



SOFT MARKET TEST

THORNTON LITTLE

THEATRE

SEPTEMBER 2023



1. Introduction

Wyre Council is keen to explore options for the future operation of Thornton Little Theatre. The council's aspiration is to collaborate with an organisation who can develop a commercial business plan to operate the facility whilst also being able to offer the local entertainment, cultural and community groups who currently use the facility access to it on fair commercial terms.

Thornton Little Theatre opened in November 1938 as Thornton Lecture Hall, and holds a prominent position at Four Lane Ends, Fleetwood Road. The venue has benefitted from investment over the last twenty years, with an extensive refurbishment taking place in 2003 (when it was renamed Thornton Little Theatre) and with further investment of £200,000 in 2010 to install a new entrance foyer, disabled access front and rear, a permanent bar area and a separate multi-function room (The Studio Room).

Thornton Little Theatres' unique selling points are its location in the heart of Thornton, its size and free parking for 54 vehicles, 8 disabled vehicle spaces and its EV charge points. The main auditorium has fixed seating for 197 plus capacity for 300 standing. There is a separate area internally called "The Studio Room", this has a capacity for 30 people and can be used either as a meeting space or as changing rooms for larger groups using the main theatre. The current annual entertainment programme offers a wide range of shows and events, with top international performers, independent local groups, and dance schools using the facilities. The commercial opportunities for the facility have scope for further development. More information is available at www.wyretheatres.co.uk

Primarily, we are committed to seeking a way forward to maximise this unique community asset and enhance its contribution to Thornton's offer as a vibrant and diverse place to live. We are not seeking to dispose of this asset by way of sale at this time.

2. Thornton Little Theatre

The accommodation at Thornton comprises (figures show approximate floor areas M²):

Ground Floor

- a. Main Hall (142)
- b. Studio Room (54)
- c. Foyer car park side (32)
- d. Foyer (30)
- e. Stage (53)
- f. Dressing room (17.5)
- g. Staff Office (16)
- h. Disabled Toilet Victoria Rd side (4)
- i. Disabled Toilet car park side (3.5)

First Floor

- j. Gents toilet (8)
- k. Ladies toilet (8)
- l. Dressing room (17)

More information on the functionality, capacity and size of each of these individual parts is attached at Appendix A (Ground Floor) and Appendix B (Ground and First Floor).

The existing car park will remain under the control of the council.

In looking at the future for Thornton Little Theatre, the council recognises that leisure and culture enrich lives and can raise aspirations. It also has a value to communities, bringing people together in shared experience, strengthening community bonds and making a major contribution to the quality of life and overall health and wellbeing. It is recognised that providing a space where the community can come together is essential in trying to combat loneliness and isolation.

Additionally, a thriving cultural sector can deliver substantial economic benefits to the community as a whole. Knowledge-based and creative industries are amongst the fastest growing sectors of the economy nationally, and culture-based tourism and the associated night-time economy can add substantially to local economic prosperity.

3. Background

We believe that Thornton Little Theatre can play a role in providing a community hub and entertainment venue for the local area. An operator who shares this belief and can provide a facility that can meet these needs is sought to work in partnership with the council.

Reception / Foyer



Theatre



Studio Room



Accessible Toilet (Foyer)



Accessible Toilet (Rear)



Standard Toilets (First Floor)



Rear Entrance



4. Scope

We are keen for interested parties to demonstrate how they can create a commercial offer that can support the running of the facility, who can also include the needs of local entertainment, cultural and community groups who currently have access to the facility (on a paid basis).

It is envisaged that this soft market test will determine whether a future procurement exercise is viable to support the aspiration of delivering an outcome where the daily running of the facility is moved out of council control whilst still offering local groups access to the facility as they have currently, on a paid basis.

The scope of this exercise must recognise the following key council objectives:

- 1) Thornton Little Theatre must be available for groups within the community, entertainment, leisure, and cultural sectors to hire the facilities from any leaseholder on fair commercial terms.**
- 2) A commitment to undertaking a short to medium term lease of the asset (minimum term of between 3 and 5 years)**

5. Risk transference

The council seeks the market's view regarding any transfer of risk. In particular, the market's view in respect of future building ownership and repairs liabilities would be welcomed. Views in respect of any interested partner investment opportunities are invited.

The council would expect that any leaseholder would undertake and own any commercial risk of operating the facility. If a contractor saw a benefit in developing, a not for profit strand to their business plan for the facility then this may also be of interest.

6. Ability to deliver transformational change

To support our local economy and to increase job opportunities, we are also keen to work in the future with an interested organisation who can offer work experience and training opportunities for local people.

The council wishes to proactively seek views from the market and explore opportunities that will enable us to identify whether a procurement exercise would attract sufficient interest to ensure future viability.

7. Soft Market Test - process and next steps

The soft market test is intended to allow interested organisations with appropriate experience to outline their views and provide information with no commitment to themselves or the council. It is not part of a formal procurement process and the council is not committed to carrying out such a process.

The soft market test will provide an opportunity for interested parties to have a time limited meeting with council officers if they so wish. Dialogue at this stage will be limited to information that is currently available within the public domain. Unfortunately, it will not be possible to share any confidential information at this stage. Viewings will be available upon request.

Interested parties are requested to submit an emailed response to the following questionnaire using the following email address lee.rossall@wyre.gov.uk or submit a copy of their responses via the Council's e-procurement portal, which is the [CHEST](#). Registration with the CHEST is recommended to ensure all information is received, as this will be the system used to share answers to queries and any other general updates. Registration with the CHEST is free.

The council will review the responses received and then consider its options. The aim of this exercise is to enable the council to suitably shape its future aspirations for this facility which may result in a formal procurement process if sufficient market interest demonstrates that the council would attract viable interest in letting the facility.

Before deciding on the final way forward, the council will take into account the number of organisations who have expressed an interest and who appear able to meet the council's objectives and expectations to ensure that genuine competition would be likely within a procurement process.

8. Indicative Timetable:

19 September 2023	Soft Market Test request published on www.wyre.gov.uk and Chest
2 October 2023	Deadline for responses confirming if you wish to attend a meeting and/or a tour of the facility with council officers in w/c 9 October via lee.rossall@wyre.gov.uk
20 October 2023	Deadline for queries
31 October 2023	Interested parties to provide written responses to the questionnaire via the CHEST or lee.rossall@wyre.gov.uk

Dealing with Queries: All queries regarding this document or requirements should be submitted via the CHEST or by email to lee.rossall@wyre.gov.uk. The council will seek to respond within 3 working days. The council will share the question and response with other interested parties via the CHEST. The final deadline for queries is 12.00 noon on 20 October 2023.

Council Contact Details: The council's main point of contact is Lee Rossall, Procurement Officer (lee.rossall@wyre.gov.uk).

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The council reserves the right to follow up this soft market testing in any way it considers appropriate and in its sole discretion. If the council chooses to carry out a procurement process, information supplied as part of this soft market testing will not be taken into account as this is a soft market testing only and does not constitute any part of a procurement process.

No expense in responding to this soft market testing will be reimbursed by the council.

The council is bound by the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and interested organisations are advised that none of the information which is supplied nor any of the discussions which are carried out between the council and interested organisations as part of the process will be considered confidential or will be exempt from disclosure.

9. Questionnaire

Please answer all questions as indicated.

Brochures or other general marketing information should not be attached in addition to this.

If you have any queries regarding the questionnaire, please detail your enquiry using the CHEST or via the email address lee.rossall@wyre.gov.uk.

The council will answer all enquiries via email. **The final deadline for queries is 12.00 noon on 20 October 2023.**

The completed questionnaire must be returned no later than 12.00 noon on 31 October 2023 bearing the reference 'Thornton Little Theatre soft market test' and returned via the CHEST or emailed to lee.rossall@wyre.gov.uk

Questionnaire:

Organisation Profile

Question	Response
Name of organisation	
Name and position of individual completing this questionnaire	
Contact details	
Briefly describe your Organisation in respect of its activities and market sector	
Briefly describe your anticipated use of the building (i.e. an outline of your business plan)	

Objective 1

Thornton Little Theatre must be available for groups within the community, entertainment, leisure, and cultural sectors to hire the facilities from any leaseholder on fair commercial terms

The council wishes to establish how the market would support this objective via a commercially viable contractual arrangement that includes the management of Thornton Little Theatre building.

No.	Question	Response
1.1	Please describe how you would approach this objective to ensure the above groups have continued access to the facility via agreed commercial terms.	
1.2.	Please describe how you would envisage measuring success against this objective.	

Objective 2

A commitment to undertaking a short to medium term lease of the asset (minimum term of between 3 and 5 years)

The council is exploring the market's appetite to undertake a lease on the building that maximises the venue's potential to support both commercial and community use

No.	Question	Response
2.1	Would your organisation prefer the option of: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A minimum 3 year lease• A minimum 5 year lease• A longer lease term (please detail preferred length of lease term)	
2.2	Would you be comfortable with a self-repairing lease agreement based on the findings of a building survey undertaken by an independent third party?	
2.3	Please provide information on how you would fund the ongoing lease and any maintenance costs for repairs required to keep the building in a safe and useable condition?	

APPENDICIES

Appendix A: TLT Theatre Plans
(Ground Floor)

Appendix B: TLT Theatre Plans
(Ground & First Floor)