

# Hat Factory Arts Centre Capital Project Executive Summary (Feasibility Extract)

July 2017

## 1.1 Introduction

*“Creativity, production and diversity are synonymous with Luton and should be celebrated. We have explored how the Cultural Trust can improve the facilities and develop more vibrancy at the Hat Factory Arts Centre. We want to provide a better platform to show and share locally relevant and nationally important arts opportunities, events and activities. We are committed to improving the Arts centre so that the programme, building and resources will inspire and empower everyone. The time is right for this fantastic old hat factory and all its users to brim with pride once more”.*

Marie Kirbyshaw, Chief Executive.

## 1.2 Summary

In our Luton Culture Business Plan (2017-21), we outline our target audience across all our arts and cultural sites and libraries as local people, young people, diverse communities and artists/creative practitioners. The Arts Centre feasibility focuses on how our user and non-user research has enabled us to refine our target audience for this centre. We are focussing on increasing participation and engagement from Black and Minority Ethnic communities (BAME). Currently 30% of our Hat Factory audiences are BME against a national average of 12%. And so whilst nationally our audience profile is good, locally BME is 44%. We will also focus on young people aged 05-16 years and on emerging artists and creative practitioners with an interest in theatre, dance, spoken word, music, digital and film, comedy, contemporary circus and visual arts. Our capital improvements will enable us to programme more than one event at the same time so that we can provide an inter-cultural programme and encourage the cross-fertilisation of different audiences in our expanded social spaces.

## 1.3 What users, staff, partners, stakeholders, audiences and non-users want

- **A new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system** to inform programming and communications, branding, messaging and advertising and a **digital strategy** to increasing innovative online content, website improvements and more effective monitoring and analysis of online effectiveness.
- **Access to information** – ensuring all our visitors, users and customers know what’s on and how to engage.
- **One welcome** – we will create a better visitor impression and enable more interaction. This will align with media communications and quality web presence, ticket purchase, online and in person customer care.
- **Improved soundproofing**, front and back of house delineation and new-look interior will help us engage new audiences and fruitful strategic partnerships locally, nationally and internationally.
- **New education and skills space** will enable us to work with artists who use participation in their practice as an effective way for us to engage schools, and young people out of formal education in arts and cultural activity.
- **Offsite programming during build phase** – combine/overlap with *Creative People and Place* and *As You Change So Do I* – opportunity to build new audiences, take them on a journey towards the new programme.

- **Our new open and accessible venue** refurbishment will enable us to better promote and programme arts participation and engagement. We will enrich our programme and enhance key art/film/theatre projects, and provide more in-depth engagement with schools and communities.
- **Our new refreshed Arts Centre and intensified programmes and education offer** will help us build our reputation and communicate positive stories about Luton and invest in the talent and skills of young people.
- **Widen audiences through excellent transport links**, as the arts centre is so well located close to the rail and bus stations with easy access across the region, London and internationally through London Luton Airport.



*Artist's impression of the Hat Factory showing the 'Beacon' by Mark Titchner 2016 (Image: Fabric Space)*

#### **1.4 The Building needs**

- Priority spaces are the ground floor, basement, first floor and courtyard
- Improve the sense of arrival and clarify a single entrance for all visitors and users
- Improve the quality of reception, orientation and capacity to cater for diverse audiences
- Transform the look and feel of the centre to be more attractive, interesting and engaging
- Improve the operational efficiency of the building, to zone heat and light and security
- Create new meeting, social and gathering areas for pre, interval and post-performance use
- Upgrade accessibility around the ground floor and improve toilets and introduce changing facilities
- Update technology and IT to promote use and activity of the centre and other arts activity in Luton
- Integrate more sustainable practices such as air recirculation, LED lights, lifecycle/environmental costs

## 1.5 Business Need

The Trusts business plan from 2021 requires that the Arts Centre generates more audiences, arts programmes and incomes in order to be a viable venue. Currently the building does not meet these needs, the spaces and facilities are inadequate, customer facilities dated and the income streams insufficient. It is critical that the capital project goes ahead for the Trust to operate from it. Luton Borough Council is the landlord and they are being supportive of the plans and have invested funding.

The Arts Centre has faced closure a number of times, most recently when the donation from London Luton Airport was reduced in 2015. At this point, it was decided to further develop the Hat Factory's trading functions (hire, rents and café) rather than close it. Subsequently the Trust invested in the refurbishment of Connors bar, but this has proved to be an insufficient intervention into a building/operation that has greater needs. Further investment is required in the arts and programming areas, public access and in updating the facilities, functions and spaces to engage more people with it. It is essential therefore for that the Trust undertake this work in order to deliver a viable and vibrant arts centre into the longer term for Luton. This capital project is part of the Hat District Creative Cluster project which will create greater sustainability for the venue into the long-term, thanks to investment of £3.9 from the Local Growth Fund (SEMLEP) to the Trust.

## 1.6 The Capital project brief

**Our aim is to become more Open & Vibrant** – we will transform visitor experiences and increase arts audiences to the Hat Factory Arts Centre by significantly improving the physical environment and access to arts provision. We will open up the building and welcome everyone to engage in the creativity and vibrancy within. Our new facilities will attract and retain a diverse and young audience which is more representative and celebratory of Luton and we will provide a platform for anyone to develop their skills and talents so that they can flourish. The Arts Centre will be part of a four building ecosystem for creative people and businesses to develop and grow their skills and talents and progress to success within the Hat District Creative Cluster.

**Our capital improvement priorities shall be to:**

- Develop the Hat Factory to be more user-focussed, welcoming and accessible to all
- Attract and engage more audiences, particularly young people, artists/creative and BME communities
- Develop a more efficient building to ensure greater sustainability through reduced running costs

## 1.7 Cost & Timeline

The Hat Factory is a Capital project, and so the £1.24m capital cost is to enhance the building and infrastructure. 100% of the funding has been secured by the Trust and we thanks our funders Arts Council (£500K), LBC (£340K) SEMLEP LGV (£200K). We are also contributing £200K. The timeline summary is as follows;

2017	Secure funding, appoint architect, refine design for planning and plan decant*
2018/19	April closure for 12 months to complete capital works. Outreach and Engagement.
2019/20	Relaunch

\*Decant. Whilst the capital works are focussed on ground, basement and first floor, the roof, mechanical & engineering, lifts and fire exits will also be changed and improved. As such, occupation is not possible and a 12 month decant is essential in order to comply with H&S when the site is handed over the contractor.