



Derby Playhouse Petition

SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Council has received a petition bearing 13,000 names under this heading *"We the undersigned urge Derby City Council to support Derby Playhouse. Derby deserves a professional producing theatre, it is important to us and we believe that Derby Playhouse should remain open now and in the future."*
- 1.2 Derby Playhouse Ltd went into Administration in December 2007. It was allowed to continue to trade until the closure of its Christmas show, Treasure Island, in February 2008. Since then, the Theatre has been dark.
- 1.3 Since December 2007 the Company and its assets have been in the control of an Administrator appointed by the Board. The Administrator is currently seeking bids for the movable assets of the theatre and expects that a decision will have been made on this by Monday 25 February.
- 1.4 The Administrator has called a creditors meeting on 25 February 2008, so that the position of Derby Playhouse Ltd can be finally resolved.
- 1.5 Throughout 2007 and especially in the period when the current financial crisis emerged late in 2007 the City Council has made repeated pronouncements about its support for the Derby Playhouse and for producing theatre in Derby. These statements have been issued in the name of the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Leisure and Direct Services. The level of direct financial support during 2007/08 was £395,275 to be paid on dates agreed back in March 2007.
- 1.6 During 2007 the Derby Playhouse Ltd Board approached the City Council on several occasions to request early payment of its grant. Some of those requests were granted, but an approach in November 2007 for the early payment of the January instalment was refused. This decision was taken in the context of very disappointing ticket sales during 2007, the failure of the organisation to fulfil all of the requirements laid down in our funding agreement and consequent concerns about the long term viability of Derby Playhouse Ltd.
- 1.7 The Playhouse staff and former Board members then embarked on a campaign to "save" Derby Playhouse. The campaign asserted that the City Council has no interest in high quality producing theatre in Derby and that it was planning to sell off the Derby Playhouse site for redevelopment. Both of these assertions are incorrect.

- 1.8 Nevertheless the media campaign conducted by former staff and Board members persuaded many residents of Derby and theatre goers across the world that without Derby Playhouse Ltd the service provided in Derby by the Derby Playhouse building and its facilities had no future. 13,000 signatures were collected on the petition which was subsequently presented to the Council.
- 1.9 In the meantime the Arts Council of England has made its own decision on future revenue funding for producing theatre in Derby. The decision was confirmed at the end of January 2008. This decision was to halt all investment in Derby Playhouse Ltd and to channel the amounts of money earmarked for Derby into a new model coordinated by Derby City Council.
- 1.10 The new model presented under the title Derby LIVE safeguards the future of producing theatre in Derby and gives it a very strong prospect for growth in the future. The Derby LIVE model brings into one coordinated unit the Assembly Rooms Great Hall, the Assembly Rooms Darwin Suite, the Playhouse Main Stage, the Guildhall Theatre and the Playhouse Studio Theatre. It also incorporates the City Council's events programme. Under this model theatre produced in Derby by both professional and amateur agencies will be presented in the auditorium which provides "best fit" in terms of artistic requirements, technical requirements, audience demand and financial viability. Outdoor spaces such as the Market Place and the newly refurbished Cathedral Green will be incorporated in this programme.
- 1.11 The Derby LIVE model is seen as a very important development tool for the governance and development of regional theatre by specialists within Arts Council England. Arts Council England has guaranteed its funding to further this during the next three years, with inflation uplifts year by year. The City Council has guaranteed £395,275 of investment in this model in the financial year 2008/09.

RECOMMENDATION

2. The Commission notes the petition on the future of producing theatre in Derby.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

3. The Derby LIVE model provides an exciting and vibrant future for producing theatre in Derby. Indeed the next three years will show whether the Derby LIVE model could become a national exemplar for the development of producing theatre in venues and in open spaces in an urban environment.

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Background papers:	None
List of appendices:	Appendix 1 – Implications

IMPLICATIONS

Financial

- 1.1 Investment amounting to £395,275 has been guaranteed from the City Council during the year 2008/09. Further decisions in subsequent years will be made through the budget process.
- 1.2 The Arts Council has guaranteed funding over three years amounting to over £2.2 million which will be channelled through Derby City Council.

Legal

2. The legal status of Derby Playhouse Ltd will be decided in the next few days. If the City Council's bid for the assets of Derby Playhouse Ltd is successful, the lease on the Derby Playhouse building will revert to the City Council and the City Council will then take over the building and all of its assets.

Personnel

3. The creation of the Derby LIVE model will necessitate a major restructuring within the City Council so that a new organisation can emerge fit to manage a large portfolio of indoor venues and an outdoor programme.

Equalities impact

- 4 The Derby LIVE model will allow the good practice which has been developed at the Assembly Rooms and Guildhall Theatre to be extended into other performing venues.

Corporate Priorities

5. This report supports the following priorities:
 - Creating a 21st century city centre
 - Supporting everyone in learning and achieving
 - Giving you excellent services and value for money