

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Delegated Officer Decision – 17 February 2025

Report Title

Feasibility Fund Allocation: Rotherham Civic Theatre

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

No, but it has been included on the Forward Plan

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

Andrew Bramidge, Strategic Director, Regeneration & Environment

Report Author(s)

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Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

The South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA) have allocated £3m revenue to Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council as a 'Feasibility Fund'. A grant agreement has been signed to accept the funding and this report seeks to exercise delegation to the Strategic Director for Regeneration & Environment in consultation with the Leader of the Council and Assistant Director Financial Services to allocate £24,999 of this fund to undertake market testing and options appraisals for the provision of a performing arts venue in Rotherham Town Centre.

Recommendations

1. Allocate £24,999 of the Feasibility Fund for activity described in Section 2 of this report.

List of Appendices Included

Appendix 1 Equalities Impact Assessment Part A
Appendix 2 Carbon Impact Assessment

Background Papers

[June 2023 Finance Update](#)

Minute number 2.6

Rotherham Cultural Strategy 2019-2026

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Feasibility Fund Allocation: Rotherham Civic Theatre

1. Background

- 1.1 The South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA) have allocated £3m of revenue funding to the Council as a 'Feasibility Fund'. The aim of this grant is to facilitate the development and delivery of Rotherham's Place Based Investment Strategy (PBIS) by reducing capacity and capability constraints and contributing to the development and delivery of both capital and revenue projects. The PBIS was presented to Cabinet in February 2023.
- 1.2 In December 2022 the grant was accepted by the Council and the funding agreement signed. Further, in June 2023 Cabinet approved the allocation of the Feasibility Fund via officer delegation to the Strategic Director for Regeneration & Environment in consultation with the Leader of the Council and Assistant Director Financial Services.
- 1.3 To date £2.022m has been allocated to contribute toward resourcing, property management costs, consultation, marketing and communications and development of town centre projects and the development of a feasibility study for a new Business Centre.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 Rotherham Civic Theatre is a 356-seat theatre, located in the centre of Rotherham. It opened its doors in 1960 as a theatre, after being converted from a Church. It is a much-loved theatre for local people and hosts, commercial, professional and community groups throughout the year.
- 2.2 Rotherham Civic Theatre is owned by the council and sits within the Regeneration and Environment directorate, within the service Culture, Sport and Tourism. It is run by a dedicated team of 12 staff including operational, marketing and catering plus casual staff and volunteer stewards.
- 2.3 In 2019 Rotherham's Cultural Partnership Board and its membership adopted the Rotherham Cultural Strategy, the first of its kind in Rotherham for more than a decade. The strategy sets out seven 'game-changing' priorities including:
 - **A Vibrant Heart** – supporting town centre recovery and regeneration
 - **Vital Neighbourhoods** – revitalising our neighbourhoods
 - **Adventures in Rother Valley** – developing the green and active leisure offer in the south of the borough
 - **A Great Place for Wentworth and the Dearne Valley** – building on the cultural heritage of the north of the borough
 - **Turning Passion into a Profession** – developing skills and talent pathways into industry
 - **Amazing Events** – creating magical shared experiences to bring people together and build pride in Rotherham

- **Children’s Capital of Culture** – working with children and young people to strengthen their voice in the development and delivery of Rotherham’s cultural and leisure offer
- 2.4 ‘A Vibrant Heart’ works towards supporting the creation of a welcoming, creative, and dynamic town centre. The strategy recognises that culture has a key role to play in transforming the town centre ensuring that it is accessible and engaging for all areas of our communities and visitors alike. This is further supported through the Town Centre Masterplan which places leisure at the core of the town centre offer.
- 2.5 In addition, theatre has an important role to play in the revitalisation of our local communities within the ‘Vital Neighbourhoods’ strand of the strategy. Theatre is often one of the first experiences of arts and culture for our communities from the annual pantomime to participating in local dance groups. Since 1890 there has been a theatre presence in Rotherham providing a safe space for communities to meet and ideas to be shared. Rotherham Civic Theatre has historically attracted between 65,000 and 75,000 customers a year and enjoys a 65-70% capacity over the year including a well-supported panto of approximately 90% capacity. The Civic Theatre draws a large percentage of its audience from within Rotherham with boundaries spreading into Sheffield, Barnsley and Doncaster postcodes, but also encompassing other Yorkshire areas as well as national visitors.
- 2.6 Over the last three years the theatre has sought to redevelop its spaces with a refurbishment of its front of house spaces to create additional informal performance spaces and a coffee shop to introduce day-time use. Most recently funding has been secured to develop a second studio space to build an audience development strategy which takes communities from small workshops to intimate performances in 100 seat studio theatre through to regular performances in the 356-seat main house.
- 2.7 The current building has challenges in terms of capacity, opportunity for growth and its general condition. A Feasibility Study was undertaken in 2022 to determine a suitable location for a new venue and the site was subsequently acquired by the Council. However, a new Centre for Performing Arts represents a significant investment and fundraising challenge for the Council and before plans progress it would like to undertake market testing to inform a full options appraisal to be sure that the investment would create a viable model for the future of the theatre.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 3.1 **Do nothing** – The Council’s Asset Management service has advised the current building may come to the end of its useful life within the next ten years, requiring significant repairs to the roof and structure to remain operational. To not progress the feasibility work could see the Council invest significant capital to restore a building that is not fit for purpose or could mark the end of performing arts provision in Rotherham Town centre as the repairs could be so costly they are prohibitive.

3.2 **Progress with the development of proposed plans** – Building on the initial Feasibility Study which identified potential locations, sizes and use of a possible new, work could progress to the next phase of development. However, without the appropriate due diligence the identified site and offer may present a future revenue challenge for the Council and is therefore too great a risk to take forward.

3.2 **Invest in market testing and detailed options appraisal** – this is the recommended options which will enable the Council to explore options for a future performing arts provision in the Town centre that are both financially robust and fit for the market.

4. Consultation on proposal

4.1 As part of a Phase 1 Feasibility Study which was undertaken in 2022 to identify the need and potential opportunity for a new Centre for Performing Arts, consultation was undertaken with members of the public, theatre users, amateur performing groups, theatre professionals and funding bodies such as Arts Council England and Historic England.

4.2 The outcome of the consultation was generally in favour of a new centre in a more central location that take advantage of transport links and provide a new focal point for the Town Centre culture and leisure offer. The consultation identified a series of uses that can be included in a new theatre such as:

- Multiple performance spaces including a main house theatre, studio theatre, classrooms, workshops and rehearsal spaces
- Active uses such as retail and hospitality that would provide a day time offer and street level activation
- Greater links to travel and transport both car parks, walking routes from new housing developments and public transport
- Greater connection to the wider Town Centre development including restaurants, bars and other cultural venues
- Improvements to access inclusion e.g., Changing Places Facilities, disabled access to raked seating

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

5.1 Three quotes for this work will be sought in line with the Council's Financial and Procurement Procedure Regulations (FPPRs).

5.2 It is hoped that a consultant could be appointed to this brief by March 2025 with the findings of the market testing returned by June 2025 and a final options appraisal completed by September 2025.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications (to be written by the relevant Head of Finance and the Head of Procurement on behalf of s151 Officer)

6.1 The grant allocation will fund the options appraisal for provision of a performing arts centre within Rotherham Town Centre. Funding for any

additional or subsequent work will need to be agreed and approved, if it cannot be managed within existing resources. The Feasibility Fund has already been subject to previously agreed allocations:

Year	Agreed Use	Value £	Feasibility Fund Uncommitted £
2022/23	In year savings contribution towards regen costs	150,000	2,850,000
2023/24	In year savings contribution towards regen costs	200,000	2,650,000
2023/24	Resourcing, property management, consultation and marketing – Officer Decision March 2024	690,000	1,960,000
2024/25	Regen staffing costs – Officer Decision May 2024	144,000	1,816,000
2024/25	Business Centre Feasibility – Officer Decision May 2024	100,000	1,716,000
2024/25	Strategic Site Development – Officer Decision Aug 2024	600,000	1,116,000
2024/25	Rotherham Markets Vision – Officer Decision Aug 2024	38,000	1,078,000
2024/25	Regeneration Team resourcing and training - Officer Decisions Sept 2024	100,000	978,000

To date, £2,022,000 of the Feasibility Fund has been approved and allocated. If this allocation is approved, there will be £2,046,999 committed and £953,001 for future use.

6.2 The services described in this report must be procured in compliance with the relevant procurement legislation (Public Contracts Regulations 2015 or the Procurement Act 2023, whichever is applicable at the time) and in accordance with the Council's own Financial and Procurement Procedure Rules.

7. Legal Advice and Implications (to be written by Legal Officer on behalf of Assistant Director Legal Services)

7.1 The grant funding Agreement with SYMCA was signed in December 2022, and the decision regarding the allocation of that grant delegated by Cabinet in June 2023 via officer delegation to the Strategic Director for Regeneration & Environment in consultation with the Leader of the Council and Assistant Director Financial Services. The Service must ensure that the spend on this contract to undertake market testing and options appraisal is in compliance with the Scope of the grant and its terms and conditions.

7.2

The value of the potential contract at £24,999 is well below the threshold for goods and services of £213,447 (including VAT) under the Public Contracts Regulations 2015. Further under Rule 58.2.2 of the Council's Financial Procurement and Procedure Rules a service can use a closed procedure inviting a minimum of 2 informal quotations (based on knowledge, experience, supplier expressions of interest etc), one of which must be from a local supplier. Therefore, the approach recommended by the Service of inviting 3 quotes would be compliant. It is recommended that service consult with legal services on the form of consultancy agreement to be used.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

- 8.1 There are no direct Human Resources implications arising from the recommendations contained in this report.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

- 9.1 In 2025 Rotherham became the world's first Children's Capital of Culture. Through consistent engagement and co-production with children and young people, working towards the festival year, there has been a repeated and sustained ask for more places to go and things to do. Of those surveyed in 2021 as part of consultation related to Children's Capital of Culture entertainment activities were ranked 3rd most important by young people and lack of facilities was ranked joint 3rd with addiction related social issues as their least favourite thing about their town.
- 9.2 In qualitative consultation as part of both Children's Capital of Culture and the development of Rotherham' Cultural Strategy (2019-2026) children, young people and their families told us:
"We need more live music, events and venues"
"67% of residents value a good range of things to do for teenagers"
"67% of residents think that a bigger range of low cost leisure activities in important"
- 9.3 In 2021 the front of house areas of the current building were refurbished to create a Coffee Shop and day time use of the venue. This space has opened up new engagement opportunities with children and their families, particularly early years, and created a space where engagement activities for vulnerable adults can also be explored. As these programmes develop the groups participating in them will continue to be consulted as part of this work.
- 9.4 The 2023 Lifestyle survey asked Year 7 and Year 11 pupils if they had ever been to Rotherham Civic Theatre with only 35% replying positively, however 6,918 responses were given to the type of shows they would like to see at the theatre suggesting a far greater appetite. Comedy was rated highest with 2,1023 responses.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

- 10.2 An Equalities Impact Screening (Part A) has been completed for this work. A full Equalities Impact was not deemed necessary at this stage of the project

as it relates solely to desk research, however as the project develops a full Equalities Impact Assessment will be completed.

11. Implications for CO2 Emissions and Climate Change

- 11.1 This proposal seeks the allocation of funds for a desk-based exercise only and therefore there are not considered to be any direct carbon impacts.

12. Implications for Partners

- 12.1 The Feasibility Fund is provided by the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority and its use will contribute to the MCA's economic growth targets and the jointly owned Place Based Investment Strategy by delivering key outputs through the regeneration programme.

13. Risks and Mitigation

- 13.1 Expenditure in line with forecast is a risk in relation to timebound funding pots. However, the Feasibility Fund has a flexible timeline and the MCA will consider justifiable slippage against initial forecasts.

14. Accountable Officers

Leanne Buchan, Head of Creative Programming & Engagement

Lorna Vertigan, Head of Regeneration

Simon Moss, Assistant Director for Planning, Regeneration & Transport

Approvals obtained on behalf of Statutory Officers: -

	Named Officer	Date
Chief Executive	Sharon Kemp	Click here to enter a date.
Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services (S.151 Officer)	Judith Badger	Click here to enter a date.
Assistant Director of Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	Phil Horsfield	Click here to enter a date.

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