,915 |
| Most events in a month | 14 | 15 | 16 | 16 |
| Ticket Levy | | | £24,596 | |
| No of artists | | | 220 | |
| No of performers | | | 5389 | |

This basic data demonstrate the following:

- The Albany Theatre has attained levels of consistency, stability and organisational delivery commensurate with the standards expected from a civic theatre or city arts organisation.
- The brand identity, artistic reputation and recognition of the Albany Theatre is now established locally, in the city, and (to a certain degree) nationally.
- The Theatre possesses the organisational capabilities, the cultural assets, the facility, and the location, for building a high-impact artistic program.
- The Albany has demonstrated that it has made serious inroads into a city-wide social and community engagement.
- The Theatre has devised a vision that is shared with the community and the wider stakeholder group.
- The Albany Theatre Board of Directors comprises experienced professionals with a high level of ambition to see the theatre deliver on major policy aims for the city.

The Albany Theatre Trust Board of Directors has engaged with academics, architects, community leaders and city councillors, and has so commissioned research and generated strategic aims of substance. The Albany has become directly relevant to several national policy frameworks: (i) arts and creative industries; (ii) new enterprising community organisations; (iii) cultural value; (iv) globalisation – diasporas, migrations and cultural diversity.



7: Aspiration and the Need to Achieve: critical points in the Albany Theatre's development

The Albany Theatre Trust is committed to understanding the needs of its various stakeholders, as well as the complexity of interests that cross this location, building and site. The site has a complex history of development, and remains only partially developed. It is the Albany's conviction that if the theatre project is at the heart of the future and continued development of this site, the city will see invested a sustainable cultural project capable of delivering value exceeding merely financial returns or the routine accomplishments of another art venue.



Key aspects of this site's history:

- The City Technical College was established for education, skills and public benefit, and is a focal point in the modern history of Coventry.
- The old city theatre's grand historical Art-Deco auditorium is visually outstanding and has been restored.
- The Albany is the fruit of the commitment and active concern for the Theatre by the city-based theatre community (in the form of over 90 users from across the city and nationally touring) and the continued support of Coventry City Council.
- The acquisition and subsequent relinquishment of the College site by developers MCD Ltd, saw the incorporation of an 'S106 agreement' (10th March 2010, Schedule 2 Section 4.4), requiring the retention of the theatre and its administration by a Theatre Trust.
- The restoration of the front entrance and foyer area, with its Grade II listed neo-classical facade and glazed atrium, saw the housing of the Theatre's box office accommodation, and provides an entrance to the hotel chain Premier Inn (opened early 2012, occupying the top two floors of the building).
- The acquisition of the whole site by developers XLB Property Limited has presented new opportunities. The building, through Licence to Occupy, is overseen by the Albany Theatre Trust, but where the Trust still operates without a lease. However, the Trust has negotiated the opportunity to lease adjacent 10500 square feet of space (the 'East Wing'), where in the event this will need to be reflected in an amended S106 Agreement.

- By 2015 the Albany Theatre Trust had become a stable and ambitious Company Limited by Guarantee, and a registered charity, with an experienced Board including six Executive Directors.
- The Albany Theatre is supported by The Theatres Trust, which has placed the building on its *Buildings at Risk* register, and is providing advice to the Board.
- The Albany maintains an active positive and collaborative relation with other arts organisations in the city, including the Belgrade Theatre, Warwick Arts Centre, Ego Youth Theatre The Herbert Gallery, Positive Images, The Godiva Festival, Writing West Midlands and a number of smaller art groups.
- The Albany Theatre Trust has not – because of continued uncertainties with regard to the full development of the site – been able to obtain a proper lease agreement for the occupation of the theatre complex, and despite the construction of a dynamic strategic framework for development, the Trust has no secure basis for devising a financial plan.

The Albany is therefore at a stage where it needs to clarify the contractual and sustainable status of the theatre – which involves clarifying the relationship between the Trust and the Landlord (the full implementation of the Section 106 agreement), the relationship between the Trust (as a new charitable Ltd Co.) and Coventry City Council, and also between the building and the Trust's current aspirations to deliver substantive value to the city in accordance with the city's policy aims. These aims include cultural service provision, sustainable social communities and sustainable development, health and well-being, citizenship, minority groups and immigration, education and skills, and not least the UK City of Culture 2021 bid.

In so doing, the Albany Theatre will be allowed to enter the next phase of its history and determine a sustainable financial management model and revenue generation strategy, and fully contribute to Coventry's profile building as a city that is competitive on a national level.

The building around the theatre auditorium (the auditorium, dock, green room and dressing rooms) contains an adjacent expanse of over 10500 square feet. This now appears to be on offer as a commercial space to other interests in the city for office use. The Albany Theatre, at this juncture in its history, is faced with a twin dilemma:

- The need to retain and upgrade the existing limited Albany Theatre facility, where the current footprint is under threat in the form of a facility upgrade that will only offer smaller facilities to the side of the building.
- The commercialisation and occupation of the entire building by non-cultural operators, enclosing the Theatre in a minimal space that will not allow for development, nor be visible to the city.

The Albany Theatre's needs, even to meet its current commitments, involve the following:

- 1: The development of the existing space (of dock, green room, dressing rooms and administration space), so as to provide for professional level delivery of its cultural activity and to maximise the capacity of the Theatre's high-impact production.
- 2: The creation of smaller, studio and series of more intimate spaces, so that community and local engagement can grow around the core theatre facility, making good its aims for participation.
- 3: To consolidate the identity and contiguity of all Albany Theatre spaces and operations (for example, with practice and rehearsal spaces) so as to provide the scope for partnerships with other arts organisations the universities, and funded projects.

8: The Albany's current development requirements

The Albany Theatre Trust has conducted its own informal but thorough audit of the use, functionality and future viability of the current facility, and done so in relation to the Albany's strategic aims. *The main concluding points of its assessment are as follows:*

→ The Albany Theatre Trust need to operate on its current strategic plans, and both secure and develop (in standards, quality and provision) the current theatre footprint – and do so through a 25 year lease on the property, with the enabling stipulations of the S106 Agreement).

→ On the basis of a lease, the Albany Theatre Trust needs to develop a fully effective financial plan for growth, expansion and the delivery of a high level and rate of cultural and community service. On this plan, effective partnership, stakeholder, fundraising, revenue management and fund application strategies, can be based and become operational in a short space of time.

→ The Trust must secure the management of the outdoor space between the theatre and the East Wing of the building. This space, while important for security, access, and increased productivity, will also present rare and vital creative potential in the context of the strategic aims.

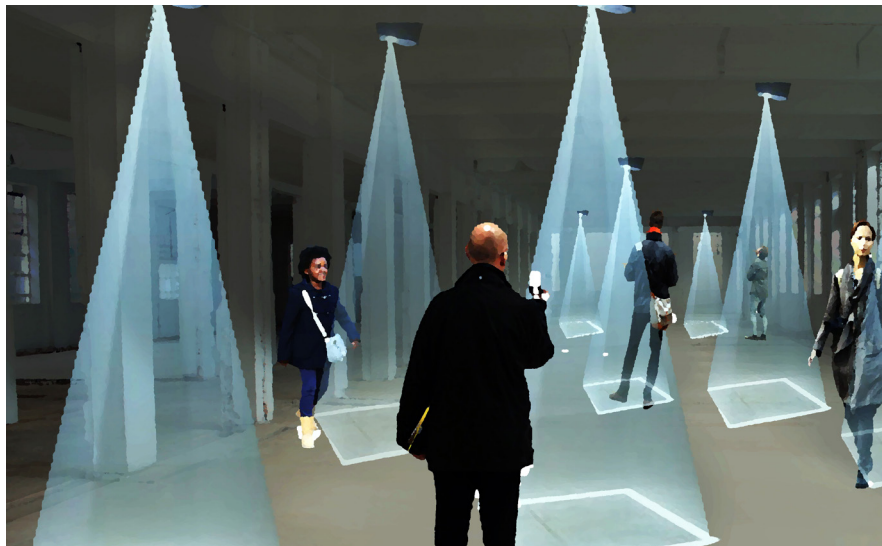
The strategic aims will only be fully addressed by a physical growth in the facilities. The only option available is an expansion into the ground floor of the East Wing of the building – providing the necessary space for storage, a public accessible front box office for the Theatre, and facilities required for its adventurous aim to become Coventry's new 'hub' for cultural innovations.



The occupation of the most visible section of the ground floor of the current building will generate a sense that the occupation of the existing building is substantial, and in turn generate a profile and sense of presence. A city's cultural offer in part depends on the occupation of vital space in the city by culture, and being visibly recognised as a cultural venue. This visible presence will entail a footfall and openness to local residents, as well as an opportunity for the Albany to become a visible destination for students and the visitor economy more broadly. The grand facade of the building can be capitalised upon, and a new hub for cultural innovations in community arts and research could gain a wide-spread reputation.

A new hub for cultural innovations in community arts and research would see the Albany Theatre play a major role in the embryonic cultural economy of Coventry, and a role in securing Coventry as the UK City of Culture 2021 and beyond into Culture Coventry 2016-2026.

The new visible hub space would represent on the level of the symbolic a city commitment to active community culture, volunteering, graduate prospects for a growing creative industries, new research on culture and economy in the city, new engaged arts practice, and a new space for social interaction.



9: The Project and Development Plan

As indicated above, the Albany Theatre Trust is facing a three-fold capital development project. It argues that these three projects are indissolubly interconnected – through the Albany’s strategic development aims. If these capital projects are not successfully managed to completion, the strategic aims of the Albany Theatre Trust (indeed even the larger of its current performances and public events) will deliver only limited value in the limited orbit of community theatre. It could spell the end of the Albany Theatre as an arts organisation, given that its creative life and aspirations will become trapped within its own, increasingly constricted, building.

The three capital projects are:

- 1: Redevelopment of the rear of the theatre building – reconstructing the current facilities (dock, green room, dressing rooms).
- 2: Refurbishment and development works for the Theatre auditorium and immediate surrounds.
- 3: Extension into the East Wing of the building – which has hitherto remained empty and undeveloped.

As the Robotham Feasibility Designs make clear [cf. the Albany Theatre Trust’s *Proposal*] the components of the space as designed are oriented in a way that meets the strategic aims of the Theatre, specifically its Arts for Life agenda.

| New Spaces | Strategic Value |
|--|--|
| Box office reception and New entrance. East Wing full occupation joined by glazed link and existing front door and building foyer. Open courtyard. Cafe/bar area. Studios. Admin and meeting rooms. Flexible space. Workshop and storage. Rehearsal space. | Visible front expressing a cultural presence outside the ring road. Maximising the use of space for a critical mass of users. Contiguity between the theatre and the East Wing . Social accessibility. Professional facilities for increased admin efficiencies. Maximisation of the operational capacity of existing core delivery. New space for small performances, experimentation and rehearsal, development and socially inclusive events. |

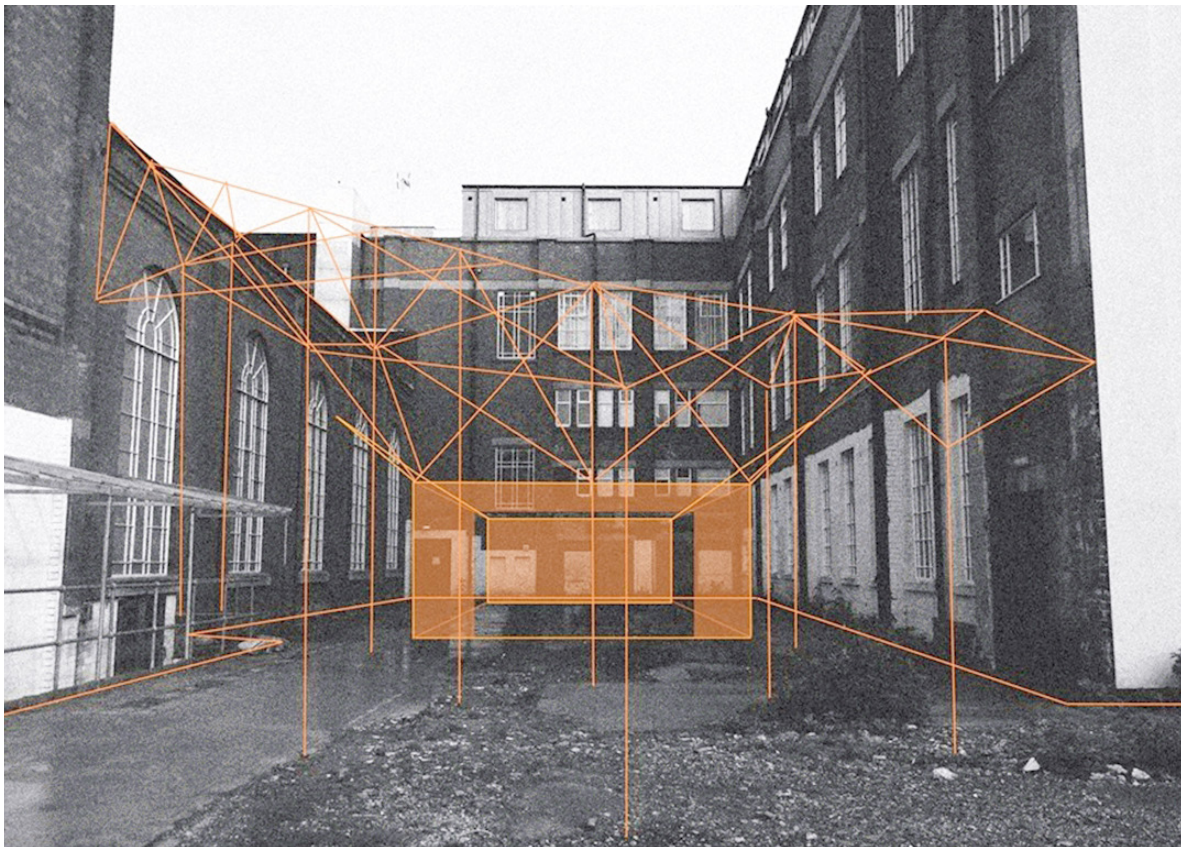
It is self-evident that a ‘critical mass’ of users or participants in a city’s creative economy is key to the effectiveness of that creative economy. While there will always be partial solutions or ways of using a portion of the East Wing space, the volume of value generated will only reflect the level of investment made. The opportunity this space presents is considerable: it will allow the Albany Theatre to be framed and characterised by an accessible social and creative practice space, which offers an introduction to the theatre’s main program as well as a space for a wide range of Arts for Life activities. The detailed objectives of such a development will involve the following:

- A cultural destination in the city – with a social dimension (cafe/bar, social space).
- A place where workshops, seminars and training can be offered, and by various providers (the Albany, other arts organisations, the universities). A space for stimulation, mentoring and support for creative artistic practice, socially engaged practice, and professionalisation of individual development.

- A space that is not entirely characterised by theatre or 'theatre going audiences', but is open, flexible and social diverse.
- A place where one will always find innovative, provocative new socially-engaged, art practice.
- A space for networking, talks, celebrity events, and social celebrations.
- A space where internationally renowned thinking and practice in Arts for Life and socially-engaged art can emerge, be branded, marketed and disseminated to the world.
- A place where universities meet to collaborate on research projects in urban culture, diversity and well-being.

If this can be achieved – and the Albany Theatre Trust is confident that it can, and swiftly – this project can, in turn, become a vital component of the UK City of Culture 2021 bid profile, and do so by providing:

- A theatre, whose story is the story of the Twentieth Century, with its unfinished business in using education and culture to build the city's economy, society and civic democracy – and do so well into the 21st Century.
- A pioneering art organisation with a strategic vision for using the performing arts, research and creative enterprise, for a defined urban Well-Being agenda.
- An organisation whose social engagement will identify and celebrate Coventry's twin achievements in innovation and in building a peaceful multicultural city.
- A network of active and high-profile supporters.
- A program that spans popular culture and historical and contemporary performance arts.
- An organisation that is open to anyone to embark on a rigorous skills development and learning process.
- A cultural hub whose strategic aims articulate a determination to generate a creative economy in the city of Coventry.



10: The Business Case

The Albany Theatre Trust is a young cultural enterprise, but had built up reserves of £78,285 by the end of the last financial year (March 31st 2015). Over the same period they invested almost £100,000 in refurbishments and enhancements, adding to the capital value of the building as well as improving the quality of arts experience and productivity.

There are 108 event days booked in for 2015-16 – through recent staff restructuring (and volunteer growth) the number of events in 2016-17 will increase by 50%. A snapshot of the Albany's performance can be summarised as follows:

| Totals | Events | Event Days | Total Audience | Box Office revenue | Albany Income | Ticket Levy | No of artists | Participants |
|----------------|------------|------------|----------------|--------------------|----------------|-------------|---------------|--------------|
| 2013-14 | 37 | 64 | 19808 | 187,160 | 62,786 | | | |
| 2014-15 | 55 | 97 | 30488 | 279,992 | 102,491 | | | |
| 2015-16 | 69 | 108 | 28593 | 324,868 | 103,124 | 24,596 | 221 | 5411 |
| 2013-15 | 161 | 269 | 78889 | 792,020 | 268,401 | | | |

As the figures show, in just three years, the Albany has established a viable arts organisation. It is an organisation that demands investment and development, delivering value to the city at a time when culture and creativity are becoming key contributors to urban life in every major city in the world.

The strategic plan for investment and development, however, is currently frustrated by a circular problem.

- 1: Without an extensive lease agreement and a financial plan, and without security in its facility, it is impossible to proceed with investment and development.
- 2: The S106 Agreement guarantees a payment of £950,000 to the Trust by the owners XLB, but further funds will be required to realise even the S106 proposal to remodel the rear of the theatre.
- 3: The Arts for Life agenda, and all the Theatre's operations, will be suspended in a state of jeopardy if alterations to the building deliver a smaller and more contracted rear space (dock, green room, dressing rooms). The current demands of the owner-developer are heading in this direction.
- 4: The Albany Theatre's current strategic aims can only be fulfilled if extension is allowed into the building's East Wing – providing the administrative, box office, open social space, small performance spaces, and storage space, that any such operation requires.
- 5: The Albany Theatre Trust is confident that the need to raise further capital funds will be a challenge it can confidently face if allowed to implement its strategic plan and become a central cultural hub for the city.

This is a challenge in the form of an unmissable opportunity. Deliberations stretching back to early 2014, The Albany Theatre Trust is convinced that growth is the only option, and on a track record of cultural delivery and the professional management of cultural diversity, it is confident that it can devise a strategic means of generating revenues to address the costs of increased space. In terms of an immediate return on investment, The East Wing expansion can be calculated in terms of 3 hours of use per space for only 200 days per year (at low or reasonable hire rates) and can generate revenues of over £200,000 (calculated in relation to costs of £150,000, (with rent at the higher end), generating an operating surplus of over £50,000.

Table 2: *Use of and Revenues from the additional space*

| Area of space (sq.m.) | Use of space | Hourly rate | Daily revenue* | Annual revenue |
|-----------------------|--|-------------|----------------|----------------|
| 265 | dead space - storage workshop toilets | | | |
| 113 | Offices | | | |
| 50 | Bar | | 200 | 40000 |
| 50 | Café | | 200 | 40000 |
| 78 | Rehearsal room 1 - studio | 30 | 90 | 18000 |
| 44 | Rehearsal room 2 | 15 | 90 | 9000 |
| 76 | Rehearsal room 3 | 25 | 75 | 15000 |
| 87 | flexible space - community | 25 | 75 | 15000 |
| 128 | flexible space - dance | 30 | 90 | 18000 |
| 14 | flexible space - meeting 1 | 12 | 36 | 720 |
| 14 | flexible space - meeting 2 | 12 | 36 | 720 |
| 18 | flexible space - meeting 3 | 12 | 36 | 720 |
| 37 | mini studio | 15 | 45 | 9000 |
| 974 | *(based on 3 hours use per day only) | 3 | | |
| | days open | 200 | 928 | 185600 |
| | Rehearsal room 1 - studio - show revenue | | | 21600 |
| | Additional conference revenue | | | 20000 |
| | | | | 227200 |

The Albany Theatre Trust's *Arts for Life* Proposal (March 2016) details capital costs and funding requirements.

11: Delivering on the City's policy aims

Right now, the Albany is a theatre and all its activities and stakeholders are determined by this singular identity. With the new East Wing expansion, the stakeholder base of the Albany will grow, and attract new partners for a new wide range of innovation activities:

The Albany theatre is important to me because it provides a small seated venue for conventional music. There are plenty of alternatives for more modern music where standing is the norm. For Coventry generally it provides a smaller venue than the Belgrade or Warwick Arts Centre (Butterworth Hall) for events which do not attract larger audiences – including musical and theatrical events – not just music ... Coventry misses out to Birmingham in that regard. I often have to travel to see Bands or Individuals who don't attract large enough audiences for Butterworth Hall. The Ralph McTell concert was a good example of the Albany being the right size.

– David (audience member)



Serving a range of artists and creatives

- ◇ Performing arts
- ◇ Visual arts enterprise
- ◇ Literary arts and writing
- ◇ Crafts and maker culture
- ◇ Digital and social media
- ◇ Design-based industries

Providing a space for Artist Interconnections:

The new hub can be a basis for artists to develop their social and economic interconnectedness with the city – where the Albany can actively facilitate connections, networking, meetings, and new ideas from visiting artists, performers and other actors and agencies with whom they struggle to connect:

- ◊ Local, regional and national funding agencies
- ◊ Public agencies and City Council departments
- ◊ Investors and business skills stakeholders
- ◊ Artist-focused organizations and their programs
- ◊ Community development agencies
- ◊ Individual entrepreneurs

Exploring new methods by which creative people can engage with or serve communities through various media:

- ◊ Performance and acting
- ◊ Photography
- ◊ Social and other Digital Media
- ◊ Documentary Film
- ◊ Graphic design and visual communication

Facilitating and developing the management competency for complex collaborations:

- ◊ Complex collaborations can involve the participation, planning and coordination of major social, cultural or research projects – involving a range of philanthropic or charity organisations and public agencies.
- ◊ Research and policy development collaborations that engage and bring together the two universities.
- ◊ International cooperation and intercultural projects – undertaking projects with exciting innovations in community arts in mainland Europe, South America, Africa and China.
- ◊ Engaging with EU and UNESCO-level projects, and develop the capacity for generating artistic and intellectual content with a global reach.

Generate new norms for entrepreneurial activity – particularly in the use of a variety of funding sources, investments and revenues:

- ◊ Cultivate ways of devising more adventurous strategies for revenue-generation.
- ◊ Use the facility as a multi-purpose public facility with revenue generating potential.
- ◊ Attract donations and investment, and manage portfolios of such creating financial sustainability.
- ◊ Attract philanthropic agencies or legacies, and manage the contractual terms of such productively and strategically.

Achieve success through incremental development, individual initiative and micro-innovations, as well as large-scale expansion:

- ◊ Empower individual members to work innovatively within the Albany's strategic framework.
- ◊ Construct a program of large impact projects and smaller projects – building the capacity for continual and scientific evaluation and measuring the relation between scale and impact.
- ◊ Construct a program of interventions in the city's urban landscape and social spaces, attracting media attention and publicity dissemination.
- ◊ Devise large effective media strategy, ensuring the digital capture, archiving and dissemination of all creative activities.

The Albany Theatre Trust considers its positioning within the policy landscape of the city to be critical to its delivery of value for the city. In the context of its strategic aims, the Albany will deliver value within the following frameworks:

The Key Cities network: the Albany Theatre's strategic aims are focused on the locale of the city, and their aspirations to build a broader cultural hub for the city will deliver on the city's brand image as a city of innovation, aspiration and creative economy.

Council Plan 2015. Coventry: A Top Ten City: the Albany Theatre is "globally connected and locally committed" through its inclusive approach to Coventry's diverse diaspora communities, international artists and performances, and its embeddedness in the social life of the city.

Coventry's Cultural Strategy 2007-17: the Albany Theatre provides a "Space of Possibility", where high visibility arts drive an inclusive agenda into Coventry's neighbourhoods. *It delivers on the cultural strategy's central aims:*

- 1: *Develop* the new Creative Economy – by combining culture, innovation, skills and employability.
- 2: *Raising* Coventry's profile with the community and visitors – by recognising the problem of perceptions, both within and from outside the city.
- 3: *Connect* the city's culture to the local neighborhoods – the Albany Theatre is a major inner city venue but outside the city ring road and interconnected with Earlsdon and Spon End.
- 4: *Making* the city centre a vibrant centre of culture – where the city arguably remains culturally fragmented the Albany will provide a major locus of activity.
- 5: *Contributing* to social inclusion and community cohesion across the City – where there is a chronic lack of continuity between Coventry's main institutions (arts, culture, social, community, educational) the Albany Theatre works as a 'connection catalyst', cutting across all forms of activity with its volunteerism, socially inclusive and 'Arts for Life' approach to the arts.

Draft Coventry Strategic Arts Policy 2011/12 – 2013/14: in this context, the Albany is generating cultural entrepreneurship, demonstrating independence, resilience and a twin concern for quality in arts and delivering value to the city.

Coventry Urban Design Guidance and Coventry Local Development

Framework: the Albany is very concerned that its building and the stunning Art-Deco theatre is a huge source of value, and the iconic neo-classical building facade offer it a visibility that can be exploited. Embedding contemporary value in the heritage and the urban landscape of the city is here a significant task.

Draft Tourism Strategy 2014-2024: the Albany Theatre is flanked by two quality hotels (Premier Inn and Ramada) and with high profile shows, along with increasing diaspora community and family community performances, the potential for increasing visitors to the city is considerable. The Albany will work with both hotels to offer “special deals” to theatre patrons, be that special stay rates or meal offers. A recent show saw the Premier Inn completely full weeks in advance.

Community Cohesion Strategy 2010-2015: as a community arts organisation, the Albany is essentially concerned with equalities, rights, building local trust and cooperation, and will respond to the challenges of cultural division and extremism.

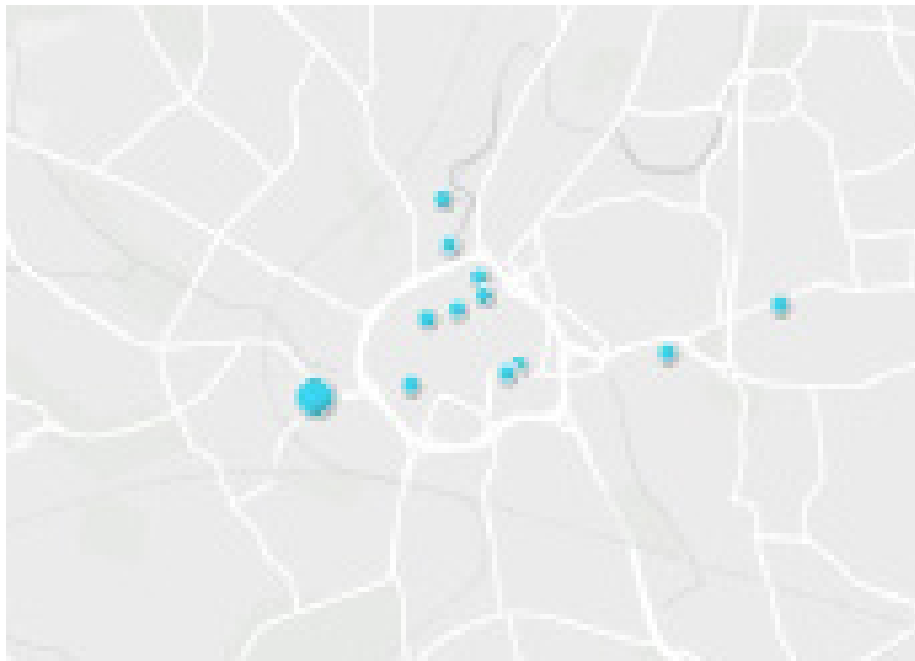
Coventry’s Sustainable Community Strategy 2008-2028: The Albany’s central aim is to improve the general quality of life for everyone – and in the form of its Arts for Life strategic mission it dovetails with this policy framework.

UK City of Culture 2021: the Albany will deliver a high quality cultural programme that will build and expand on local strengths and reaches a wide variety of audiences. Its strategic expansion will create a demonstrable economic impact through its mainstreaming of volunteer experience, skills and socially engaged events. As a major new urban hub for the arts, it will be a catalyst for regeneration, as well as contributing to community cohesion and Health and Well-Being.

There are, of course, other policy aims that the Albany’s strategic activity does and will cohere with – the city’s spectrum of children, youth, Well-Being and Health frameworks.

12: Why are these aspirations to be taken seriously?

The Albany Theatre and its committed community of practitioners, academic collaborators and stakeholders, has invested a considerable amount of thought in the cultural requirements of the city of Coventry and the Albany Theatre's role in the city's economic development. The Albany Theatre Trust Board and theatre staff have a consensus agreement on the following:



Map of Coventry city with cultural locations identified

The City needs a cultural hub – a space that is open, available, socially inclusive, intellectually active, and strategically oriented to innovation: The new Albany hub will be a space of social innovation – where social experience and engagement (without necessary professional expertise) will be key. The space will actively incubate and cultivate new ideas for 'Arts for Life', particularly in relation to local transformation, human development, and concrete opportunities for self-advancement for citizens.

The City needs a new model of arts organisation that is actively involved in innovating new revenue-generating activities, and liaising with funders, investors and donors for sustainable financial independence: Albany Theatre has attracted the commitment and support of experienced professionals, all aware of the growing needs for organisational sustainability in finances. The Albany is an innovative organisation, and wants to apply its innovative capabilities to financial planning, for example, the testing of different funding models (e.g. crowd-funding, digital philanthropy, online community or network subscriptions, and the commercialisation of IP).

The City needs an arts organisation that is centrally concerned with the city's creative economy, skills development and professionalisation: The Albany will use its experience in social inclusive and volunteer management as a means of developing opportunities for technical, administrative and professional skills. But more than this, its open space will be used to gather city creatives and arts professionals for intelligence-sharing and a joined-up intellectual dialogue on the role of culture in the city, extending to the identification of talent development, targeting disadvantaged children and young people, coordinating apprenticeships and other employability-related activities.

The City needs an arts organisation that aims at the culturally disenfranchised, and does so through a socially interventionist arts strategy: The Albany wishes to move beyond standard 'social engagement' paradigms, and innovate the use of the arts in human development – particularly in using its volunteer frameworks as a generative framework for skills development and creation of tangible activities that generate well-being.

The City needs an organisation that breaches the divide between 'arts audiences' and ordinary citizens: The Albany Theatre's program is expansive and will host high visibility popular shows along with challenging contemporary theatre. With smaller spaces it will be able to experiment and devise strategic ways of using the vital forms of literacy and skill in the arts to address the social and cultural needs of ordinary citizens.

The City needs a space where artistic creativity is activated as a source of creative industry innovation and ideas for new enterprise: The creative industries are generally separate from the arts and cultural institutions – the Albany sees a profound connection between them. The arts will be used as a framework and source of ideas for new creative ventures – whether public or commercially oriented.

The City needs an organisation that provides a space for research collaboration of national importance, and consistent research intelligence on the city: The social and cultural landscape of UK cities are changing rapidly, and facing new challenges. Arts organisations often lack research capability, and access to live intelligence on the people and city to which they want to remain engaged. The Albany's partnership with the universities will be cultivated to build a research capability for the city, and for the research needs of other city arts organisations.

The City needs an organisation that uses Coventry's huge cultural diversity in a strategic way: Cultural diversity is more than just a social fact – it is a significant policy framework (e.g. The 2005 UNESCO Convention, and UCLG's Agenda 21 for Culture) and a series of opportunities for arts organisations. The Albany Theatre's experience in community engagement will be extended internationally – working with the universities to create international fellowships, artist residencies, and the funding to bring artists from the developing world to Coventry – potentially through their own diasporas already established in the city.



Summary Assessment

I would respectfully suggest that you visit the theatre and speak to the technical team who are there on a weekly basis to get an idea how the theatre should be designed backstage area and dressing rooms. If we lose some of the dock area we will lose shows and the theatre will be reduced to a church hall arts centre. ... I am very concerned to learn that there is no lease yet in place at the theatre, or the proposed other arts complex. That must be top priority before other matters can be discussed.

– Phil (volunteer theatre technician)

The Albany is not just a regular theatre, it is a city-based cultural enterprise. It aspires to be an effective agent in the creative development of an aspiring city, and to provide a space where that aspiration can grow and become infectious. The Albany maintains a vital concern for the cultural life of Coventry, and has cultivated an active participation in Coventry's social communities. The Albany, particularly through its recent engagement with universities – Coventry University and the University of Warwick – is determined to develop strategic capabilities in the context of international policy frameworks, and so apprehend factors permeating the global economy. **Given huge imminent shifts in demographics and culture under increasing immigration and expanding diaspora communities, the need to work strategically with cultural diversity, rights, and sustainability intelligence is becoming more pressing.**



The Albany Theatre's aims and aspirations articulate priorities that reach higher than the particular, organisation-bound, self-interest of one theatre. It aspires to become a cultural 'hub' for the city – a space that interconnects artistic production with social engagement and knowledge. It wishes to be a hub for the growing creative economy in Coventry. The creative economy is an economy driven by ideas, new knowledge, innovative practices, collaboration and new forms of social cooperation. It is an economy that is grounded on intellectual vibrancy through social interaction. It is an economy that thrives on diversity, not specialisation, and on urban 'buzz', not just institution-building.

This report concludes that:

The Albany Theatre Trust's development aspirations are a bold and necessary response to the current situation facing the development of the site and the building facility.

Whatever the financial returns on a full commercialisation of the building facility, they cannot compare to a unique, historical and vibrant cultural hub, which can deliver on the city's broader policy aims.

The space for culture in the city must grow and not shrink. The current venue, the auditorium, the iconic facade, and visual presence in the city, is invaluable and a rare situation in a city where culture has increasingly limited options.

A capital expansion of the Albany Theatre will generate forms of value that will extend into the social and economic realms of the city.

The public interest is served by a cultural space that is open, socially inclusive, and operates with an Arts for Life agenda.

The operational sustainability of the development plan is assured by the stability and strength of the Albany Theatre Trust. It demonstrates professional capabilities in revenue raising, financial management, strategic management, and significant partnerships.

Acknowledgements

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