



Dunedin Theatre Network

CONCEPT FOR DISCUSSION: STAGE TWO

MAYFAIR
THEATRE

PLAYHOUSE
THEATRE
HOME OF DUNEDIN REPERTORY SOCIETY INC

ZEAL
ZEALAND

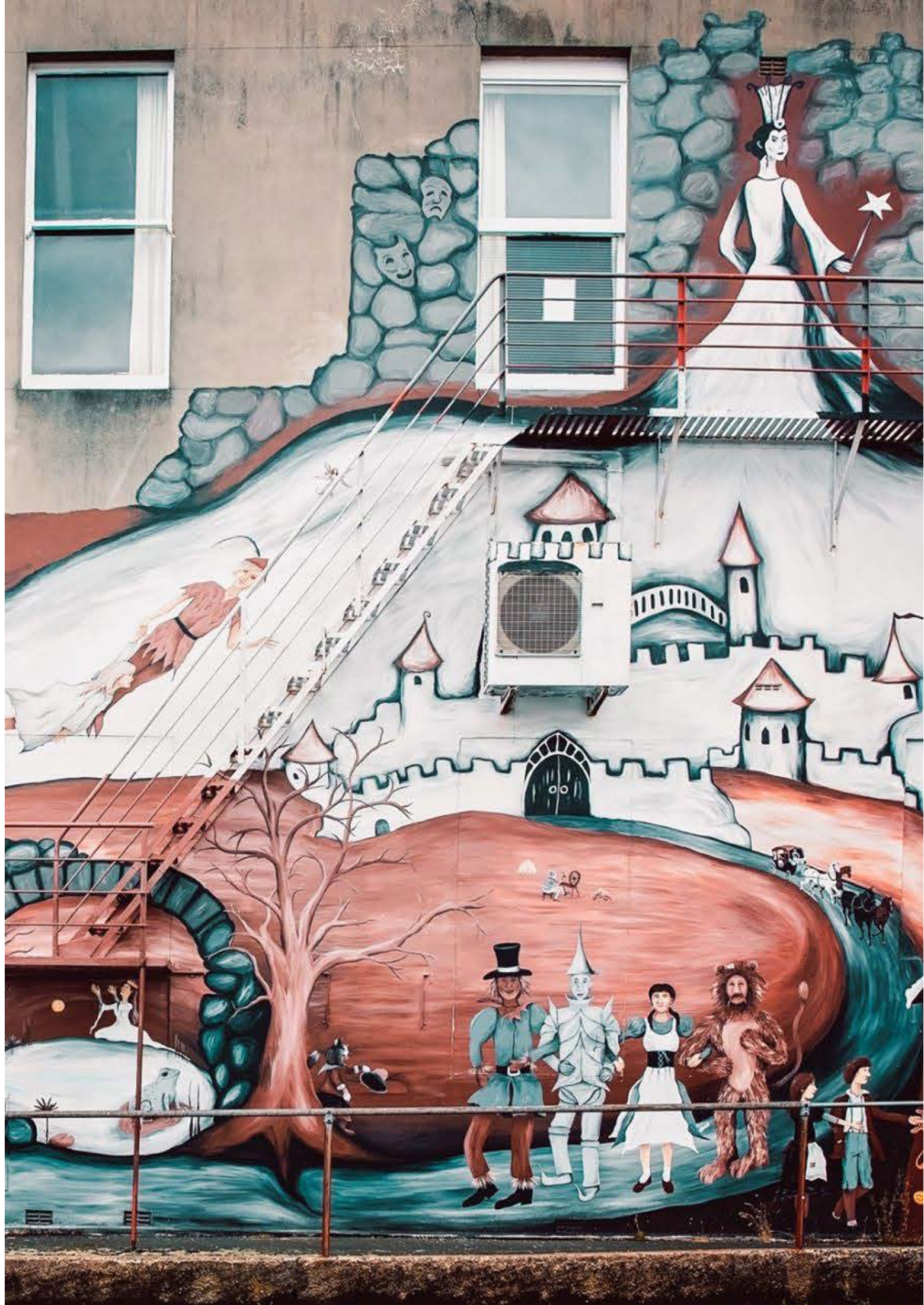


Photo credit: Kevin Hill
Mural: Filipa Crofskey

the IDEA IN A BIT MORE DETAIL

In May 2022 we proposed an idea of a “network approach” for Ōtepoti Dunedin’s theatre infrastructure.

We proposed a staged refurbishment of the Playhouse Theatre, the Athenaeum Building and the Mayfair Theatre.

We’ve spent the last few months developing the idea in more detail and engaging with the performing arts community.

We would now like to work with Dunedin City Council to take this community-led, collaborative idea to the next stage of development.

We would like to agree a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Council to take this forward, and to request Council funding for costed design options to enable future decision-making.

Ngā mihi,

Helen Scott (Project Chair)
Jemma Adams (President, Dunedin Repertory Society Inc)
Lawrie Forbes (Zeal Land Ltd – Owner, Athenaeum Building)
Geoff Patton (Chair, Mayfair Theatre Charitable Trust)

www.dunedintheatrenetwork.org.nz

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Dunedin Theatre Network concept is a collaborative, community-led proposal that has sprung up in the context of:

- Dunedin's well-documented need for performing arts venue infrastructure
- Dunedin City Council having set aside budget for this purpose
- three existing Dunedin arts venues that are deteriorating and at risk of closure without investment.

The owners of the Playhouse Theatre, the Athenaeum building and the Mayfair Theatre have been working together to consider how we can help with the shortage of fit-for-purpose, accessible and welcoming performing arts spaces in Ōtepoti Dunedin.

We first floated this idea with the community in April 2022 and have since been developing our thinking and engaging widely with the performing arts community.

This report presents where we've got to and invites Council to partner with us to further explore the idea's feasibility.

CONCEPT

We offer a network of venues well-suited to Dunedin's population size and creative vibrancy, all in heritage buildings.

We propose partnering with Council as a cornerstone investor, followed by other funders, to refurbish our venues over 6-8 years in a way that meets the city's needs.

With support to refurbish them, we envisage the following improvements:

Playhouse Theatre

- Intimate 110-30-seat character auditorium refurbished for accessibility and comfort.
- A new accessible entrance, a lift, additional toilets and more circulation space in the front of the building.

- Backstage area demolished and rebuilt to the height of the three-story street front building, providing room for storage and equipment at the rear of the building.
- Maintain a strong focus on children and young people, but the venue will also be suitable for festival performances, local and touring plays, small musicals, comedy, improv, and other performances.
- The large space upstairs can be used for food & beverage, rehearsals or as a further performance space.

Athenaeum Building

- Create a Centre for Creative Industries.
- Incorporate three black box/studio spaces of different sizes for performance or rehearsals, as well as a suite of supporting spaces like meeting rooms, a recording studio, cafes and bars.
- Most likely to be used for contemporary semi-professional and professional theatre, dance, comedy, festival performances and improv.
- Could also incorporate a new Centre for Writing to grow out of the historic Athenaeum & Mechanics Institute library.

Mayfair Theatre

- Retain a 400-seat end-on/proscenium arch theatre with an orchestra pit, with significantly improved accessibility, access and comfort.
- Ownership of the neighbouring building provides considerable flexibility and opportunities to explore the internal configuration and possibilities for supporting spaces.
- Most likely to be used for larger plays, touring productions, musicals, operas, dance, school productions and larger-scale community events.

After refurbishment, the three venues would collaborate and share resources to operate the venues. This would provide the best experience for hirers and audiences, while offering the most cost-effective operating model.

We believe our networked approach – as opposed to investing in a single venue – is the best way to serve as broad a range of producers, performers and audiences as possible.

ENGAGEMENT

We have held nearly 40 one-on-one meetings with performing arts sector organisations and individuals, as well as an excellent group workshop focussed specifically on professional theatre.

The collaborative and community-led nature of our proposal was received warmly, as was the opportunity simply to have the city's venue conversation move forward.

We observed strong support for looking after what we have as a city – or, put more bleakly, what we have left.

There was great interest, curiosity and excitement about our venues' potential with proper investment, and strong support for the concept to progress to the next stage of detail.

We promised to objectively portray the performing arts community's views, and we've done that in this report and its appendix.

COUNCIL SUPPORT

This is a huge project, and we can't do it – or fund it – alone. This concept envisages a partnership model in which Dunedin City Council would contribute cornerstone investment, based on the feedback we've had from other funders that financial support from our local authority will be critical.

We would therefore like to work closely with Council to develop the idea further. We propose agreeing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between our organisations and Council to take this forward.

One of the next steps will be to understand exactly what is possible and how much it

will cost. This will require professional services advice from architects, engineers and quantity surveyors. We would like to request Council funding for this work, which we believe would cost approximately \$100,000.

If the project proves feasible, we envisage the capital cost being funded with Council cornerstone investment, supplemented with funding raised by our organisations from philanthropic, charitable, central government, private and community sources. The project would be spread over 6-8 years.

COMMUNITY BENEFITS

Investing in modern, fit-for-purpose performing arts infrastructure within three heritage buildings will have significant benefit for the city and contribute to social, economic and cultural wellbeing.

The community will have increased opportunities to produce, participate in and attend performing arts events. Having the "spaces to skite about" that Council's Ara Toi strategy imagines will significantly add to the city's cultural vibrancy, help develop our night-time economy, and enhance our reputation as a creative, literary and heritage destination.

CONCLUSION

The Dunedin Repertory Society, Zeal Land and the Mayfair Theatre Charitable Trust own venues of great importance to the community, and which are capable of providing significantly more value.

They are, however, deteriorating and are unlikely to be able to be refurbished without financial support from Council.

Meanwhile, the city has a widely acknowledged shortage of performing arts venues.

We would like to partner with Council to explore the feasibility of refurbishing our buildings to meet the city's needs. We would like to agree an MoU with Council and request funding for costed design options.

We see this proposal as an opportunity for Council to partner with community organisations and other funders to create a uniquely Dunedin answer to the city's performing arts venue infrastructure needs.

BACKGROUND

In early 2022, the owners of the Playhouse Theatre, the Athenaeum building and the Mayfair Theatre met to compare notes on the common challenges of owning and operating ageing performing arts buildings and trying to refurbish them to ensure their continued viability.

We quickly realised that, put together as a package, our buildings offer an appealing mix of sizes, styles and locations – a mix appropriate for the size and creativity level of Dunedin. We agreed to explore the idea of partnering with Council and other funders to refurbish our venues as a network.

After putting this to the community by way of a submission to Dunedin City Council's 2022-2023 Annual Plan, we received sufficient positive feedback to continue developing the idea in more detail. This report is the result of that mahi.

CONTEXT

The discussion around Dunedin's performing arts venues has been well-documented:

- As early as 2012, the city was looking into Dunedin's theatre infrastructure needs.
- The closure of the Fortune Theatre in May 2018 resulted in the loss of a 220 seat venue, as well as its resident professional theatre company. It typically produced up to five shows per year and was a significant employer and anchor for the city's theatre industry.
- Following the closure of the Fortune, Dunedin City Council and Creative NZ commissioned a feasibility study into the city's performing arts sector, with an objective of identifying the best option for a mid-sized venue for the city. This work was completed in 2020.
- The following year, Dunedin City Council earmarked \$17.1 million in its 2021-2031 Long Term Plan for a performing arts venue, with the preferred site or project

yet to be determined. Expenditure was budgeted for financial years 2025-2028.

- Covid-19 has had a huge impact on the performing arts industry. While preparing this report, the performing arts community highlighted to us Covid-19's effects on their workforce, audience numbers, booking habits, venue hire costs and funding availability.

SCOPE OF THIS IDEA

As venue owners, we clearly understand our role in the theatre eco-system: bricks and mortar.

The scope of our work has therefore been to explore how our bricks-and-mortar venues could provide fit-for-purpose, accessible and welcoming physical infrastructure for performing arts in Dunedin.

There are other questions and challenges the performing arts community is working through, including what the future of professional theatre in the city looks like.

Neither bricks-and-mortar considerations nor the rejuvenation of the city's performing arts sector can – or should – be progressed in isolation from the other. There is a symbiotic relationship at play: venues need shows to be staged and enjoyed in them, and productions need places in which to be performed.

This was a key focus of our discussions with the performing arts community, particularly professional theatre makers, and has informed our early thinking about how our venues could be modernised. Continued engagement in this regard will be important.

The Playhouse, Athenaeum and Mayfair have teamed up for this project because we own the city's primary small and medium venues-for-hire, but the full network of Dunedin theatre venues is much wider. It includes treasures such as the Regent Theatre, the Globe Theatre and Allen Hall. We have been pleased to engage with them as we developed this report.

OUR APPROACH

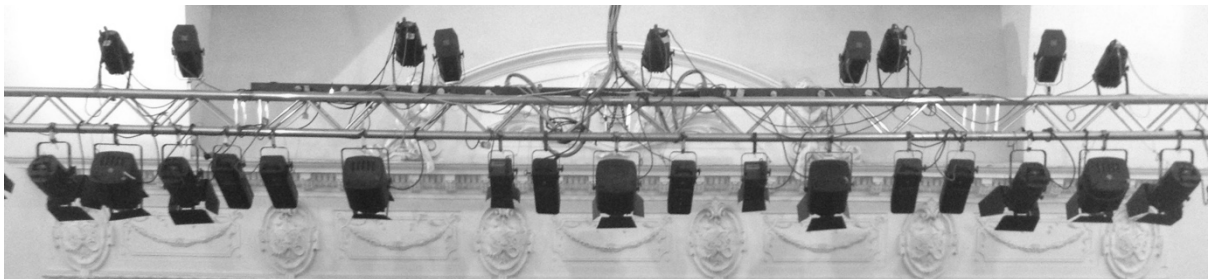
We started with the information we already hold. There is a reasonable body of professional services work on each venue – feasibility studies, early concept sketches, condition assessments and so on. We also looked at previously commissioned reports about the city’s performing arts infrastructure needs.

We built on this with broad and genuine engagement with the performing arts sector. We put a lot of energy into this, and members of the performing arts community were incredibly generous with their time, insights and expertise.

This kōrero has helped us flesh out design thinking for each of our venues and give more thought to how they could operate collaboratively in future. We’ve set our ideas out in the next section of this report.

We’ve also worked with Council management (including Policy, Property, Heritage and Ara Toi teams) as we developed this report.

Unfortunately, we were unable to obtain funding to progress as far as commissioning concept designs or QS estimates of refurbishment options, but we are pleased to have developed our idea in enough detail to support further consideration by Council and the community.



The Dunedin Repertory Society, Zeal Land and the Mayfair Theatre Charitable Trust acknowledge the support of many in the community as we worked on this concept design. Thank you to all the individuals and groups that engaged with us, attended our hui, gave us professional advice, acted as sounding boards, or supported our endeavours in lots of other ways. Thank you also to Core Development for developing and hosting our website.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

We set ourselves some principles as a group. We consider ourselves to be kaitiaki of venues that are important assets to the community. Therefore, we want our venues to be:

- **accessible** – in all senses of the word
- **affordable** – for a wide range of hirers from professional to amateur
- **available** – not exclusively hired by a resident company, but available to be booked by a wide range of organisations and individuals.

WHY INVEST IN PERFORMING ARTS?

Arts, culture and creativity are central to a thriving city. Investment in arts, culture, and creativity is an investment in people and communities, and their social, cultural, environmental and economic well-being.

Arts and culture help to create vibrant towns and cities that people want to live, work and play in, and tourists want to visit. They foster a sense of belonging and community connection, and support positive physical and mental health outcomes.

As New Zealand's Core Cities research puts it, 'creative industries contribute to the buzz of a city, strengthen brand and identity, and attract talented workers.' This is most clearly demonstrated by evidence showing the creative industries are also growing more quickly than traditional industries.

Enterprise Dunedin estimated the city's arts and culture sector to have generated \$228 million of the city's GDP in 2019, with a sector growth rate more than twice that of total GDP growth in Dunedin.

In 2021, Creative NZ found 76% of Dunedin residents had engaged with the arts in the previous year, despite the impacts of Covid-19. Around two-thirds of Dunedin residents supported Council funding for the arts, compared to the national average of 54%.

We believe arts and culture need the same support as other community infrastructure such as transport and schools – particularly in a UNESCO City of Literature.

WHAT IS AT STAKE IN ŌTEPOTI DUNEDIN?

The city is already missing out on performing arts experiences and is at risk of losing more.

Our discussions confirmed several local performing arts organisations have stopped staging some or all their work in Dunedin, purely because of a lack of appropriate, up-to-scratch venues.

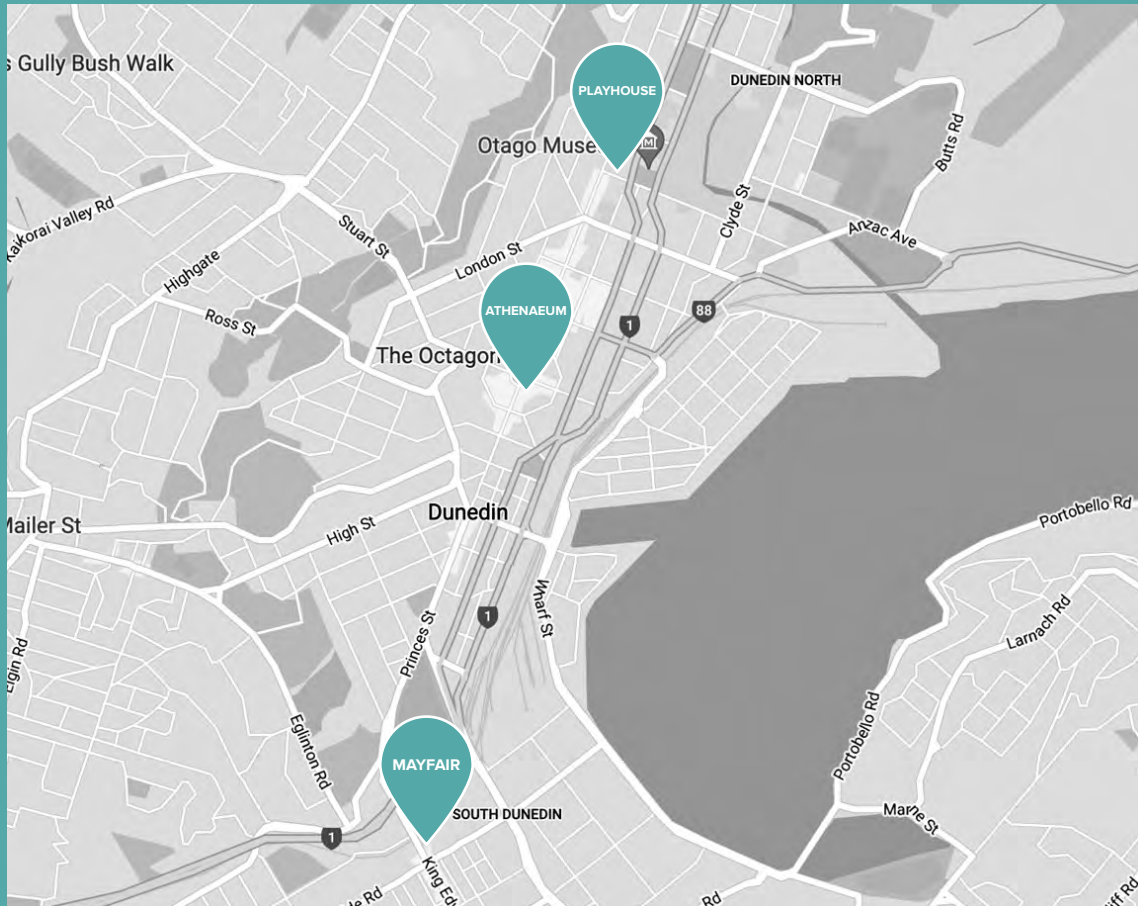
The lack of a suitable venue was a main driver in at least two professional touring organisations no longer touring to Dunedin.

Other organisations commented that they would no longer be able to stage performances if the venues we own were to close.

Our venues are deteriorating and are already on borrowed time. Without investment we anticipate they have only a few years before they will need to close. The closure of any one of our venues would be a devastating blow to the city's performing arts eco-system, which has already lost so much. The fact that they are three heritage buildings makes the case even more compelling.

Refurbished, our venues will be well-positioned to meet the needs of more local and touring performing arts organisations and to better serve audiences and the community.

the CONCEPT



PLAYHOUSE

130-seat auditorium
Social/F&B space above
Focus on children
& young people



ATHENAEUM

2 -3 new performance studios
Athenaeum Library, to become
a new Centre for Writing
Suite of other rehearsal studios,
practice rooms, offices,
meeting rooms
Food & beverage



MAYFAIR

400-seat auditorium
Social/F&B space above
Offices, meeting room
Adjacent building offers other
opportunities to explore

PLAYHOUSE THEATRE

31 Albany Street, Dunedin North

www.playhousetheatre.co.nz

Owned by Dunedin Repertory Society Inc, a fully voluntary society with charitable status.



Our vision is to restore the Playhouse Theatre, retaining the character auditorium while modernising the facility and vastly improving accessibility and the experience and comfort of audiences, performers and crew.

The Children's Theatre would remain a fixture of the Playhouse, and the venue would also be suitable and available for hire for a larger range of other performances.

HISTORY

The building that now houses the Playhouse Theatre was initially an Oddfellows Hall, opened in 1876. The Independent Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF) was a friendly society that provided support and community for migrants to New Zealand. The building hosted the new migrant community to create new social connections and also held gatherings, concerts, balls and fundraisers.

The building was rented and eventually purchased by the Southern Comedy Players in the early 1960s – at that point, the only surviving professional theatre company in New Zealand. Bernard Esquilant and Bill Menlove of the Southern Comedy Players extended the hall to add the stage and backstage area, and built a mezzanine to create the raked auditorium we know today. They named the new theatre the Playhouse.

The Dunedin Repertory Society bought the Playhouse in the early 1970s.

CURRENT CONFIGURATION AND USE

The Playhouse remains largely the same since its theatre conversion in the 1960s. It comprises two buildings: the 1876 former lodge on the street-front, and the 1960s extension at the rear.

The former lodge building is three stories tall. It houses a box office and toilets in the foyer, a 136-seat raked auditorium, a large coffee lounge space and kitchen above, as well as several wardrobe and prop storage areas.

The 1960s extension to the rear houses the stage (where the roof has reasonable height above the stage) and the single-level backstage area. Backstage comprises a green room, three dressing rooms and further storage.

Today, the Playhouse is best known for the Dunedin Repertory Society's Children's Theatre, which stages productions each school holidays. These involve about 80-90 local young people annually as cast and crew members, and attract around 5,000 patrons per year (see page 16). The Society also presents adults' theatre productions.

In addition, the Playhouse is available as an affordable hire venue for theatre, music, comedy, improv and festival performances and film screenings.

The Playhouse's proximity to the tertiary education precinct offers good synergies for casts, crews and audiences..

HERITAGE STATUS

None, although likely to qualify for listing based on advice received to date – owners currently considering.

BUILDING CONDITION & CHALLENGES

The Playhouse is in moderate to poor condition, evidenced by:

- general ageing – the Playhouse is nearly 150 years old and has had few major upgrades
- a need for seismic strengthening, though it is not “earthquake prone”
- environmental challenges, i.e. cold and damp
- poor accessibility
- does not meet modern standards for public venues
- limited theatre rigging and technical equipment.

REMEDIAL WORKS & REFURBISHMENT PLANNING PROGRESS

- ✓ Building condition assessments, including general condition, plumbing, electrical, asbestos survey, roof, structural engineering (funded in part by the DCC / OCT Capability Building Fund) in December 2019
- ✓ New roof on the former lodge building in February 2021 (funded in part by the Dunedin Heritage Fund).
- ✓ Feasibility study completed in December 2021, including heritage assessment, site planning sketches, fire and accessibility reports, and significant community consultation (funded by Lotteries Community Facilities Fund).
- ✓ Conservation Plan currently underway (funded by Dunedin Heritage Fund).

WHAT MIGHT A REFURBISHED PLAYHOUSE LOOK LIKE?

Concept sketches completed as part of a feasibility study based on our community consultation, suggested remodelling the Playhouse as follows:

- Demolishing and rebuilding the 1960s extension (the stage and backstage area) with a similar footprint, but build to the same height as the three-storey street frontage. This would allow the tech equipment and all wardrobe and props storage to be accommodated within the new rear of the building.
- Internal reconfiguration of the main street-front (heritage) building, with the addition of a new accessible foyer entrance, lift and accessible toilets at ground level. The current curved staircase would be replaced.
- The auditorium would remain of a similar configuration, with an estimated capacity of 110-120 seats. The tech area would move to its traditional space behind the auditorium, and new toilets would be added to this level.
- The top floor would retain its open social space. A walkway above the stage would give access to the new rear building. There would be additional height above the stage.
- New fit-out (rigging, tech equipment, drapes, seating, heating etc)

COST ESTIMATE

A December 2021 QS estimate of the concept sketches described above put refurbishment costs at \$4.6 million.

ALTERNATIVE PLANS

If funding cannot be achieved for the refurbishment outlined above, the Dunedin Repertory Society would make best efforts to make the building generally more comfortable for users for its remaining life.

However, the theatre would remain inaccessible to many members of the community and some health and safety concerns would remain unaddressed.

The Society anticipates it will become harder to attract volunteers willing to accept the obligations of governing the deteriorating building.

It is unfortunately likely that the Children’s Theatre would be wound up and the building closed or sold within 15 years.

PLAYHOUSE THEATRE

POTENTIAL REDEVELOPMENT OPTIONS

The sketches below were developed as part of the Playhouse’s Feasibility Study. This was completed in 2021 and involved consultation with audiences, performers and hirers. The full size concept sketches are available to view at www.dunedintheatrenetwork.org.nz

GROUND FLOOR



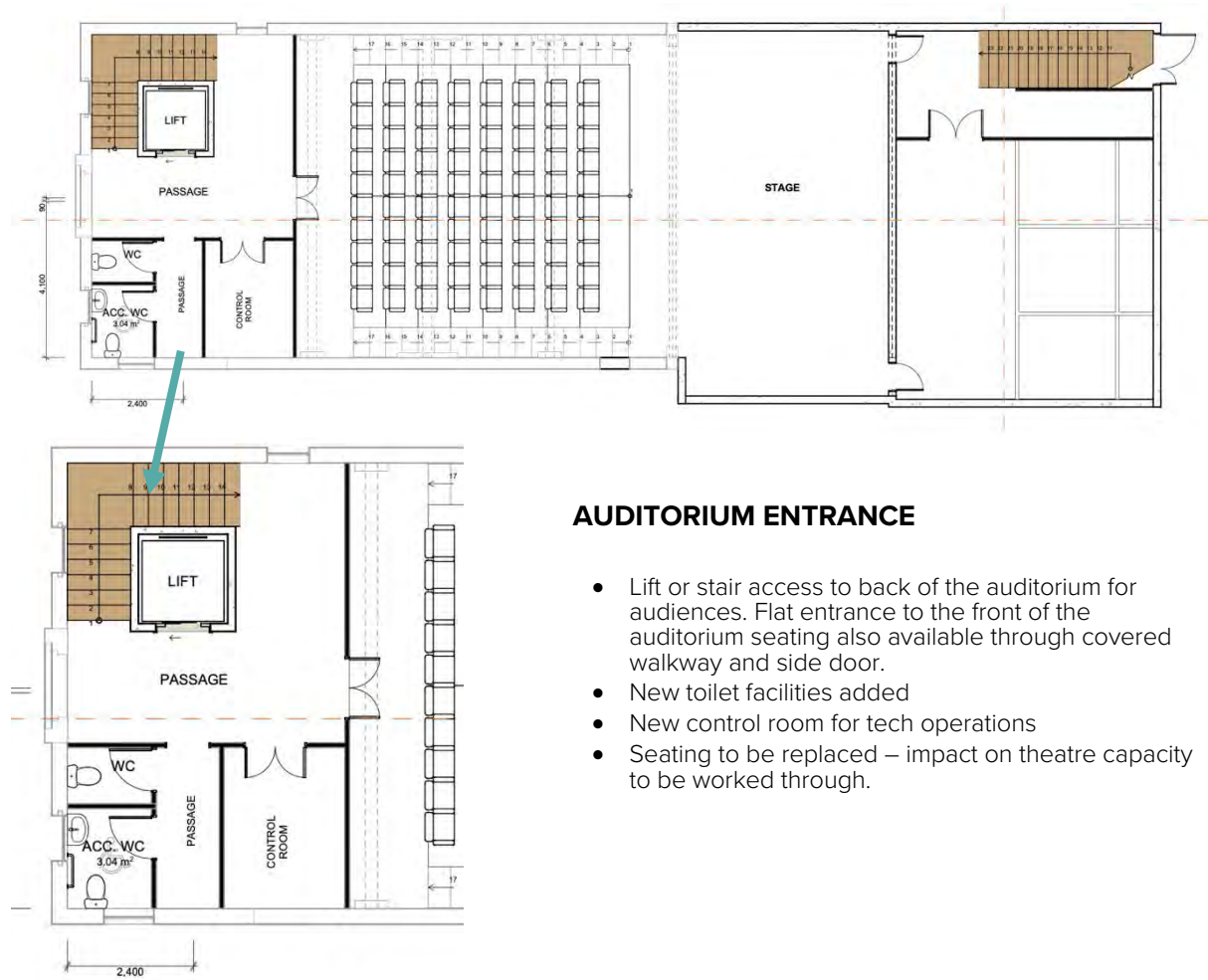
ENTRANCE

BACKSTAGE

- Dual entrances – existing front door opening to Albany Street, and new covered accessible entrance from the side
- Existing spiral staircase replaced with new, more manageable stairs and a lift
- New accessible toilet
- New ticket office
- Additional circulation/crush space in foyer

- New exit door through back wall to neighbouring car park (would be subject to permission), allows loading access and fire egress
- Floor plan similar to existing but with additional toilets (would seek to make one accessible at next stage of design)
- Adds stairs to upper floors (currently this part of the building is single level)
- The stage area itself would be rebuilt to approximately the same dimensions (but would have a higher ceiling)

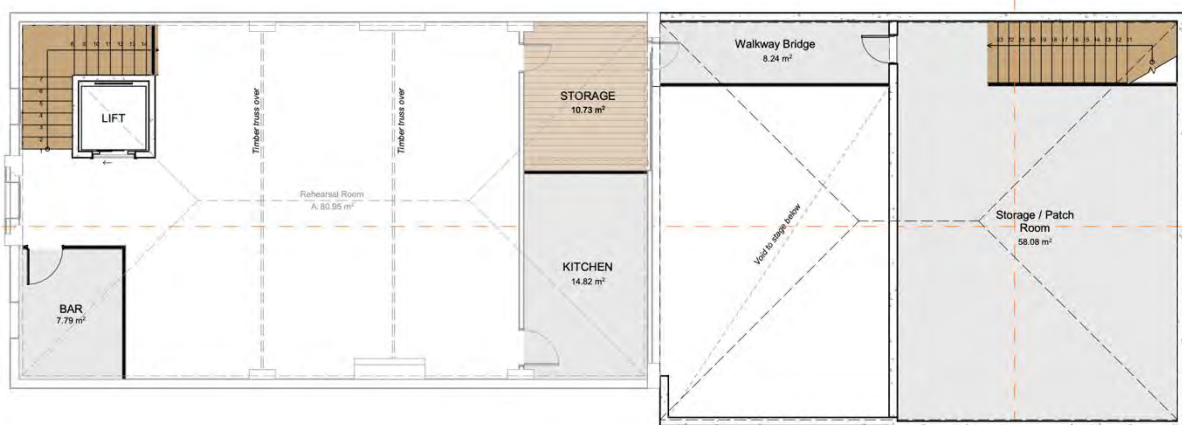
MIDDLE LEVEL



AUDITORIUM ENTRANCE

- Lift or stair access to back of the auditorium for audiences. Flat entrance to the front of the auditorium seating also available through covered walkway and side door.
- New toilet facilities added
- New control room for tech operations
- Seating to be replaced – impact on theatre capacity to be worked through.

TOP LEVEL



SOCIAL SPACE AND UPPER BACKSTAGE AREA

- Lift or stair access to coffee bar / social space
- Floor plan similar to existing, retains large light social space
- New walkway bridge over the stage area connects to backstage area, with an upper floor in the backstage area providing storage. Additional ceiling height above stage adds technical production options.

DUNEDIN REP. SOCIETY CHILDREN'S THEATRE

The Playhouse Theatre is best known to many for its school holiday children's theatre productions, which have been running for over fifty years.

The Children's Theatre is community arts at its best – benefitting those who perform, and those who attend, with volunteered time and donated resources keeping costs and other barriers to participation very low.

Each term a cast of 20-25 young people aged from about 10 years old to about 20 years old rehearse three times per week in preparation for their school holiday season. They then spend the first week of their holidays at the Playhouse, performing a season of 15 shows over nine days.

Playhouse kids develop their drama, music and movement skills in a real working theatre with a real paying audience. They build confidence, develop team skills and discipline, learn social skills and make life-long friends. We are proud of the inclusive and supportive atmosphere the Playhouse whānau have built for themselves.

The production crew is also predominantly rangatahi. We typically have teenagers operating the sound and lighting desk, and recent alumni often stage manage, usher, help in the coffee bar, or design and paint sets. There is a variety of skills our young people can learn depending on their interests.

Best of all, it's free to participate. We ask cast to join the Society (\$10 per year), but

beyond that there are no fees, no uniforms and no gear required.

This is possible because all of the supporting work is volunteered and we have a wealth of costumes and props that have been handmade for us by volunteers over many decades. We estimate approximately 500 volunteer hours go into each production.

Playhouse shows are typically attended by children aged 3-10 years old and their families. It's often children's first experience of live performance, and they are fully engaged in the performance. They heckle, laugh and interact with the performers. They love the tradition of coming up on stage to meet the characters at the end. It's hard to say who has a better time at the Playhouse – the cast and crew or the audiences.

Coming to the Playhouse is a traditional school holiday activity for many Dunedin whānau. We see lots of second generation audience members – often with grandparents who are excited to share the Playhouse magic with little people all over again. We also enjoy welcoming groups from early childhood centres and groups of adult audience members from care facilities.

We typically sell around 5,000 tickets across our three children's productions each year. At \$8 per seat, it's one of the most affordable live performance opportunities for young audiences.



There are several reasons the Playhouse Theatre works so well as a venue for the children's theatre:

- Its stage comfortably fits 20-25 young people, an ideal cast size.
- The auditorium capacity of 135 seats is small enough to feel intimate, and for little audiences members not to feel lost, but big enough to allow large numbers of audience through each term.
- The auditorium's shape and raked seating mean everyone gets a good view. Small audience members can see over the heads in front of them, and there are no pillars or corners to obstruct the view.
- It's a great learning theatre – the auditorium size challenges casts to project their voices, but it is a manageable challenge. A larger venue would not be feasible for developing voices and would likely be intimidating for a first time on stage.
- A proscenium arch theatre style is a great learning space for younger casts, crews and audiences. There is a clear delineation between stage and audience, and casts and crews get to learn foundation skills of traditional theatre layout and equipment. It's also a great basis for simple and affordable sets.

The coffee bar above the theatre provides helpful half time circulation space. It's also a place to go if audience members need to slip out during a performance to tend to their babies or small children.

The Children's Theatre depends on having a suitable venue from which to operate, and there are no other Dunedin venues that meet this need as well as the Playhouse, for the reasons listed above.

Support for the Children's Theatre, and for the Playhouse as the ideal venue for it, was loud and clear in our engagement for this concept, and in our 2021 feasibility study consultation.



ATHENAEUM

23/24 The Octagon, Dunedin

Owned by Zeal Land Ltd / Lawrie Forbes

Includes spaces currently leased by:

- The New Athenaeum Theatre
<https://newathenaeumtheatre.com>
- The Athenaeum & Mechanics Institute
<https://www.dunedinathenaeum.org.nz/>



Our vision is to create a series of vibrant, welcoming, multicultural spaces in the very heart of Dunedin city.

The venue would contain a showcase of the very best that Ōtepoti's creative industries have to offer, in a building that has cultivated Dunedin's creative talents for over 150 years. The concept echoes performing arts hubs in other cities, including the Wheeler Centre in Melbourne and TAPAC in Auckland, as well as the new Te Atamira arts space in Queenstown.

This idea has been developed as part of a joint feasibility project between Zeal Land and the Committee of the Dunedin Athenaeum and Mechanics' Institute, and is sympathetic to the heritage status of the building itself.

HISTORY

The Dunedin Mechanics' Institute started in 1851, followed swiftly by the Dunedin Athenaeum in 1859. The success of both institutions led to development on their current site in 1870, creating the Dunedin Athenaeum and Mechanics' Institute. The Dunedin Athenaeum Institute is oldest of its type still to be in operation.

The original Mechanics' Institute was one of Dunedin's first public spaces and, as such, the first home of the Otago Provincial Council and the Dunedin Town Board. The Institute also played host to meetings which led to the establishment of the University of Otago.

The new building provided space for various reading rooms and library spaces, and held regular lectures, evening classes and social events or 'conversazione'. Over the years, it has also hosted the Dunedin Mutual Improvement Society, the Otago Cine Club, the Fortune Theatre and the Dunedin Fringe Festival.

CURRENT CONFIGURATION AND USE

The building is approximately 2,000m² across three floors. Current tenants include the Dunedin Athenaeum and Mechanics Institute, the New Athenaeum Theatre, ahha design collective and the Craic bar.

The significant footprint of the Athenaeum building is rivalled only by the neighbouring Regent Theatre and Burns House in the southern half of the Octagon. Its narrow street presence and tiny blue door belies the expansive and elegant former library within.

Today only a small proportion of the building is used. The Athenaeum Institute now only uses a single library room, while the New Athenaeum Theatre operates a 70-seat performance space to the rear of the building. There are also two hospitality outlets which face onto the Octagon.

HERITAGE STATUS

The Dunedin Athenaeum is a Category 1 registered building. It is also protected in the District Plan and by a covenant with Heritage New Zealand.

BUILDING CONDITION AND CHALLENGES

- The Athenaeum is 150 years old and has had no significant upgrades.
- Seismic strengthening work is required.
- The building needs to be brought up to modern standards throughout, including electrical, plumbing, decorative work, etc.
- Poor accessibility. At least one lift, potentially two, is required to improve access and circulation.
- Delivery access to the front and the rear of the building. Currently, deliveries for the café and bar on the Octagon are through the front door. The driveway that links the building to the rear accessway of the Regent Theatre is for fire egress only.
- Fire egress needs to be addressed through design as the building is constrained on three of its four sides. A recent fire report suggested that the building can be used by up to 1000 people if an adequate sprinkler system is installed.

REMEDIAL WORKS & REFURBISHMENT PLANNING ALREADY UNDERTAKEN

- ✓ Ongoing repair work to roofs, gutters and downpipes throughout
- ✓ Feasibility study completed June 2021, (funded by the Dunedin Heritage Fund), which included heritage assessment work, site planning sketches, a fire report and community consultation work.
- ✓ Funding secured for a Conservation Plan, to be completed in 2023 (funded by the Dunedin Heritage Fund).
- ✓ A detailed seismic assessment has placed the building as being 25% of NBS at Importance Level 2. A seismic strengthening solution has already been developed.
- ✓ A recent asbestos survey has shown there to be minimal contamination.

WHAT MIGHT A REFURBISHED ATHENAEUM LOOK LIKE?

The proposal is to create a multi-use Centre for Creative Industries in the building, including:

- a newly-created National Centre for Writing which could be a hub for Dunedin's UNESCO City of Literature activities and a celebration of our literary heritage (read more on page 21).
- three contemporary performance studio spaces:
 - Studio 1: >200 seat performance studio space of approx. 286m², located on the upper ground floor
 - Studio 2: >150 seat performance studio space of approx. 185m², located on the lower ground floor
 - Studio 3: >100 seat performance studio space of approx. 128m², located on the lower ground floor.

Each performance studio would be serviced by changing and tech spaces, along with ceiling grid systems for drapes and lighting.

- a multi-studio recording suite, set below ground for great recording quality.
- flexible, hireable meeting rooms and office spaces to support productions, meeting and events.
- space for two bars (one in the Octagon plus a rooftop bar) and on-site catering, as well as potential for a small bookshop and/or exhibition space in the Octagon.
- the main office hub for the Dunedin Theatre Network.

COST ESTIMATE

An estimate in July 2021 put the cost of redevelopment at approximately \$12 million, including fit out costs for performance spaces.



Lower ground area – potential space for conversion to performance or rehearsal studios

CONCEPT FOR NATIONAL CENTRE FOR WRITING



The Dunedin Athenaeum & Mechanics Institute – tenants in the Athenaeum building originally named for their organisation – aspire to develop a National Centre for Writing in their library space within a refurbished Athenaeum building.

The National Centre for Writing could become a hub for Dunedin's UNESCO City of Literature activities and a focal point for the city as a literary destination, as the Institute sets out below.

This proposal offers a unique opportunity for Dunedin City to honour its magnificent literary and creative heritage and celebrate its City of Literature status within the UNESCO Creative Cities network. The recently published Destination Otepoti report commissioned by Enterprise Dunedin states "...with its long history associated with literature, art, museums, film and design, Dunedin needs to be more strongly recognised as one of New Zealand's most creative cities...'

A National Centre for Writing housed within the Athenaeum and accessible to both locals and visitors will lead the charge in building Dunedin's brand as a creative city. Imagine a place where Aotearoa New Zealand writers can gather to hone their craft, to learn from each other.

Imagine a place where video game developers, screenwriters, novelists and playwrights can bring their shared experience and knowledge to mentor future generations in their creative craft. Imagine a place where children can learn about creative writing and experience the joy of telling our stories in a unique, purpose-built environment.

The opportunities for creative collaboration in a dedicated space are limitless. With our arts festivals, our students, our small businesses and our wealth of creative people, a spectacular showcase celebrating our literary and creative past, present and future is not only possible but arguably essential for the city's wellbeing.



Athenaeum Library – potential site of new National Centre for Writing

NEW ATHENAEUM THEATRE



The New Athenaeum Theatre (NAT) occupies a space on the ground floor of the Athenaeum building, in the former Otago Cinema Club space.

The NAT is an example of a community-led, affordable, available space contributing positively to the city's performing arts eco-system. The NAT's usage also illustrates the demand from producers and audiences for a flexible black box space in a central location, which is a key aspect of the vision for a refurbished Athenaeum.

The Dunedin Collaborative Theatre Trust, which operates the New Athenaeum Theatre, was established in 2016 by a group of theatre practitioners who saw the need for a flexible, open-access, independent performance venue in Ōtepoti Dunedin. As well as providing a venue for local and touring companies and artists, another of the Trust's primary goals is to support new ventures and emerging practitioners, creating new theatre and performance opportunities.

The theatre is now 'home' to four associate companies that reflect some of the diverse array of performance in Ōtepoti Dunedin – dance, theatre, children's drama classes, and improv. Additionally, the NAT hosts independent shows from musicians, poets, comedians and more, all on an as-needed basis. By ensuring a venue is available when artists need it, at affordable rates, the NAT's offerings continue to expand along with its community.



MAYFAIR THEATRE

100 King Edward Street, South Dunedin

www.mayfairtheatre.co.nz

Owned by Mayfair Theatre Charitable Trust, a registered and incorporated charity



The Mayfair Theatre envisages a refurbishment that preserves the theatre's mid-size capacity and grand proscenium arch auditorium, modernising it to ensure a great experience for all its users.

The adjoining building, also owned by the Mayfair Theatre Charitable Trust, offers significant flexibility in planning a refurbishment.

HISTORY

The building opened in 1914 as the 840 seat King Edward Picture Theatre. It is one of the oldest, purpose-built movie theatres remaining in New Zealand.

In the mid 1920s, "talkies" became popular and the theatre underwent a modernisation, replacing some of Edwardian features with its current deco style. At this point, the building's name changed to the Mayfair Theatre.

Once television started to take over from the movies, many theatres gradually closed, and so it was with the Mayfair in the mid 1960s.

The Dunedin Opera Company then purchased the building and redeveloped it into a 400 seat live theatre, bringing the circle down to meet a newly constructed orchestra pit, and the original Edwardian proscenium off the back wall to form the stage. Dressing rooms were formed in the old stalls.

In the early 1990s, the adjacent building was purchased to allow for set and wardrobe areas.

In 2014, the Dunedin Opera Company sold the complex to the Mayfair Theatre Charitable Trust.

CURRENT CONFIGURATION AND USE

The 400 seat auditorium has a traditional proscenium arch, and the orchestra pit can be covered with an apron if not required.

Below the stage there are two chorus dressing rooms and six smaller dressing rooms.

The building beside the theatre (named Mayfair House) contains a large scenery store at the eastern end, while the remainder of the building is currently leased out. This building offers good possibilities in a redevelopment.

The theatre is used by a variety of local hirers, including Opera Otago, Otago Scouts, Taieri Musical, Musical Theatre Dunedin, the Dunedin Arts Festival and several schools. Touring performers include singers, comedians, dancers, psychics and actors.

A normal year would see 1,000 performers and crew staging productions seen by over 10,000 audience members.

HERITAGE STATUS

The Mayfair Theatre is a Category 2 registered building.

BUILDING CONDITION AND CHALLENGES

- General ageing – the Mayfair is 108 years old and has had few major upgrades
- Although it has a high rating in terms of the current code and is not “earthquake prone”, it needs a small amount of seismic strengthening
- Requires a new roof
- Poor accessibility
- New toilet facilities are required for patrons
- Poor access for packing in scenery

REMEDIAL WORKS & REFURBISHMENT PLANNING ALREADY UNDERTAKEN

- ✓ Feasibility study completed by Octa included heritage assessment, fire and accessibility reports
- ✓ Conservation Plan completed by Origin Consulting
- ✓ Asbestos survey completed and remediation/removal costs ascertained
- ✓ Concept sketches for a new foyer layout, a passenger lift and new toilet facilities have been created by Origin Consulting

WHAT MIGHT A REFURBISHED MAYFAIR LOOK LIKE?

The Mayfair’s refurbishment designs are at a relatively early stage, with significant scope for input from the performing arts community – particularly in relation to the auditorium’s supporting spaces and the adjoining building.

The Mayfair Theatre Charitable Trust’s work to date envisages:

- refurbishing the public areas, retaining their historical features
- adding street level access, and access to the stage house from the adjoining building.
- installing a passenger lift to provide access to the foyer, intermediate and top landings of the stairwell, and the function room
- installing new toilets in the old stalls area
- improving the heating system and general comfort of the venue
- addressing compliance issues.

Engagement for this project identified some potential uses for the adjoining building to consider – a workshop / set building space, a redesigned entrance and/or social space, rehearsal space, and others.

COST ESTIMATE

Costs are difficult to estimate, given designs are at an early stage. This report uses an estimate of \$21.5 million, based on a 2017 feasibility study plus an inflation allowance and an estimate of fit-out costs based on % of build costs.



OPERATIONS & OWNERSHIP

OPERATING MODEL

If the Playhouse, Athenaeum and Mayfair were to be refurbished, the operation of the three venues would need to look quite different from today.

We anticipate refurbishment would result in significantly more hire usage, which would need to be managed capably and professionally.

At this conceptual stage of the project, we haven't sought to define what that model should look like. But all three venue owners acknowledge that it will make sense to share resources across the three venues to help them operate as efficiently as possible, and to give hirers and audiences a great experience.

At its lightest and lowest cost, this might be a single staff member managing the calendars and hire bookings for all three venues, and maintaining a database of audience members to engage with directly about events. This could be supplemented with a pool of technicians, ushers and fire wardens – volunteer or professional – called in on a casual basis to service hires.

Through the course of our engagement, we heard several other ideas and experiences of venue management that could be explored further. These typically involved being more active in attracting hires (and/or ticket sales) and providing a greater level of service for those hires. For example, shared resource could offer ticketing and marketing, or – favoured by some – artistic direction or programme curation.

It's too early to determine the right model or how it could be funded. But venue owners can confirm we're committed to working together – and potentially with other venues or venue managers – to find the solution that offers the best value for owners, hirers and audiences.

OWNERSHIP MODEL

Some members of the community are curious as to how a partnership project would work, given our three venues are not owned by Dunedin City Council.

We don't believe this is an insurmountable issue. The Playhouse and Mayfair Theatres are owned by charitable organisations and governed in accordance with objectives of community benefit. The Athenaeum is in private ownership, and Zeal Land is pursuing this project primarily with a community focus, rather than a purely commercial objective.

As venue owners, we are open to discussions about how external investment in our venues can be protected to ensure funders' objectives are achieved and appropriately governed over the long term.



COSTS AND FUNDING

COSTS

We have indicative estimates of the capital costs of refurbishments of each of our buildings, based on previous work and feasibility studies.

These are only estimates, and they're based on different methodologies because our projects are at different stages of progress.

They are, however, all based on independent and professional advice.

In order to refine these costs, we need to engage professional services. We believe this is a next step for this concept, and would cost around \$100,000 for all three venues.

COST ESTIMATE BY PROJECT

Project	Redevelopment (\$m)	Fit-out (\$m)	Total (\$m)
Stage 1: Playhouse	4.400	0.250	4.650
Capital costs based on 2021 feasibility study QS estimates; fit-out cost based on quote plus inflation allowance			
Stage 2: Athenaeum	8.500	3.500	12.000
Capital costs based on 2021 feasibility results; performance space fit-out estimated.			
Stage 3: Mayfair	16.500	5.000	21.500
Costs based on 2017 feasibility report + inflation allowance. Fit-out costs estimated based on % of build cost.			
TOTAL	29.400	8.750	38.150
Costs include an allowance for inflation and professional fees.			



FUNDING

The costs outlined above exceed what each venue owner is able to fund from their own reserves.

Each owner is able to access external funding to varying degrees. As registered charitable organisations, the Dunedin Repertory Society and Mayfair Theatre Charitable Trust are able to apply for philanthropic, community and Lottery funding. Zeal Land has access to private funding. All three venues are also eligible for various heritage building funds.

We have each had initial engagement with several of those sources of funding, as well as an independent fundraising consultant.

We have heard a consistent message that our refurbishment projects align well with funders' objectives and are of interest to them, but that local authority funding is critical.

Jenni Giblin (owner and director of Funding HQ) shared her opinion that without DCC funding, our facilities would struggle to secure the required funds. However, if DCC were to contribute, then each facility has a very good chance of securing the remaining funds.

We would therefore like to work with Council on the possibility of the three refurbishment projects being part-funded by Council as a cornerstone investor, with entities raising remaining funding from other sources.

This approach could enable Council to make an investment that will leverage a significant further sum of external funds, achieving social and economic benefits for the city.

ADVANTAGES OF A NETWORKED APPROACH

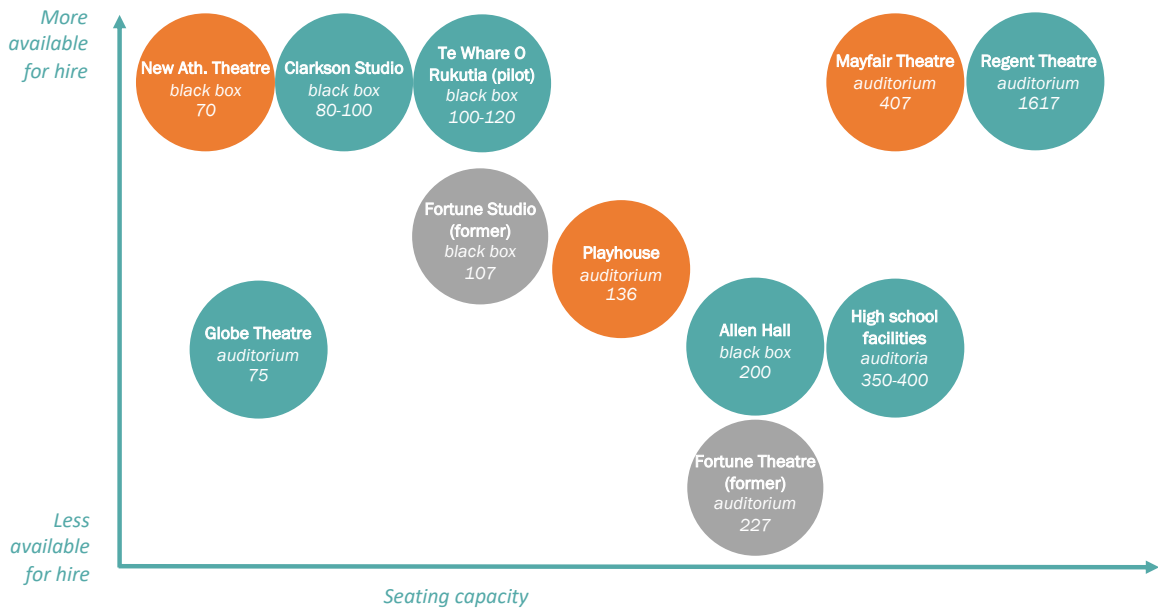
Compared to investing in a single venue, taking a networked approach offers the following advantages:

- A mix of different styles and spaces, including black box and traditional proscenium arch theatres. This supports a wide range of performance styles and genres.
- A mix of different capacities – a studio with 50-100 seats, a 100-120 seat auditorium, larger black box spaces and a 400 seat theatre. Through our consultation, we heard these sizes would suit the kinds of performances and audience numbers sought by the performing arts community.
- A mix of different locations, but all within 10 minutes of the Octagon and all with good public transport links. This spreads economic benefit across more than one site and allows multiple works to be staged at any one time – particularly helpful for Dunedin's festivals.



DUNEDIN'S VENUE CONTEXT

Ōtepoti Dunedin is blessed with some wonderful theatre and other performance spaces. We've set out the key theatre venues below, organised by their capacity and how available they are for hire¹.



We've also drawn up a view of what the scene might look like if our venues were refurbished as imagined in this report.



The Playhouse would have increased availability for hire and resource to facilitate bookings. There would be new spaces in the Athenaeum, designed to fill the capacity gap in the city's status quo. The Mayfair would be shored up to ensure a mid-size venue for larger productions.

The charts above only cover the central city area, but we also acknowledge Mosgiel's Coronation Hall (capacity 350) and tautoko the important role this busy venue plays, particularly for community and recreational performing arts, including for children and young people.

¹ These charts only look at 'availability for hire' based on how open each venue is for bookings. There are of course other aspects that impact on a venue's hireability, such as affordability and accessibility, which are also relevant.

ENGAGEMENT

We've worked hard to ensure we engaged on this idea widely and in good faith with the performing arts community.

We held almost 40 one-on-one meetings with stakeholders, organised a workshop with professional theatre practitioners, and built exciting new relationships across the sector. It's been an enriching journey for our project team. We would like to express our gratitude for the time, energy, insights and expertise the community has generously shared with us over the last few months.

We are particularly grateful to a number of Māori theatre practitioners who have given their time to discuss with us their diverse perspectives on venue needs and visions for the future. We are encouraged by the shared sentiment of looking after what we have. The importance of manaakitanga, welcoming and accessible spaces for Māori creative artists, practitioners and audience is touched upon in the appendix. These are also the core values shared by our network and paves the way for exciting redevelopment opportunities with formal consultation and collaboration.

Relationships with mana whenua and Māori theatre practitioners going forward are critically important for a project of this scale. The Dunedin Theatre Network venues are to be accessible, affordable, available, suitable and supportive of all our performing arts community and specifically inclusive of Māori creative artists and theatre companies.

Below, we share some of the key themes from our engagement on this concept.

We also invited anyone we met with to share their thoughts in their own words, and you can find these in the appendix of this report.

PROFESSIONAL THEATRE

We acknowledge the importance of professional theatre to the city, and the sense of loss that remains very real for many following the closure of the Fortune Theatre in 2018.

We met face-to-face with many professional theatre groups and individuals, and also facilitated a workshop with practitioners on 27 October 2022. This attracted a strong turn-out and high engagement from participants, and produced constructive conversation.

Practitioners were clear about what they believe is necessary for a thriving professional theatre scene. Some of that related to venue infrastructure, and they also shared with us their views on the need for better support for the creative sector generally. That's outside the scope of our project but we support their kaupapa.

Most groups we spoke to are not necessarily in favour of a return to a resident theatre company, but see Dunedin's professional theatre landscape as a mix of various local organisations and individuals producing works, supplemented by high quality touring productions. In that context, quality venues that can be used by many groups become even more important.

In terms of venue infrastructure, we heard professional practitioners focus on:

- a flexible performance space (black box) with a seating capacity of somewhere between 200-300 seats
- professional theatre fit-out (sound and lighting equipment, drapes, stage and seating hardware)
- nearby hospitality / social venues
- ongoing resourcing that can support:
 - a professional approach to hires (paid staff to professionally manage hires)
 - technicians and fire wardens to staff performances as required
 - preferably box office and marketing support, including connections to audiences
 - professional branding or reputation – i.e. a venue where audiences can be confident of experiencing high quality theatre
 - potentially an artistic director or curator.

We believe our concept offers a solid starting point for rejuvenation of professional theatre in the city, through a ~200-seat black box studio in the Athenaeum, with appropriate management and branding or programming that can support the re-development of Dunedin's professional theatre scene as it rebuilds its workforce and audiences.

COMMUNITY AND RECREATIONAL THEATRE

Dunedin has a diverse and well-supported community theatre scene, ranging from relatively small productions of plays by amateur societies to dance school recitals to large-scale musical theatre productions that are barely distinguishable from their professional counterparts – and everything in between.

In this camp we include things like high school musical productions and Gang Shows – that is, productions staged by organisations whose main purpose is not usually performing arts.

Community and recreational performing arts are a huge part of the lives of thousands of Dunedin residents. These are often their “sport”, where they contribute many hours on or behind a stage in a huge

variety of roles. Strong community bonds are formed, with societies and organisations often becoming whānau for those involved.

Community and recreational theatre performances are frequently staged in our venues (as well as Coronation Hall in Mosgiel and the Regent Theatre), and we heard through our consultation that there would simply be no other facilities for many groups to go if our venues were to close.

THE THEATRE ECOSYSTEM

Our network proposal strikes an important balance in striving to serve both professional and community theatre.

We are great believers in the theatre ecosystem: a thriving professional scene needs a pipeline of creatives and audience members that often flows from community theatre. A thriving community theatre scene relies on the inspiration and development opportunity that professional theatre provides. A healthy ecosystem as a whole is central to a thriving city with a rich cultural life. Our concept aims to offer Ōtepoti Dunedin the best ‘bang for buck’ for its investment across the ecosystem as a whole.



NEXT STEPS

We believe this idea has sufficient merit and community support to progress to the next level of detail.

We see this as an opportunity for Council to partner with venue owners and other funders to create a uniquely Dunedin answer to the city's performing arts infrastructure needs.

We would therefore like to enter into a MoU to work on the concept's next level of detail together.

A logical next step in this concept will be to invest in costed design options, allowing the community and potential funders to see exactly what is possible, and how much it would cost.

We believe this would cost in the order of \$100,000 and could be completed within approximately 6-8 months.

We would like to seek Council funding for this work, given the refurbishment project as a whole is unlikely to proceed without financial support from Council.

Venues have made significant investment in the groundwork of professional advice on our buildings and developing the Dunedin Theatre Network concept to this point. We would now like to partner with Council to move it forward.

