

USER REQUIREMENTS SPECIFICATION FOR A REPLACEMENT PERFORMING ARTS CENTRE IN BARROW

1. THE PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

The purpose of this document is to ensure that all the previous users of the demolished Forum theatre in Barrow will enjoy the same or better quality of facilities and services in the replacement theatre than they did in the original. The main facilities required in the replacement theatre are:

- 1.1 A 500 to 600 seat auditorium
- 1.2 A 100 -150 seat studio theatre/mini cinema/lecture theatre
- 1.3 Five dressing rooms
- 1.4 A main scene dock
- 1.5 A small scene dock for the studio theatre
- 1.6 A cafe and bar
- 1.7 An administrative meeting room
- 1.8 Offices and front of house
- 1.9 Storage facilities

2 ACTIVITIES TO BE SUPPORTED

2.1 Large scale dramatic, dance and musical performances by local amateur organisations and professional touring companies will be performed in the main 500 – 600 seater auditorium.

2.2 Smaller scale dramatic and musical performances are to take place in the studio theatre. This will be a 100 – 150 seater, a more intimate and informal space which will host smaller scale, experimental and innovative productions, which would not be viable in a 500 seater facility. An audience of eighty people in a 500 seater feels like a flop, but the same audience in a hundred seater feels like a good house.

Having a welcoming studio theatre to showcase emerging play-writing and musical talent will be a boost for local creativity, which might otherwise feel hesitant and daunted by the size of the other performance spaces in Furness.

2.3 A mini cinema.

The studio is to be fitted with a screen and digital projector, which will allow local film-makers to showcase their talents in the same way as the playwrights and musicians.

2.4 A lecture theatre.

The screen and projector in the studio will provide facilities for illustrated lectures.

3 USERS OF THE CENTRE AND THEIR REQUIREMENTS

We can identify a number of categories of users who have differing requirements...

3.1 Producers and promoters of visiting productions.

Producers and promoters will require an accurate and complete online Technical Specification describing all the equipment and facilities of the theatre. They will also need a Meeting Room for their team to discuss the forthcoming production with the theatre's administrative and technical staff.

3.2 Technical staff

Technical staff will require hardcopy and online manuals of all installed equipment. Also diagrams of all services and cabling.

3.3 Onstage Performers

All onstage performers need dressing room facilities. Some may need radio microphones.

3.3.1 Musical theatre and other dance performers

Musical theatre and dance performers may benefit from a sprung stage. This will need to be decided early in the project.

3.3.1.1 Dance schools

Dance school shows are unusual in the large number of cast taking part in a show. This can rise to a maximum of 150 children, which is three or four times the number of performers in a well-populated musical theatre show. These children cannot be accommodated in standard dressing rooms, and so overflow dressing rooms must be provided.

The first choice of overflow dressing rooms will be the Meeting Room. Since the Meeting Room will be mostly used in the daytime, its adaptation as a dressing room for evening shows will not be disruptive.

If the Meeting Room is inadequate for the larger dancing schools then the studio must be used. This could well be disruptive of its normal use and care will be required to avoid scheduling the studio for performance use when a large dancing school is in the main theatre.

3.3.2 Acoustic onstage performers.

This category consists of drama performers, acoustic musicians, soloists, choirs, folk bands, and orchestras. There are no special requirements.

3.3.3 Electric onstage performers

These are principally rock bands who bring their own electrical equipment. This will probably need PAT testing before being allowed to be used in the venue, and precautions will be needed to prevent trailing cables causing a tripping hazard.

3.4 Offstage performers.

Offstage performers principally consist of orchestral accompaniment to musical theatre and maybe also smaller groups of musicians accompanying soloists. They are usually seated just below the front of the stage (in older theatres in a 'pit'). They will require comfortable seating, illuminated music stands and a low curtain surrounding them.

Note that there is a possible conflict in use of space with wheelchair users, who are usually placed in front of the very first row of seats. The theatre's administrative staff need to ensure that there is sufficient space to allow people to pass between the orchestra and the wheelchair users, and no seats are sold which might later need to be removed as obstructive.

3.5 Performers with special needs...

3.5.1 Access to all performance spaces needs to be step-free.

3.5.2 Hearing loops need to be active backstage and in the dressing rooms as well as in the auditorium.

3.5.3 Specialist advice must be sought at the design stage in making all spaces safe for those with impaired vision.

3.6 Catering

The catering area is to be flexible with easily movable and stackable furniture to allow it to be reconfigured to incorporate temporary features such as small art exhibitions.

3.6.1 Catering and bar staff

Staff should have clear, wide and unobstructed routes to move around the preparation and serving area to avoid dangers of getting in each other's way and spilling hot food and drink. The counter should be uncluttered and ergonomic. All surfaces should be durable and easily cleaned.

3.6.2 Catering and bar customers

Tables and chairs should be spaced so that each customer has a minimum of 2.5 square meters. Directions of queuing should be clearly indicated.

3.7 Front of house, ticketing, financial and administrative staff.

Public-facing front of house staff need too be on the ground floor. Others may be in first floor offices.

3.8 Audiences

Audiences may be divided into three categories: adults, families with older children, families with younger children.

3.8.1 Adults probably have no preference for what night of the week they attend a performance

3.8.2 Families with secondary age children prefer to attend Friday evening, Saturday matinee or Saturday evening performances.

3.8.3 Families with primary and pre-school children seem particularly attracted by school holiday day time performances.

3.9 The local business community

Part of the new theatre's remit is to revitalise Barrow town centre and its trading environment and increase the footfall. So every nearby business, whether they are aware of it or not, is a user. The theatre management should be requested to liaise with its surrounding BID (Business Improvement District) to work to their mutual advantage.

4 LOCATION OF THE CENTRE

The new theatre should be located at or near a public transport hub. Adequate parking is required with maybe parking charge concessions for those attending events. The theatre should be situated in the town centre to act as a footfall focus for its BID

5 PHYSICAL STRUCTURE AND LAYOUT OF THE CENTRE

5.1 Access

All public areas should be at ground level and have step-free access.

5.2 Front of house and publicity

The front of house desk should be placed near the main entrance and should have ample space for publicity leaflets. Space should be available for pop-up banners and A3 posters. A large flat-screen display may be placed near the desk or in the cafe or other suitable place where people congregate.

5.3 Toilets

There should be at least two toilet facilities for each sex so that one will always be available while the other is being cleaned. There should be at least two disabled toilets.

5.4 Storage

There are two requirements for storage - short term and long term.

5.4.1 Short term storage.

Short term storage is for shows currently being performed. Scenery and large props for both performance spaces are to be delivered to the main auditorium scene dock. Those for use in the Studio are to be kept separate and stored in the Studio scene dock.

5.4.1.1 Performance food.

Food to be consumed onstage as part of the performance is to be stored according to manufacturer's instructions. This may require refrigeration so a fridge should be located in a dressing room.

5.4.2 Long term storage

Items required intermittently such as decking or orchestra equipment should be stored in first floor storage rooms. A suitable service lift will be required.

5.4.3 Storage of ladders.

Ladders must be stored horizontally, never vertically. Nor should they be left unattended in a vertical position when children are around. The main scene dock is to have suitable frames or brackets fitted to the long wall for storage of ladders.

6. PERFORMANCE SPACES

6.1 Requirements common to both spaces

Both the main theatre and the studio theatre will have the following requirements:

6.1.1 Acoustics

The ambient noise from electrical equipment, air conditioning etc should be less than 40dB. The potential use of adaptive acoustics needs to be explored for the different requirements of speech and music.

6.1.2 Audio relay

All dressing rooms are to receive audio relay.

6.1.3 HVAC

The heating, ventilation and air conditioning system(s) should be specified in accordance with previous successful installations in similar spaces.

6.2 THE MAIN AUDITORIUM

6.2.1 Audience seating .

The main raked seating bank should have a capacity of no fewer than 529 and should be capable of being folded back to reveal a flat floor area for cabaret seating or other non-theatrical events.

6.2.2 Main performance area.

6.2.2.1 Dimensions (these are minimum suggested values to reproduce the Forum's functionality)

The performance area is to be primarily of the proscenium type, though with a small thrust area 1.5m wide and running the length of the proscenium opening, with provision for steps to the auditorium floor at each end.

The height of the stage above the auditorium floor is to be 1 metre

The width of the proscenium is to be no less than 9.3 metres.

The height of the proscenium is to be no less than 5.35 metres above the stage

The overall width of the stage is to be no less than 17.5 metres

The depth of the stage is to be no less than 10 metres

The height to grid is to be not less than 12 metres (Keswick)

The stage is to be flat, not raked. A raked stage has little advantage where the seating is also raked, and presents H&S hazards in terms of items on castors having a tendency to roll into the orchestra, and tall items of stage furniture having a risk of toppling over.

6.2.2.2 Prompt desk.

The prompt desk in wings to have video monitoring of show, cue lights and intercom to sound and light technicians.

6.2.3 Sound

The functionality of the sound system shall not be inferior to that documented on pages 3 and 4 of [The Forum Main Theatre Technical Specifications](#). There shall be easy interfacing to radio microphone subsystems.

6.2.4 Lighting

The functionality of the Lighting System shall not be inferior to that documented on pages 4 and 5 of [The Forum Main Theatre Technical Specifications](#).

6.2.5 Scene projection

Both front and rear projection capabilities are to be provided.

6.2.6 Dressing rooms

There are to be four dressing rooms, each capable of accommodating 15 people. Each shall have a toilet and hand washing facilities.

6.3 THE MAIN SCENE DOCK

6.3.1 Parking

The parking outside the scene dock is to be ample to allow trucks to manoeuvre, load/unload their set and depart.

6.3.2 Dimensions.

6.3.2.1 Area

The Forum scene dock was 5.25 x 17.45 metres giving a floor area of 92 sq metres. The replacement theatre's scene dock must be at least equivalent to this with at least one wall being long enough to store ladders horizontally.

6.3.2.2 Openings

There are to be two openings from the scene dock at either side of the performance area, they are to be 2 metres wide and 5.5 metres high. The opening onto the truck parking area is to be adequate to allow unloading.

6.4 THE STUDIO THEATRE

6.4.1. Seating

Raked seating to accommodate 150

6.4.2 Performance area

The stage will be a raised area 1.5m high by at least 8m wide by at least 4m deep. Entry to the stage is to be from either side, possibly by means of an interconnecting corridor which also allows access to the dressing room, meeting room and scene dock.

6.4.3 Screen

The back wall of the stage is, or will accommodate, a screen to turn the theatre into a mini cinema.

6.4.4 Control and projection booth.

Lighting, sound and cinema projection will be controlled from a booth at the back of the seating.

6.4.5 Sound and lighting

The Studio's sound and lighting will be at least as good as the functionality specified in the [White Rock Studio Technical Specification](#) pages 6 and 7 or the [Keswick Studio Specification](#)

6.4.6 Changing rooms

The changing room will accommodate up to 15 people with overflow going into the Meeting Room

6.4.7 Scene dock

A small scene dock with a floor area of 25sq metres will be needed.

7 THE MEETING ROOM

The meeting room will accommodate 16 seated around tables, or 26 when in use as a dressing room.

This specification will be updated frequently as the users' committee reviews and improves their requirements. Please check the Revision Level and date to ensure you are up-to-date.