



# Dunedin Theatre Network

CONCEPT FOR DISCUSSION







Photo credit: Kevin Hill  
Mural by: Filipa Crofskey

# the IDEA

A staged programme of investment in the city's existing theatre infrastructure.

Cornerstone investment from DCC, supplemented with other sources of funding.

Achieves the functional brief from Charcoalblue's report, plus delivers additional benefits.

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**We are excited to present this community-led, collaborative solution to you.**

Ngā mihi,  
Jemma Adams (President, Dunedin Repertory Society Inc)  
Lawrie Forbes (Zeal Land Ltd - Owner, Athenaeum Building)  
Annie Villiers (Dunedin Athenaeum & Mechanics Institute)  
Ellie Swann (General Manager, New Athenaeum Theatre)  
Geoff Patton (Chair, Mayfair Theatre Charitable Trust)



# This submission is a collaboration between the owners of the Playhouse Theatre, the Athenaeum & Mechanics Institute Building and the Mayfair Theatre.

We propose a staged refurbishment of all three venues over 6-8 years, using funding allocated in Dunedin City Council's Ten Year Plan (10YP), supplemented with other central government, philanthropic, community and private funding.

Between them, we believe the network of refurbished venues could achieve at high level the functional brief set in the Phase 2 Report of DCC's Performing Arts Feasibility Study, and more.

A networked approach would also offer advantages over the two mid-size theatre options presented in the 10YP:

- A total of 4x main performance spaces ranging in capacity from 70 to 400 seats, plus a suite of other supporting spaces
- A range of styles of performance spaces
- A geographic spread of venues across the north, central and south city, each with good public transport links
- Preservation of three heritage buildings
- A collaborative model to manage the refurbished venues, supporting continued sharing of resource into the future.

We would like to engage with Council and the community on this concept urgently.

Without investment, our heritage buildings continue to deteriorate and building costs continue to rise, while – four years on from the

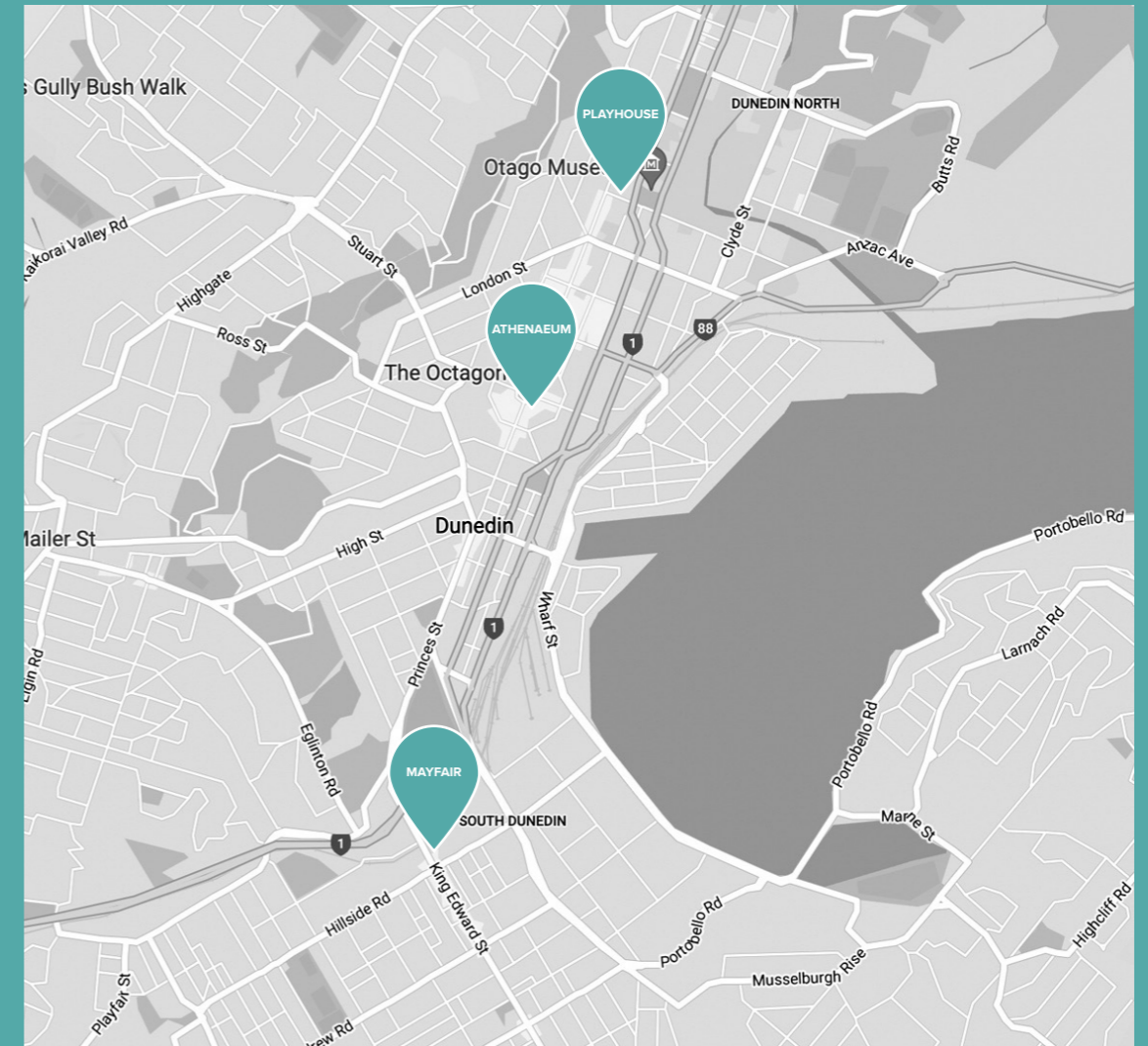
Fortune Theatre's closure – Ōtepoti Dunedin continues to lack fit-for-purpose performing arts venues.

Without Council partnership, securing that investment from other external funders is very difficult. Working in partnership with Council, and presenting each project in context of a wider plan, will be far more powerful.

We have each been exploring refurbishment options for our venues for some time. A significant body of professional services work on our venues already exists, including inspection reports, condition assessments and feasibility studies. This work is now ready to be taken forward.

In the 2023 financial year we respectfully request:

- An indication of Council support for the concept so we can hold meaningful discussions with the community and funders
- A point of contact at DCC to help facilitate kōrero with the community, and to work with us as the network proposal is consulted on and refined
- A pathway to including Year 1 budget in next year's Annual Plan (bringing some funding forward from 10YP forecasts), if consultation and refinement proves positive
- A commitment of up to \$30,000 per building in the 2023 financial year to deliver a costed concept design for each.



## PLAYHOUSE

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



## ATHENAEUM

2 x 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

# WHAT WOULD IT LOOK LIKE?

## COLLABORATIVE SHARED RESOURCE TO MANAGE FACILITIES

This could include a range of shared functions or personnel - e.g. ticketing, hires management, house tech, maintenance. Not necessarily limited to these three venues.

## COMMITMENT TO ENSURING VENUES ARE AVAILABLE TO THE COMMUNITY

## ABILITY TO INCLUDE OTHER VENUES IN THE NETWORK



### PLAYHOUSE THEATRE

#### Outline of refurbishment plans

- 130-seat character auditorium retained and improved. To keep a community focus but be capable of hosting smaller professional shows
- 80sqm multi-use space upstairs retained and improved
- Demolish and rebuild 1960s rear extension, enabling improvements to accessibility and circulation space throughout the building
- New rear access to stage / backstage area
- New theatre tech fit-out
- Earthquake strengthening
- General improvements such as heating, ventilation, decor

#### Schedule of spaces from Charcoalblue Phase 2 Report

- Contribution to community arts hub brief of smaller rehearsal, practice & meeting spaces
- Food & beverage facilities

#### Additional benefits

- 130-seat character auditorium with associated FOH & BOH spaces
- Specific focus on children & young people through continuation of the Playhouse Children's Theatre



### ATHENAEUM

#### Outline of refurbishment plans

- Develop 2 x Performance Studios (>200m2 each)
- Associated back of house facilities, (including changing, tech and storage facilities)
- A suite of supplementary studio spaces, (including a large rehearsal studio, >140m2)
- New theatre tech fit-out
- Earthquake strengthening
- A new Centre for Writing, aligned with Dunedin's UNESCO City of Literature status
- A suite of flexible meeting and office spaces
- 2 x cafes/bars, (in the Octagon and a rooftop bar) plus potential for additional retail

#### Schedule of spaces from Charcoalblue Phase 2 Report

- 2x large performance studio spaces
- Front of House space, F&B
- Admin / Office spaces
- Artists' spaces
- Production staff spaces
- Contribution to community arts hub brief of smaller rehearsal, practice & meeting spaces

#### Additional benefits

- Specific literary focus / Centre for Writing
- Further options to be explored



### MAYFAIR THEATRE

#### Outline of refurbishment plans

- 400-seat traditional auditorium retained and improved
- 90 sqm social / small performance space upstairs retained and improved
- 55 sqm meeting room and office retained and improved
- Improvements to front of house and back of house accessibility (inc. a lift)
- New theatre tech fit-out
- Earthquake strengthening
- General improvements such as heating, ventilation, décor
- Ownership of adjacent building offers other possibilities (e.g. workshop space)

#### Schedule of spaces from Charcoalblue Phase 2 Report

- Mid-size theatre with associated FOH & BOH
- Front of House space, Food and beverage facilities
- Admin / Office spaces
- Artists' spaces
- Production staff spaces, with potential for design / workshop space to be explored
- Contribution to community arts hub brief of smaller rehearsal, practice & meeting spaces

#### Additional benefits

- Orchestra pit
- Further options to be explored



# TIMELINE

A key tenet of the collaborative concept is staged investment – by spreading our projects out over time, we can avoid needing to compete with each other for funding.

The Playhouse project is arguably the most advanced in terms of planning, and is

based on significant community and sector consultation. It is also the most straight-forward and least expensive project. Completing this project first gives the city a “quick win”, while allowing more time to refine plans for the larger Athenaeum and Mayfair projects.

## INDICATIVE STAGING 2022-2029

2022 - 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
Consultation, Refining Concept, Funding Applications	<b>STAGE 1: PLAYHOUSE</b> Design: 9 months Build: 12 months					
		<b>STAGE 2: ATHENAEUM</b> Design: 12 months Build: 18 months				
				<b>STAGE 2: MAYFAIR</b> Design: 15 months Build: 18 months		



Photo credit: Gravity Events

# COST ESTIMATES

The tables below shows indicative cost estimates for each of our individual refurbishment projects, and the likely timing of those costs based on our indicative programme.

They're only estimates. And as the table notes, they're based on different methodologies, because our projects are at different stages of

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

We propose spending the next 6-8 months consulting and refining design options, and working with architects, engineers and quantity surveyors to firm up cost estimates.

## COST ESTIMATE BY PROJECT

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

## ESTIMATED TIMING OF INDICATIVE COSTS (\$m)

	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	TOTAL
<b>Stage 1: Playhouse</b>	1.100	3.550	-	-	-	-	4.650
<b>Stage 2: Athenaeum</b>	-	0.600	4.400	7.000	-	-	12.00
<b>Stage 3: Mayfair</b>	-	-	-	0.800	4.000	16.700	21.500
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1.100</b>	<b>4.150</b>	<b>4.400</b>	<b>7.800</b>	<b>4.000</b>	<b>16.700</b>	<b>38.150</b>

# FUNDING

This concept envisages the 10YP's \$17.1 million performing arts venue funding being allocated across the Playhouse, Athenaeum and Mayfair projects.

Each project would then seek the balance of its funding from other sources, which could include central government, community trusts, philanthropic funds, sponsorship, private funding or donations from the community.

Each venue owner has had initial engagement with various funders in relation to our individual projects.

We have heard a consistent message that our

projects align well with funders' objectives and are of interest to them – but that local authority funding is critical: "Sounds great - ring us back when DCC's on board."

Over the next few months we envisage talking to funders to gauge how much support might be available, with a view to bringing a proposed funding model back to Council.

The advice we've had to date strongly indicates that our projects (at least the Playhouse and Mayfair) will have little chance of success without DCC support. This will likely result in our venues closing within the next few years.



Athenaeum

# WHAT NEXT

This concept for discussion is just that. In order to determine its viability we need to:

## Consult with the community

We've already reached out to some key theatre practitioners within the city and found strong support for the network concept and approach. We also have the results of previous consultation on our individual projects.

We need to broaden this and talk to more of the performing arts community – and audiences – to understand how our venues can support them, and how we can work together.

We're particularly cognisant of the need to better understand the needs of the dance community, and Māori and Pasifika performing arts organisations.

We also envisage engaging with organisations like Arts Access Aotearoa, given improving accessibility will be a key feature of all three projects.

## Refine the designs and costs

Consulting with the community will help us form a better picture of what our individual projects need to look like – particularly the Athenaeum and Mayfair projects. We can then work with architects and quantity surveyors to advance design work and refine cost estimates.

## Talk to funders

An indication of DCC's in-principle support for the concept will allow us to have more meaningful discussions with funders and gauge how much external funding may be available for our projects.

We may be able to start raising funds from the community for Stage 1 (the Playhouse).

## Shape up a proposal for consideration

We envisage coming back to Council with a more detailed proposal within a few months. If the concept stacks up, we would like to see the flow of Council funding start in the 2024 financial year, to enable the Playhouse project to get underway.



Playhouse



Athenaeum



Mayfair



# APPENDIX

More detail about our venues



# PLAYHOUSE THEATRE

31 Albany Street, Dunedin North / [www.playhousetheatre.co.nz](http://www.playhousetheatre.co.nz)

**Ownership** Dunedin Repertory Society Incorporated (fully voluntary society with charitable status).

**Cost Estimate** \$4.6 million. Based on QS estimate of concept plans.

## Description

Former friendly society lodge built in 1876. Extended and converted to a theatre in the 1960s. Features a 130-seat character auditorium, backstage space and a large coffee lounge space above. Not heritage listed but independent advice confirms its heritage value likely meets criteria.

## Current Use

- Children's Theatre - school holiday productions featuring young people on and behind the stage, enjoyed by the city's littlest audiences. Affordable to participate in and attend, the Playhouse Children's Theatre has been the "grass roots" of Dunedin's theatre eco-system for nearly 50 years. It is highly valued by the community, as evidenced by feasibility study consultation.
- Other Repertory society theatre productions
- Available as an affordable hire venue (has hosted theatre performances, music, improv, comedy and festival performances, both local and touring).

## Building Condition & Challenges

- General ageing
- Fallen out of step with various modern standards

- Environmental (cold, damp)
- Poor accessibility
- Limited theatre tech equipment
- A new roof in 2021 bought time, but full refurbishment is required for the long term

## Status of Refurb Planning

- Feasibility study completed Dec 2021, funded by the Lotteries Community Facilities Fund.
- Feasibility study included extensive consultation with the Playhouse community and wider performing arts sector. This showed strong support for the Children's Theatre as well as the potential of the Playhouse as a venue. Considerable appetite to use the Playhouse if current challenges with the building could be addressed.
- Concept sketches and QS estimate complete for a refurbishment which would see the 1960s extension demolished and rebuilt, freeing up space in the front of the heritage building to address accessibility and improve circulation spaces.
- Consultant team identified for detailed design; ready to apply for Resource Consent.





# ATHENAEUM

23 The Octagon, Dunedin Central / [www.dunedinathenaeum.org.nz](http://www.dunedinathenaeum.org.nz) [newathenaeumtheatre.com](http://newathenaeumtheatre.com)

**Ownership** Lawrie Forbes, Zeal Land Ltd.

**Cost Estimate** \$12 million. Based on the recommendations of the feasibility work, this figure includes fit out, seismic strengthening, compliance work and professional fees.

## Description

Built in 1870, the Dunedin Athenaeum Institute is the oldest of its type still to be in operation. The Dunedin Athenaeum and Mechanics Institute building comprises a three-storey building located in Dunedin's Octagon covering some 2,000m<sup>2</sup>. The building is Category 1 registered with Heritage New Zealand and protected in the District Plan.

## Current Use

- Athenaeum Institute Library
- New Athenaeum Theatre (90-seat venue)
- The Thistle Café and Craic Bar (both run by the same operator)
- Privately let office space
- Lower ground floor is currently vacant, but occasionally used for theatre productions, market space and film location.

## Building Condition & Challenges

- After many years of neglect, the current owner purchased the building with a view to saving it, Zeal Land are working to

appropriately restore the building, but it is time consuming and expensive

- Most of the building is in a poor/moderate condition and requires significant investment
- The building requires substantive seismic strengthening work and needs to be brought up to modern standards.

## Status of Refurb Planning

- A feasibility study was completed in June 2021. This included wide-ranging consultation on the potential uses of the Athenaeum building and was commissioned jointly by the Athenaeum Institute and Lawrie Forbes. The research was funded by the DCC's Heritage Fund.
- The feasibility concluded that an Arts Centre was the preferred option for the building. This recommendation was based on the brief from the landlord, the Institute, and the results of the DCC's performing arts feasibility. This option was widely consulted on and supported by Dunedin's performing arts community.



# MAYFAIR THEATRE

100 King Edward Street, Dunedin South / [www.mayfairtheatre.co.nz](http://www.mayfairtheatre.co.nz)

**Ownership** Mayfair Theatre Charitable Trust.

**Cost Estimate** \$21.5m based on updated figures from the 2017 feasibility report, this figure includes fit out, compliance work and professional fees.

## Description

Originally named the King Edward Picture Theatre, the Mayfair was built in 1914 and is one of the oldest surviving picture houses in New Zealand. Like the Playhouse, the building was converted for use a theatre in the 1960s. Originally the building was owned and operated by the Dunedin Opera Company, ownership passed to the Mayfair Theatre Charitable Trust in 2014. The building is Category 2 registered with Heritage New Zealand and protected in the District Plan.

## Current Use

The Mayfair is one of Dunedin's largest community performance venues, and the city's second largest traditional proscenium arch theatre (after the Regent). The theatre is hired by a range of professional and community groups, including Opera Otago, Musical Theatre Dunedin, Taieri Musical Society, touring companies and festival performances. It has also hosted high school musical productions.

## Building Condition & Challenges

The Mayfair is in a moderately poor condition and does not meet modern standards. With a lack of investment over many years, the theatre is not a comfortable environment for performers and audience members alike. Accessibility around the theatre is poor and theatre technologies are becoming obsolete and require replacement. According to a recent Detailed Seismic Assessment, the building is 80% NBS and therefore not earthquake prone.

## Status of Refurb Planning

A feasibility study was completed in 2008 and updated in 2017, this feasibility produced a costed programme of work required to bring the building up to modern standards while retaining key heritage features. Since the completion of this feasibility work, the Mayfair have been working with Origin Consultants on a refurbishment of the building's front of house, including new toilets, a lift, reusing the shop-front area and improving accessibility.





