

# SITE DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS APPRAISAL

June 2022

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## 1. Background of Newhampton Arts Centre

### About Whitmore Reans and the Newhampton Arts Centre site

Newhampton Arts Centre is a multi-space and multi-user arts and cultural centre operating on a site located within Whitmore Reans situated just to the north of the Wolverhampton ring road. It is a minute's walk from Molineux, the home of Wolverhampton Wanderers, and five minutes walk to the city centre. Other cultural infrastructure in the city includes The Grand Theatre (large touring musicals, theatre), Museum and Art Gallery, Arena Theatre (small-scale theatre attached to the University) and the independent Lighthouse Cinema. The city's iconic large music venue, The Civic, is due to re-open in 2022. All of these are clustered in the city centre.

Whitmore Reans is a hyper-diverse and constantly changing community. It has seen successive waves of immigration over the past fifty years, and as well as historic Afro-Caribbean and Asian sub-continent communities there are more recent arrivals from Eastern Europe and Somalia. The nearest school, West Park Primary, has 73 % of pupils with English as a second language. NAC is adjacent to West Park, a large council amenity that is the venue for many outdoor cultural events in the city.

NAC occupies a site facing onto Newhampton Road, opposite West Park. The site buildings are arranged in a rough quadrangle around a central courtyard that is used as car parking, and in the summer as the site of the New Horizons stage-tent. Pedestrian and vehicle entrance to the site is via the small cul-de-sac Dunkley Street, on the south side of the site.

### History, present operation and legal structure

The present site came into being as the Higher Grade School in 1894, then as Wolverhampton Municipal Grammar School from 1921. The site was a school for over seventy years until 1989. The site was developed by Wolverhampton City Council and City of Wolverhampton as a joint creative Industries and creative education site, and benefited from a capital redevelopment funded by City Challenge.

Newhampton Arts Centre is constituted as a charity and a company limited by guarantee. The charity's financial history is available at the Charity Commission website. A Board of Trustees (currently nine) are responsible for the governance of the charity and are also the directors of the company. There is no membership structure or trading subsidiary.

The ownership of the site reflects its recent history. Wolverhampton City Council own half of the site: the studio block and the buildings along the north side. City of Wolverhampton College own the Gallery Hall (the main frontage onto Newhampton Road) and the theatre block. Ownership of the central courtyard is also equally divided between the two.

## **Present Operation**

The programme managed by NAC onsite has a number of elements: live events in the theatre and New Horizons stage-tent; weekly courses and classes; a community and education programme; and the activities of the residents.

Approximately 120 live performances per year in the theatre (320 standing, 140 seated) predominantly music (rock, pop, folk, jazz) and theatre (adult and family, professional and community). In 2021 NAC commissioned the New Horizons Stage: a large outdoor stage tent which established a second performance space onsite situated in the courtyard for the summer months.

Twenty weekly courses and classes in subjects as varied as youth theatre, yoga, English as a Second Language, visual art and keep fit.

A community and education programme that includes work with local primary schools; creative activities for families during school holidays and work with specific community groups.

The site is the base of operations for twenty independent resident creative and community businesses: there are two recording studios, a community radio station, youth theatre and a cluster of visual artists. Residents offer services as varied as adult day care, tattooing and visual art courses. All residents occupy space on a licence to occupy and pay rent to NAC.

Newhampton Arts Centre is one of three Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisations in the city: the other two are The Arena Theatre and Wolverhampton Museum and Art Gallery. Wolverhampton was included in Arts Council England's list of 54 priority areas for increased investment in the coming decade.

## **2. Background to site development options Appraisal**

The last significant capital investment in the site came twenty years ago in the redevelopment that brought NAC into being. Since then investment has been limited to maintenance and fixing building issues. At the time the site was conceived as dual-function: in the theatre and studio block NAC would present a programme of live events, courses and classes; in the Gallery Hall block the College would deliver creative courses for students. This arrangement continued until 2015, when the College decided to withdraw active operations from the site and proposed tinning up their half of the site. The NAC Board decided to take over management of the College half and the former classrooms were then let to a range of artists and organisations, dramatically expanding the number of resident organisations based onsite.

The building now is in urgent need of investment, fresh thinking and development to equip it for the role it has carved out over the past twenty years: Wolverhampton's hub for culture and creativity. NAC now manages the entire site, and the site has been used for purposes and to an extent never envisaged twenty-five years ago.

As the first phase of this development NAC is now seeking to commission a Site Development Options Appraisal to thoroughly explore options as to how the site can be developed to equip it for the next twenty years as Wolverhampton's arts centre.

We are therefore seeking a suitably qualified and experienced Art Business Consultant and Heritage Architect to work together to undertake an options appraisal of the NAC site that explores ways to refurbish, reconfigure and possibly extend the building. Both should be experienced in advising and evaluating large capital projects and understand the issues concerning arts/community/heritage buildings. The options appraisal will be used to evidence a decision to pursue one option into project development, as the basis of community consultation and to support funding applications.

**List of buildings and functions onsite:**

**Studio Block: 1990s flat-roof design.**

- Two large ground-floor and three medium first floor multi-use studio spaces suitable for classes, workshops, training events etc.
- One large carpeted studio space – the Rehearsal Theatre suitable for yoga, rehearsals etc.
- Three small offices.
- Northern and Eastern Elevation
- Victorian two-story building housing resident organisations RML – music studio; and Eden Support – day care.
- Single story building housing dance studio; music studio Beatsabar and two other small offices for residents.

**Theatre Block**

- Two-story building, mainly Victorian but with modern extension.
- 1990s extension – café and kitchen, toilets.
- Victorian building – ground floor theatre (320 standing, 140 seated), dressing rooms and technical storage.
- Victorian building first floor – five residents spaces of varying sizes.

**Gallery Hall**

- Victorian two-story building
- Large central area with two-story atrium currently used for exhibitions, formerly the school hall.
- Off this area on ground and first floor a number of classroom-sized resident spaces and a balcony
- running round the atrium. Glass-paned ceiling.

**Radio Station Building**

Two-story continuation of Gallery Hall with resident spaces including WCRfm (community radio station) and Gecko Training.

This is not an exhaustive list and there are approximately 75 rooms onsite.

### **Site defects, design deficiencies and limits on current operation and future possibilities**

Jacobs Surveyors undertook an exhaustive condition survey across the entire site in 2017 for Wolverhampton City Council and this would be available to the commissioned organisation. Major defects and deficiencies are currently:

#### **Studio Block**

- Ageing plant on flat roof providing air handling that is increasingly unreliable.
- Tired décor and carpets.
- One-person lift access.
- Insufficient fire exit doors to Rehearsal Theatre
- N-E Buildings
- Outdated modern décor, fixtures and fittings.
- No disabled access to first floor.
- No modern air handling or heating.
- Windows in poor condition.

#### **Theatre Block**

- Theatre in need of investment to bring seating, raked flooring, bar and backstage areas up to
- a good standard.
- Theatre size limits programming
- Ventilation and air conditioning to theatre unreliable and unsuitable for post-COVID world
- Café acoustic and visual feel is poor.
- ‘Serving hatch’ layout between café and kitchen is out-dated and inappropriate.
- One-person lift access
- Toilets are damp, outdated and flat roof above leaks
- Gallery Hall
- Major water leaks through valley gutters and downpipes
- Damp within walls causing plaster to come away on first floor
- Many rooms have tired and unsuitable fixtures and fittings
- Boilers and air handling in basement are at end of life and unreliable
- Victorian lead piping in much of the building

#### **Courtyard**

- Slope of courtyard means heavy rain causes flooding into the N-E elevation buildings.
- Main entrance is via Dunkley Street. Historic entrance onto Newhampton Road is closed, meaning site can look like a disused school from the main road.
- Radio Station Building
- Leaks as in the Gallery Hall
- Throughout the site
- Separate ‘front doors’ to the theatre, Studio Block, Gallery Hall, radio station and several
- other ground floor units onto the courtyard present a complex site management task and an
- additional security risk.

This is an indicative rather than exhaustive list.

### 3. Specification and Deliverables

#### **Aim of appraisal and deliverables (outcomes/results)**

The outcome we are looking for is an approach which will best equip the NAC site to serve as Wolverhampton's centre for arts and culture for the next twenty years.

#### **Specific deliverables:**

- Research to include market analysis and stakeholder/community consultation
- Development of a set of criteria based on research to measure options against
- Identify and compare three options for redevelopment in line with our charitable objectives and against the agreed criteria.
- Deliver a sound business case for each option that demonstrates how it would contribute significantly to further strengthening the business model
- Identify how NAC can reduce its carbon footprint through physical site development and how all aspects of NAC's operations can become more environmentally sustainable in all options
- Present the overall potential deliverability of the respective options, including timescales, capacity to deliver and any barriers to delivery
- Costings for the preferred option
- Economic development outcomes and options for the preferred option

#### **Other areas we would expect to be covered:**

- Listed building status, land use and planning considerations
- Conservation deficit calculation (if relevant)
- Funding Strategy
- Methodology
- Action Plan

#### **The successful organisation will need to:**

- Familiarising themselves in detail with the site history and current operation, the current state of the buildings onsite, the legal relationships between the key parties (Wolverhampton City Council, City of Wolverhampton College) and the business model.
- Gain an understanding of NAC's role in the local, citywide and regional arts provision and its relationships with the City Council, Arts Council England.
- Interview NAC board members, staff, residents and site users to gain a multi-dimensional understanding of how the site is perceived to operate and the frustrations and limitations of the current operating model and building usage.
- Run some public consultation activity with the audiences for NAC events to enable them to feed into the process

### **Specification for individual/company**

NAC is looking for an organisation or consultant with experience in the following:

- Capital projects including options appraisals, feasibility and project management
- Capital projects involving heritage buildings with a strong sense of public ownership.
- Early-stage involvement in capital projects with multiple stakeholders
- Experience of offering consultancy to a small organisations with limited resources
- Understanding of our values as a community arts centre
- Knowledge of the funding requirements of lottery distributors such as Arts Council England, the Community Fund and the Heritage Fund are also an advantage.

### **Timeframe and budget for work**

June 2022 – recruitment process

July 2022 – successful bidder starts work

August-October 2022 – interviews, consultation events etc.

October 2022 – draft report presented to NAC board

For this work NAC has allowed a budget of £10,000 plus VAT. This budget may be split between the Arts Business Consultant and Heritage Architect or allocated to one company who can provide both.

The project is supported by the Architectural Heritage Fund and the successful applicant will need to provide AHF with any required reporting on the progress of the project.

## Recruitment Process

Tenders should include:

- ▶ Your approach to the work
- ▶ How you would intend to deliver on the outcomes
- ▶ Examples of work which demonstrate your experience in this area
- ▶ Budget to include VAT and all expenses
- ▶ Your proposed timetable for the work

Tenders should be submitted by **Friday 1st July** to Trevelyan Wright on [trevelyan@newhamptonarts.co.uk](mailto:trevelyan@newhamptonarts.co.uk)

All those tendering are welcome to contact Chief Executive Trevelyan Wright for an informal conversation on the above email.



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