



Dunedin Theatre Network

CONCEPT FOR DISCUSSION: STAGE THREE

MAYFAIR
THEATRE

PLAYHOUSE
THEATRE
HOME OF DUNEDIN REPERTORY SOCIETY INC

ZEAL
ZEALAND



the IDEA WITH COSTED CONCEPT DESIGNS

In May 2022 we proposed an idea of a “network approach” for Ōtepoti Dunedin’s theatre infrastructure.

We proposed a staged refurbishment of the Playhouse Theatre, the Athenaeum Building and the Mayfair Theatre.

We spent 2022 and 2023 developing the idea in more detail and engaging with the performing arts community.

In mid-2023, Dunedin City Council agreed to provide \$100,000 towards costed concept designs for the three theatres in order to enable future decision-making.

The costed concept designs are now complete. This report presents that information to Council, the performing arts community and the Dunedin public, to assist in decision-making about the future of the city’s performing arts infrastructure.

Ngā mihi,

Dunedin Repertory Society Inc
Zeal Land Ltd
Mayfair Theatre Charitable Trust

www.dunedintheatrenetwork.org.nz

CONTENTS

BACKGROUND	5
THE CONCEPT	6
THE PLAYHOUSE THEATRE	8
THE ATHENAEUM BUILDING	12
THE MAYFAIR THEATRE	18
WHY INVEST IN PERFORMING ARTS	22
OPERATIONS & OWNERSHIP	23
COSTS & FUNDING	24
NEXT STEPS	26



BACKGROUND

In early 2022, the owners of the Playhouse Theatre, the Athenaeum building and the Mayfair Theatre met to compare notes on the common challenges of owning and operating ageing performing arts buildings and trying to refurbish them to ensure their continued viability.

We quickly realised that, put together as a package, our buildings offer an appealing mix of sizes, styles and locations – a mix appropriate for the size and creativity of Dunedin. We agreed to explore the idea of partnering with Council and other funders to refurbish our venues as a network.

Our Stage 1 (May 2022) and Stage 2 (May 2023) reports cover this journey in detail and are essential companions to this Stage 3 report¹. The Stage 2 report also includes the verbatim and written feedback from our broad consultation with the performing arts community.

Following completion of our Stage 2 report, Dunedin City Council resolved to approve

\$100,000 towards costed concept designs for each venue. We entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Council to govern this work.

SCOPE OF THIS STAGE OF WORK

Over the past few months, we have been working with project managers, architects, structural engineers and quantity surveyors to have costed concept designs completed for each venue.

We extended the scope of the costed concept design work to include structural engineering advice, at Council's suggestion. This has been a valuable addition to the project.

We are excited to share the costed concept designs with the city, and look forward to the next stage of discussions about addressing the city's performing arts venue needs.

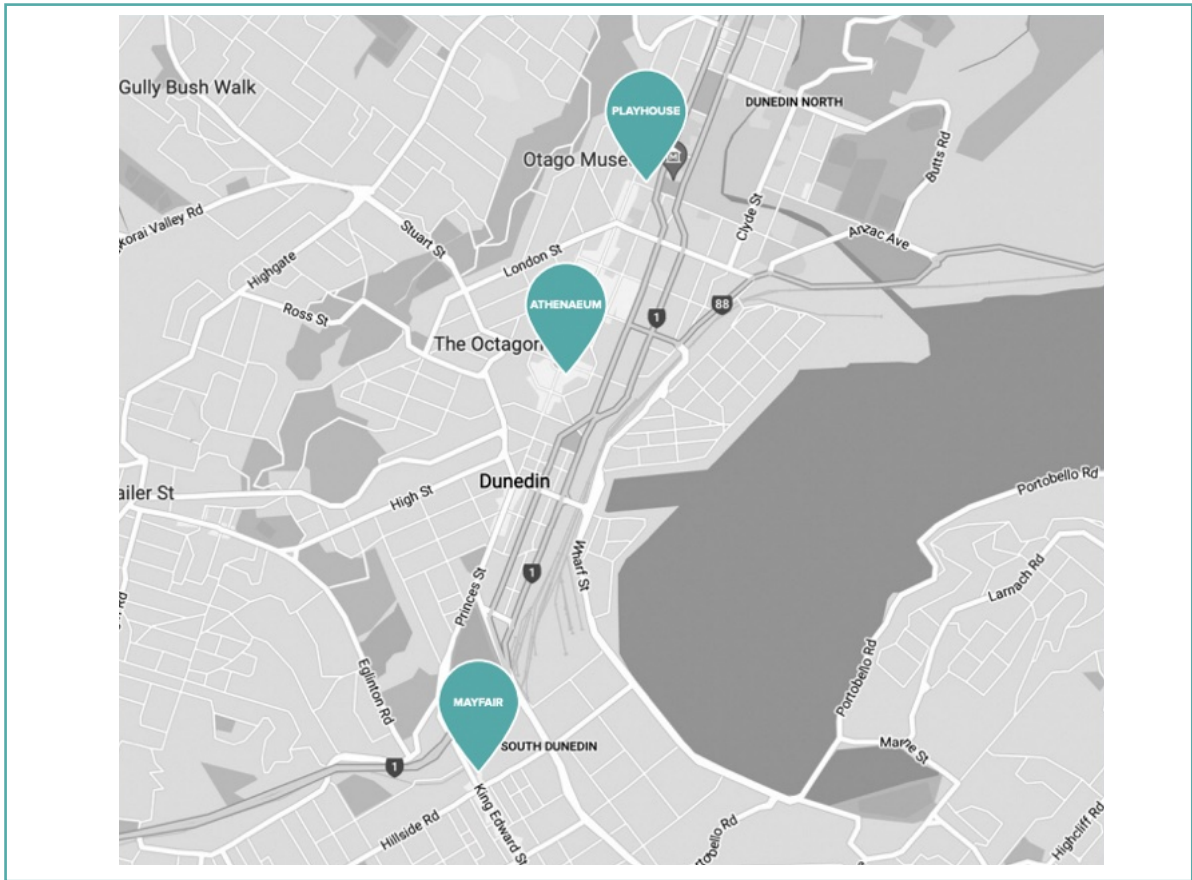
GUIDING PRINCIPLES

We set ourselves some principles as a group when we started this collaboration in 2022. We consider ourselves to be kaitiaki of venues that are important assets to the community. Therefore, we want our venues to be:

- **accessible** – in all senses of the word
- **affordable** – for a wide range of hirers from professional to amateur
- **available** – not exclusively hired by a resident company, but available to be booked by a wide range of organisations and individuals.

¹ All reports are available on our website, www.dunedintheatrenetwork.org.nz

the CONCEPT



	PLAYHOUSE	ATHENAEUM	MAYFAIR
VISION	Character theatre with a focus on children and youth, available to a range of smaller scale and community hires	Creative hub with literary roots. Dual centrepieces of a large live music venue and a black box theatre	Larger theatre for plays and musicals –touring and local, professional and community
PERFORMANCE SPACES	• 120-seat character auditorium	• 225m² / ~120-seat black box • 330m² / 600-pax live music / performance space	• 342-seat auditorium
SOCIAL SPACES	• Large lounge above the auditorium	• Theatre foyer in library space • Café/bar/reception area with commercial kitchen • Coffee shop	• Large social space on upper floor
OTHER SPACES		• Recording studio • Offices	• Workshop, scene dock • Retail shop • Additional building provides further options for future
PRICE TAG	\$5.79 million (2026 start)	\$15.48 million (2026 start) \$16.27 million (2027 start)	\$13.32 million (2026 start) \$15.00 million (2029 start)

CONCEPT DESIGN TEAM



Feldspar are client-side project managers who provide end-to-end service for clients, from project initiation to successful implementation.

Feldspar have co-ordinated the formation of these costed concept designs by leading the team of specialist consultants.



William Fulton and Stewart Ross of TEAM Architects are experienced architects, with heritage and theatre projects a specialty. Previous projects include the Ashburton Events Centre and the Court Theatre Addington.

William and Stewart have provided the concept designs for the Playhouse, Athenaeum and Mayfair.

STEPHEN MCKNIGHT

Stephen McKnight is a well-regarded Dunedin-based structural engineer and developer, who specialises in heritage buildings.

Stephen provided the structural advice and concepts for the Playhouse Theatre.

STEVENSON BROWN LTD

Peter is a successful Dunedin-based structural engineer, having worked in the city for over 30 years. Peter has a long involvement with the Athenaeum project and recently completed a detailed seismic assessment for the building.

In this project, Peter provided the structural advice and concepts for the Athenaeum.



WSP has the largest engineering presence in the Southern Region and is a leading firm within Ōtepoti Dunedin.

WSP provided the structural advice and concepts for the Mayfair Theatre.



Rawlinsons are a leading national professional cost management and quantity surveying practice providing independent and impartial construction cost management, cost engineering and financial administration expertise for over 50 years throughout New Zealand.

Rawlinsons have provided QS services for all three venues.

The following pages set out information about each building and present the concept plans and costings that we have completed this year. This is a summary only; the full detail of the concept designs and QS estimate is available at www.dunedintheatrenetwork.org.nz.

PLAYHOUSE THEATRE

31 Albany Street, Dunedin North

www.playhousetheatre.co.nz

Owned by Dunedin Repertory Society Inc, a fully voluntary society with charitable status.



Our vision is to restore the Playhouse Theatre, retaining the character auditorium while modernising the facility and vastly improving accessibility and the experience and comfort of audiences, performers and crew.

The Children's Theatre would remain a fixture of the Playhouse, and the venue would also be suitable and available for hire for a larger range of other performances.

HISTORY

The building that now houses the Playhouse Theatre was initially an Oddfellows Hall, opened in 1876. The Independent Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF) was a friendly society that provided support and community for migrants to New Zealand. The building hosted the new migrant community to create new social connections and also held gatherings, concerts, balls and fundraisers.

The building was rented and eventually purchased by the Southern Comedy Players in the early 1960s – at that point, the only surviving professional theatre company in New Zealand. Bernard Esquilant and Bill Menlove of the Southern Comedy Players extended the hall to add the stage and backstage area, and built a mezzanine to create the raked auditorium we know today. They named the new theatre the Playhouse.

The Dunedin Repertory Society bought the Playhouse in the early 1970s.

CURRENT CONFIGURATION AND USE

The Playhouse remains largely the same since its theatre conversion in the 1960s. It comprises two buildings: the 1876 former lodge on the street-front, and the 1960s extension at the rear.

The former lodge building is three stories tall. It houses a box office and toilets in the foyer, a 136-seat raked auditorium, a large coffee lounge space and kitchen above, as well as several wardrobe and prop storage areas.

The 1960s extension to the rear houses the stage and the single-level backstage area. Backstage comprises a green room, three dressing rooms and further storage.

Today, the Playhouse is best known for the Dunedin Repertory Society's Children's Theatre, which stages productions each school holidays. These involve about 80-90 local young people annually as cast and crew members, and attract around 5,000 patrons per year (see our Stage 2 report). The Society also presents adults' theatre productions.

In addition, the Playhouse is available as an affordable hire venue for theatre, music, comedy, improv, festival performances and film screenings.

The Playhouse's proximity to the tertiary education precinct offers good synergies for casts, crews and audiences.

HERITAGE STATUS

None, although Conservation Plan assessed the Playhouse as having overall local heritage significance.

BUILDING CONDITION & CHALLENGES

The Playhouse is in moderate to poor condition, evidenced by:

- general ageing – the Playhouse is nearly 150 years old and has had few major upgrades. The roof on the backstage building is no longer water tight and this part of the building is now suffering regular water ingress
- a need for seismic strengthening, though it is not “earthquake prone”
- environmental challenges, i.e. cold and damp
- poor accessibility
- does not meet modern standards for public venues
- limited theatre rigging; old and limited technical equipment.

REMEDIAL WORKS & REFURBISHMENT PLANNING PROGRESS

- ✓ Building condition assessments, including general condition, plumbing, electrical, asbestos survey, roof, structural engineering (funded in part by the DCC / OCT Capability Building Fund) in December 2019.
- ✓ New roof on the former lodge building in February 2021 (funded in part by the Dunedin Heritage Fund).
- ✓ Feasibility Study completed in December 2021, including heritage assessment, site planning sketches, fire and accessibility reports, and significant community consultation (funded by Lotteries Community Facilities Fund).
- ✓ Conservation Plan completed 2023 (funded by Dunedin Heritage Fund).

WHAT MIGHT A REFURBISHED PLAYHOUSE LOOK LIKE?

Concept designs are provided on the following pages. At high level they envisage:

- Demolishing and rebuilding the 1960s extension (the stage and backstage areas). This addresses the poor condition of this building, and enables it to be better configured for modern use.
- Internal reconfiguration of the main street-front building (the former lodge), with the addition of a new accessible foyer entrance, lift and accessible toilets at ground level. The curved staircase, which was highlighted in the Conservation Plan, would be retained.
- The auditorium would remain of a similar configuration, with an estimated capacity of 120 seats. Space for wheelchairs would be accommodated at the rear of the auditorium.
- The top floor would retain its open social space, with a new kitchen able to serve larger functions. A walkway above the stage would give access to the new rear building.

WHAT WOULD IT SUPPORT?

- Children’s Theatre to remain a key focus
- Youth theatre
- Plays in development, smaller-scale plays, festival performances
- Comedy and improv

COST ESTIMATE

\$5,790,000

ALTERNATIVE PLANS

If funding cannot be achieved for the refurbishment outlined above, the Dunedin Repertory Society would make best efforts to make the building generally more comfortable for users for its remaining life.

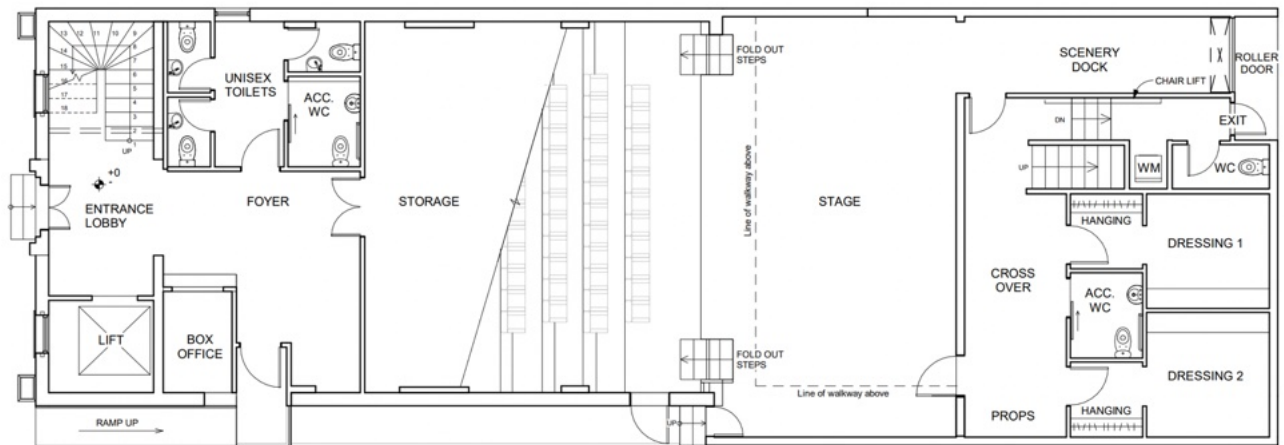
However, the theatre would remain inaccessible to many members of the community and some health and safety concerns would remain unaddressed. The Society anticipates it will become harder to attract volunteers willing to accept the obligations of governing the deteriorating building. It is unfortunately likely that the Children’s Theatre would be wound up and the building closed or sold within 5-10 years.

PLAYHOUSE THEATRE

CONCEPT DESIGN SKETCHES

The sketches below have been developed by TEAM architects, with structural advice from Stephen McKnight. The designs take into account feedback from the Playhouse's Feasibility Study (2021) and Dunedin Theatre Network consultation (2022-2023). The full size concept drawings, structural plans and QS report are available at www.dunedintheatrenetwork.org.nz

GROUND FLOOR



PROPOSED GROUND FLOOR PLAN

ENTRANCE

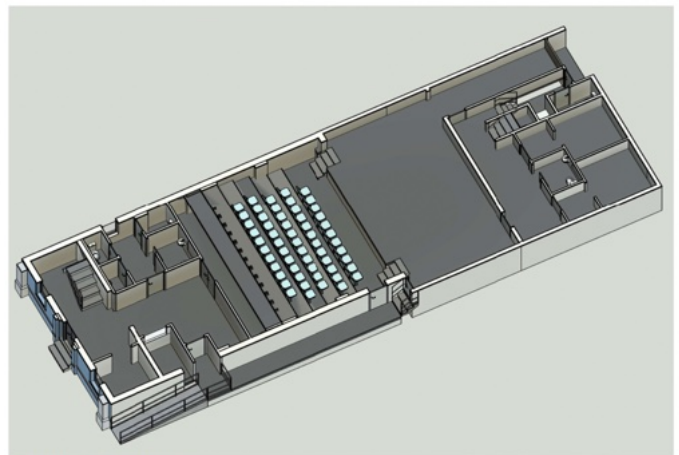
- Dual entrances – existing front door opening to Albany Street, and new accessible entrance from the side
- Existing spiral staircase retained, supplemented with a lift
- New toilets, including accessible toilet
- New small ticket booth
- On the exterior, reinstate some original plaster details, update signage with a canopy, re-paint

STAGE & BACKSTAGE

- Demolish and rebuild backstage building
- New exit door through back wall to neighbouring car park (subject to permission) to allow loading access and fire egress
- Cross-over passage, two dressing rooms, accessible toilet and scenery dock
- The stage area itself would be rebuilt to approximately the same dimensions, with fold-out stairs at each side, and acoustic treatment to the ceiling

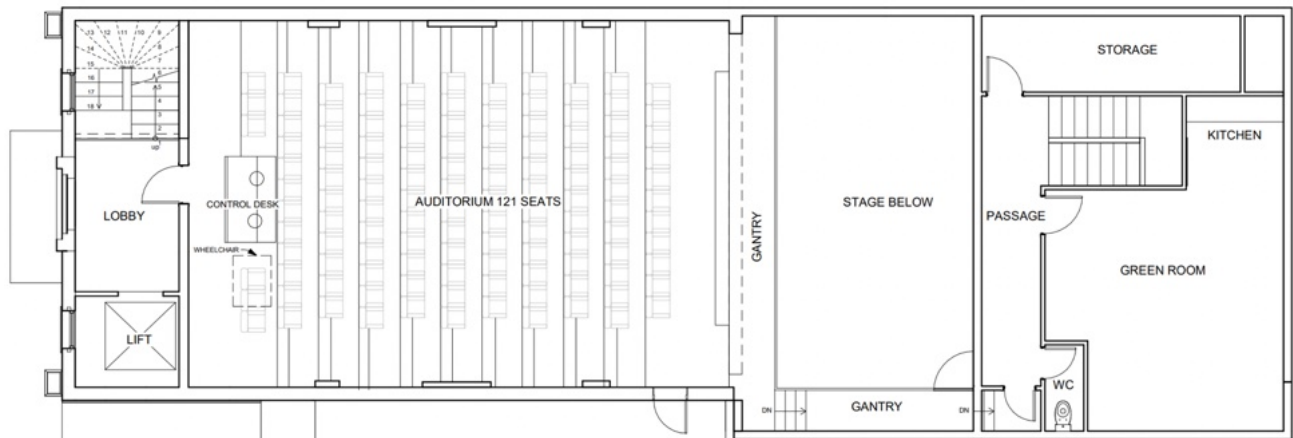


NORTH EAST VIEW



GROUND FLOOR VIEW

MIDDLE LEVEL



PROPOSED THEATRE LEVEL FLOOR PLAN

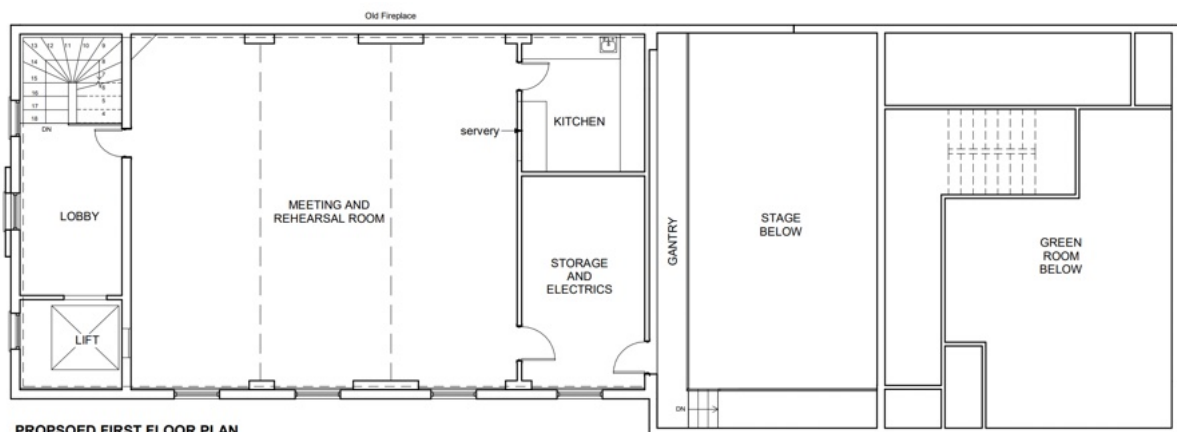
LOBBY & AUDITORIUM

- Lift or stair access to back of the auditorium for audiences. Side door at the front of the auditorium also retained.
- Auditorium retains similar size, shape and character as existing, with more comfortable seating for 121 (current capacity 136).

BACKSTAGE

- Green Room and small kitchenette above dressing rooms
- Access to a gantry for safe crossing above the stage to the upper floor of the front building

TOP LEVEL



PROPOSED FIRST FLOOR PLAN

SOCIAL SPACE AND UPPER BACKSTAGE AREA

- Lift or stair access to coffee bar / social space
- Floor plan similar to existing, retains large light social space
- New gantry over the stage area connects to backstage area

ATHENAEUM

23/24 The Octagon, Dunedin

Owned by Zeal Land Ltd / Lawrie Forbes

Includes spaces currently leased by:

- The New Athenaeum Theatre
<https://newathenaeumtheatre.com>
- The Athenaeum & Mechanics Institute
<https://www.dunedinathenaeum.org.nz/>



Our vision is to create a series of vibrant, welcoming, multi-use spaces in the very heart of Dunedin city.

The venue would contain a showcase of the very best that Ōtepoti's creative industries have to offer, in a building that has cultivated Dunedin's creative talents for over 150 years. The concept echoes performing arts hubs in other cities, including the Wheeler Centre in Melbourne and TAPAC in Auckland, as well as the new Te Atamira arts space in Queenstown.

This idea has been developed as part of a joint feasibility project between Zeal Land and the Committee of the Dunedin Athenaeum and Mechanics' Institute, and is sympathetic to the heritage status of the building itself.

HISTORY

The Dunedin Mechanics' Institute started in 1851, followed swiftly by the Dunedin Athenaeum in 1859. The success of both institutions led to development on their current site in 1870, creating the Dunedin Athenaeum and Mechanics' Institute. The Dunedin Athenaeum Institute is oldest of its type still to be in operation.

The original Mechanics' Institute was one of Dunedin's first public spaces and, as such, the first home of the Otago Provincial Council and the Dunedin Town Board. The Institute also played host to meetings which led to the establishment of the University of Otago.

The new building provided space for various reading rooms and library spaces, and held regular lectures, evening classes and social events or 'conversazione'. Over the years, it has also hosted the Dunedin Mutual Improvement Society, the Otago Cine Club, the Fortune Theatre and the Dunedin Fringe Festival.

CURRENT CONFIGURATION AND USE

The building is approximately 2,000m² across three floors. Current tenants include the Dunedin Athenaeum and Mechanics Institute, the New Athenaeum Theatre, a web development business and the Craic bar.

The significant footprint of the Athenaeum building is rivalled only by the neighbouring Regent Theatre and Burns House in the southern half of the Octagon. Its narrow street presence and tiny blue door belies the expansive and elegant former library within.

Today only a small proportion of the building is used. The Athenaeum Institute now only uses a single library room, while the New Athenaeum Theatre operates a 70-seat performance space to the rear of the building. There are also two hospitality outlets which face onto the Octagon.

HERITAGE STATUS

The Dunedin Athenaeum is a Category 1 registered building. It is also protected in the District Plan and by a covenant with Heritage New Zealand.

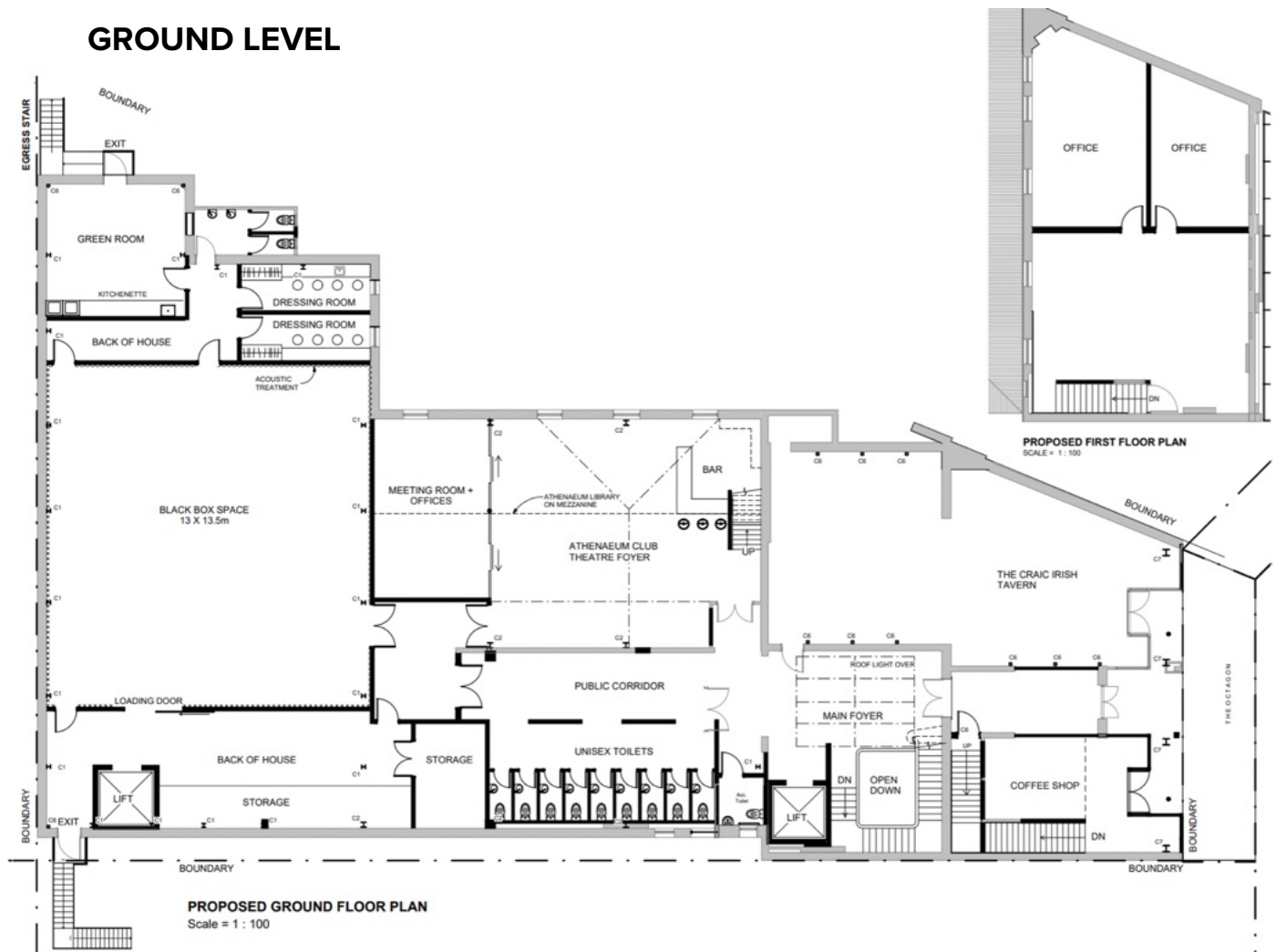
BUILDING CONDITION AND CHALLENGES	• The Athenaeum is 150 years old and has had no significant upgrades. • Seismic strengthening work is required. • The building needs to be brought up to modern standards throughout, including electrical, plumbing, decorative work, etc. • Poor accessibility. At least one lift, potentially two, is required to improve access and circulation. • Delivery access to the front and the rear of the building. Currently, deliveries for the café and bar on the Octagon are through the front door. The driveway that links the building to the rear accessway of the Regent Theatre is for fire egress only. • Fire egress needs to be addressed through design as the building is constrained on three of its four sides. A recent fire report suggested that the building can be used by up to 1000 people if an adequate sprinkler system is installed.
REMEDIAL WORKS & REFURBISHMENT PLANNING ALREADY UNDERTAKEN	✓ Ongoing repair work to roofs, gutters and downpipes throughout ✓ Feasibility study completed June 2021, (funded by the Dunedin Heritage Fund), which included heritage assessment work, site planning sketches, a fire report and community consultation work. ✓ Conservation Plan complete (partly funded by the Dunedin Heritage Fund). ✓ A detailed seismic assessment has placed the building as being 25% of NBS at Importance Level 2. A seismic strengthening solution has already been developed. ✓ A recent asbestos survey has shown there to be minimal contamination.
WHAT MIGHT A REFURBISHED ATHENAEUM LOOK LIKE?	The proposal is to create a multi-use Centre for the Creative Arts, including: • a newly-created Centre for Writing which could be a hub for Dunedin's UNESCO City of Literature activities and a celebration of our literary heritage. The Centre will be integrated with the rest of the Athenaeum, and offer literary events, creative writing courses, writers in residence and literacy programmes for young people, as well as a small library space. • Two performance spaces: ○ A large, flexible basement venue, with space for 600 people standing ○ A new black box venue with space for 120 seats, including modular staging and seating for maximum flexibility • A recording studio, set below ground for great recording quality. • Video recording space. • A cafe/bar at the main entrance, fully integrated with the rest of the building, including reception area / box office, and a small coffee shop facing the Octagon. The development will include a commercial kitchen to provide hospitality options for the whole building. • Substantial back of house spaces. • Flexible meeting and office space.
WHAT WOULD IT SUPPORT?	• Live music (on the basement level) and music recording • Larger-scale theatre, dance or other performances on the basement level • Wide range of medium-size theatre, dance or other performances in the black box on the ground level • Office and administration services
COST ESTIMATE	\$15,480,000 (construction starting early 2026) Or \$16,270,000 (staged approach, with construction starting late 2027)
ALTERNATIVE PLANS	If support for this concept is not able to be found, Zeal Land would either look at an alternative commercial use of the building and/or sell part of the building.

ATHENAEUM

CONCEPT DESIGN SKETCHES

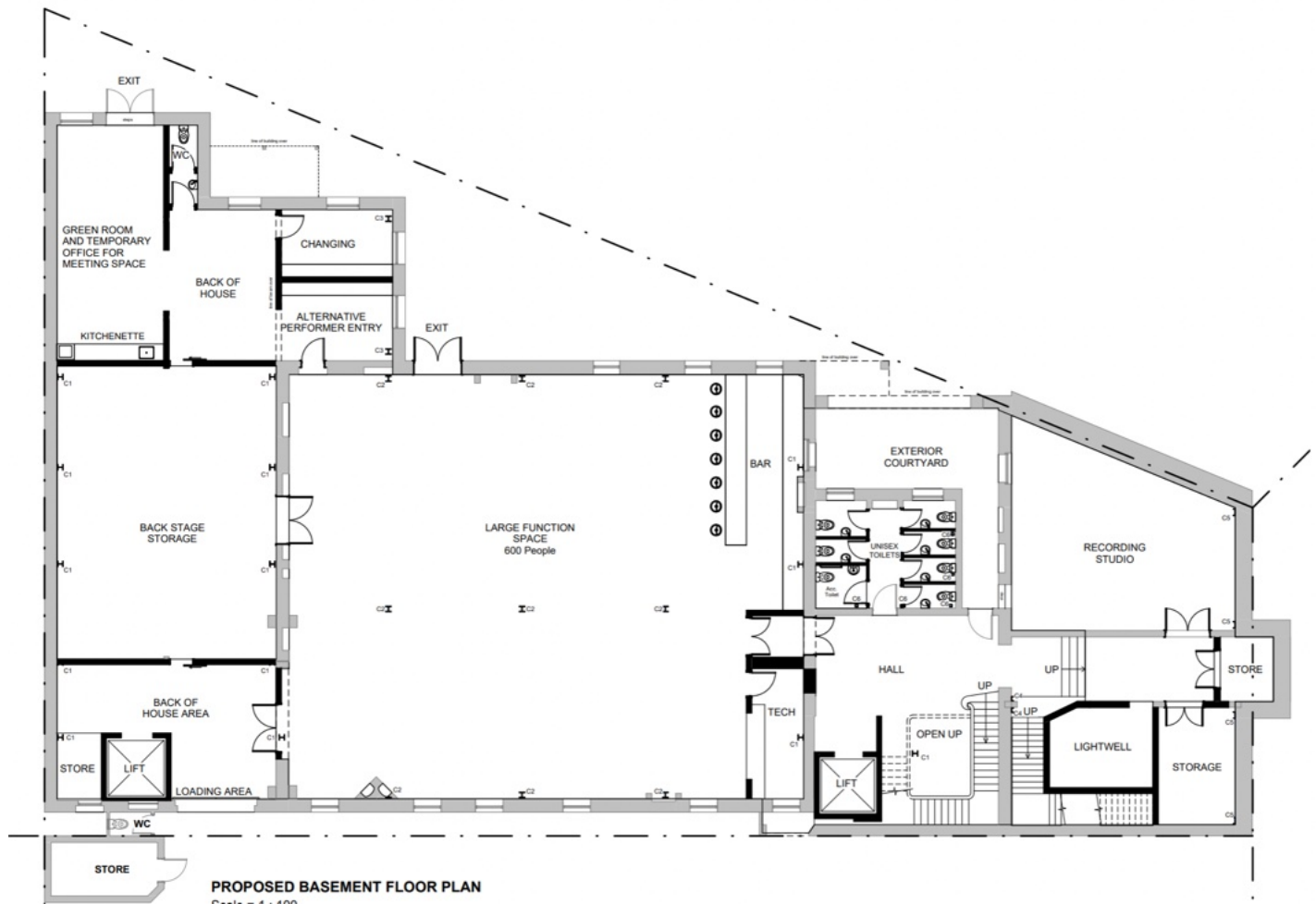
The sketches below have been developed by TEAM architects, with structural advice from Peter Stevenson. The full size concept drawings are available to view at www.dunedintheatrenetwork.org.nz

GROUND LEVEL

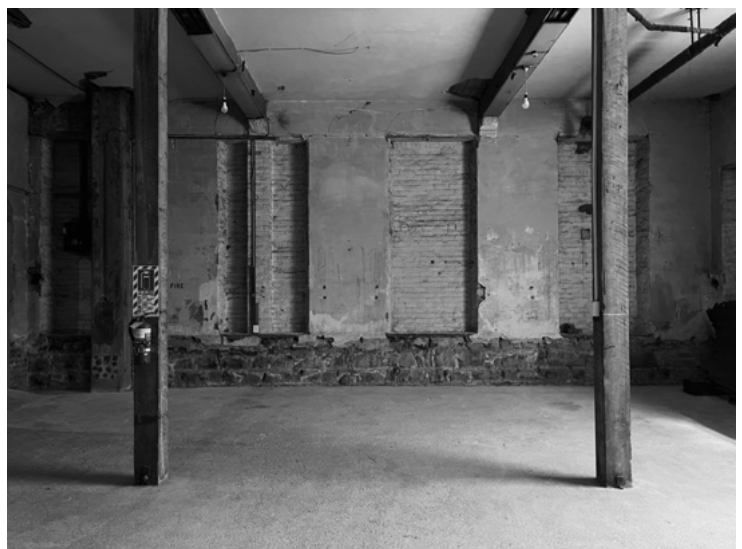
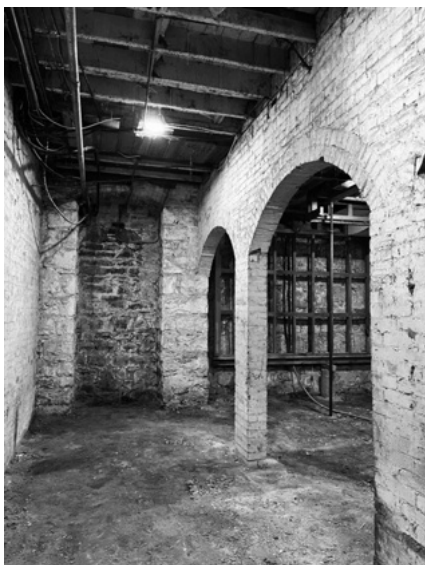


- Remodelled Octagon entry, with a refurbished foyer allowing more light and connection to spaces beyond the foyer. Original staircase to lower level retained, plus a new lift.
- New shopfront to the former Thistle bar space, with space for a small coffee shop and a new additional stairwell from Octagon level to lower level
- Retained stairs to upper floor with refurbished and rentable office and studio spaces
- Retain and reconfigure the Athenaeum Library space as a gathering space with bar facilities for literature and theatre events
- Sound lobby provides access to a new 13m x 13m acoustically treated black box performance space
- New back of house spaces and facilities, including green room, toilets, dressing rooms, storage space and service lift
- Exterior: new verandah and sympathetic redefinition of the façade, bringing colour and identity

BASEMENT LEVEL



- New large function / venue space with foyer and unisex toilet facilities, a bar and a room for technical services, as well as an exterior courtyard
- Behind the large venue space is a backstage area for equipment storage, as well as a green room, toilet, dressing room and back of house space
- Loading dock, service lift and storage area to the western side
- A recording studio with storage space is created below the Octagon facing building



3-D IMAGES



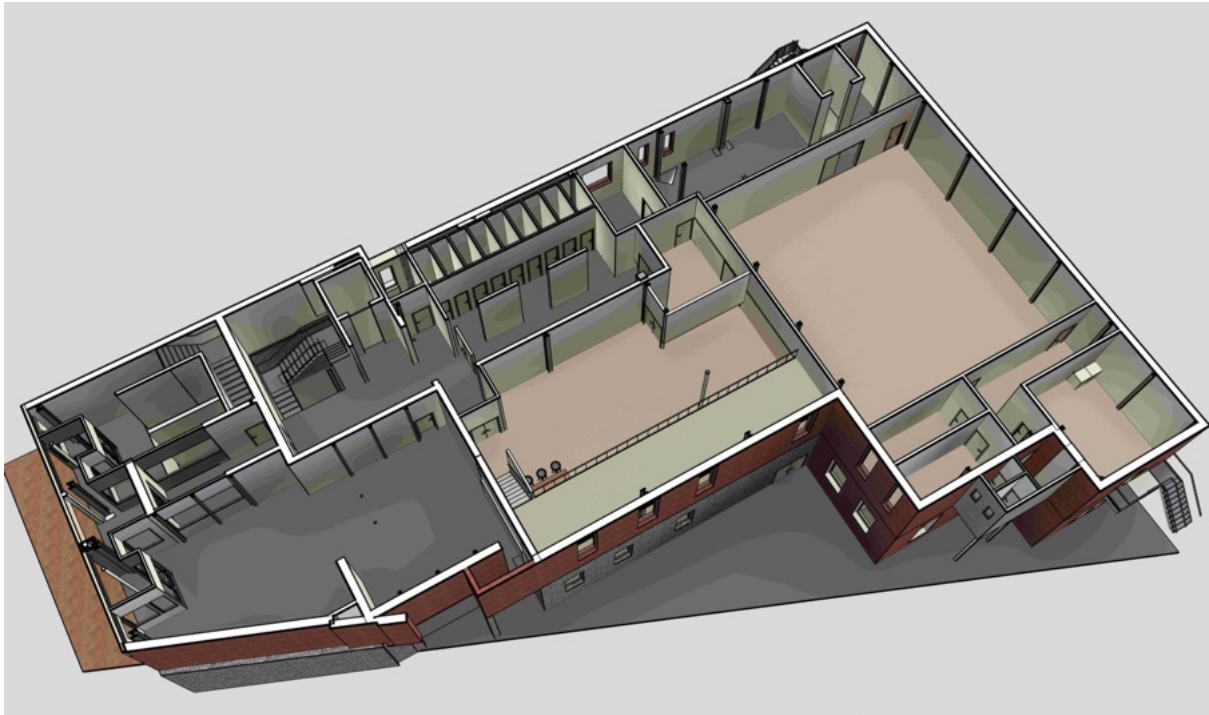
Proposed façade:

Note reinstated masonry and new shopfront to the former Thistle bar. Remodelled entry to the Athenaeum provides a more welcoming space and better connection to the venues and spaces within.



North-east elevation:

This image conveys the scale of the Athenaeum and the potential of the proposed redevelopment.



Ground floor:

At the left-hand edge of this image, we see the three entry points to the building (to the former Thistle bar space, the main Athenaeum entry, and the Craic). Also shown in this image is the updated Athenaeum library space (to serve as a foyer for literary and theatre events), new toilet facilities, and a new 13m x 13m black box / flexible performance space, with supporting back of house spaces.



Lower ground / basement floor:

The main feature of this level is a 600-pax capacity venue with bar and tech spaces, as well as supporting back of house areas. At the Octagon-end of this level (at the left of this image) is a recording studio and storage space. This level also features an exterior courtyard.

MAYFAIR THEATRE

100 King Edward Street, South Dunedin

www.mayfairtheatre.co.nz

Owned by Mayfair Theatre Charitable Trust, a registered and incorporated charity



The Mayfair Theatre envisages a refurbishment that preserves the theatre's mid-size capacity and grand proscenium arch auditorium, modernising it to ensure a great experience for all its users.

The adjoining building is also owned by the Mayfair Theatre Charitable Trust. Two thirds of the building are currently leased, providing important income for the Trust. This proposal includes plans for the remaining third of the building (nearest the supermarket). The leased two thirds could be incorporated into future developments.

HISTORY

The building opened in 1914 as the 840 seat King Edward Picture Theatre. It is one of the oldest, purpose-built movie theatres remaining in New Zealand.

In the mid 1920s, "talkies" became popular and the theatre underwent a modernisation, replacing some of Edwardian features with its current deco style. At this point, the building's name changed to the Mayfair Theatre.

Once television started to take over from the movies, many theatres gradually closed, and so it was with the Mayfair in the mid 1960s.

The Dunedin Opera Company then purchased the building and redeveloped it into a 400 seat live theatre, bringing the circle down to meet a newly constructed orchestra pit, and the original Edwardian proscenium off the back wall to form the stage. Dressing rooms were formed in the old stalls.

In the early 1990s, the adjacent building was purchased to allow for set and wardrobe areas.

In 2014, the Dunedin Opera Company sold the complex to the Mayfair Theatre Charitable Trust.

CURRENT CONFIGURATION AND USE

The 400 seat auditorium has a traditional proscenium arch, and the orchestra pit can be covered with an apron if not required. Below the stage there are two chorus dressing rooms and six smaller dressing rooms.

The building beside the theatre (named Mayfair House) contains a large scenery store at the eastern end, while the remainder of the building is currently leased out.

The theatre is used by a variety of local hirers, including Opera Otago, Otago Scouts, Taieri Musical, Musical Theatre Dunedin, the Dunedin Arts Festival and several schools. Touring performers include singers, comedians, dancers, psychics and actors.

A normal year would see 1,000 performers and crew staging various productions. In the year to June 2024 the Mayfair hosted 13,900 audience members.

HERITAGE STATUS

The Mayfair Theatre is a Category 2 registered building.

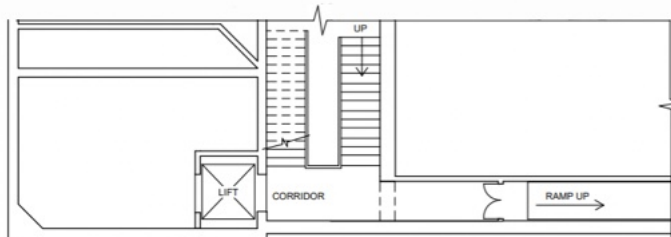
BUILDING CONDITION AND CHALLENGES	• General ageing – the Mayfair is 110 years old and has had few major upgrades • Although it has a high rating in terms of the current code and is not “earthquake prone”, it needs a small amount of seismic strengthening • Requires a new roof • Poor accessibility • New toilet facilities are required for patrons • Poor access for packing in scenery
REMEDIAL WORKS & REFURBISHMENT PLANNING ALREADY UNDERTAKEN	✓ Feasibility study completed by Octa included heritage assessment, fire and accessibility reports ✓ Conservation Plan completed by Origin Consulting ✓ Asbestos survey completed and remediation/removal costs ascertained ✓ Concept sketches for a new foyer layout, a passenger lift and new toilet facilities have been created by Origin Consulting
WHAT MIGHT A REFURBISHED MAYFAIR LOOK LIKE?	The concept designs for the Mayfair aim to refurbish and reconfigure the existing theatre and adjacent workshop space, providing for: • Accessible entry through to the auditorium, and to the social space upstairs • New toilet facilities, including accessible toilets, accessed from the foyer space • Reconfiguring the backstage areas beneath the auditorium to better meet the needs of today’s performances • Creating a new connection between the auditorium building and the adjacent building to the north, providing a workshop and scene store with hoist and stairs to a mezzanine at stage level • Reconfiguring auditorium seating to provide a better audience to performance connection, and adding wheelchair accessible seating • Providing stage-right wing with performer facilities and access to the workshop and scene dock building • The Northern shop is not included in current development plans but has potential to be used as an additional space opening off from the foyer. Mayfair House (the leased parts of the adjoining building) offers future development opportunities.
WHAT WOULD IT SUPPORT?	• Large-scale plays and musicals, both amateur and professional • Some live music performances • Touring productions • Comedy
COST ESTIMATE	\$13,320,000 (construction starting early 2026) Or \$15,000,000 (staged approach, with construction starting early 2030)
ALTERNATIVE PLANS	If funding cannot be achieved for the refurbishment outlined above, the Mayfair Theatre Charitable Trust will continue to operate as long as it can. However, this is likely to become difficult to continue within the next 5 years, at which time the theatre operations would be closed and the building would be sold. The Trust is unlikely to find a purchaser that would operate it as a theatre.

MAYFAIR

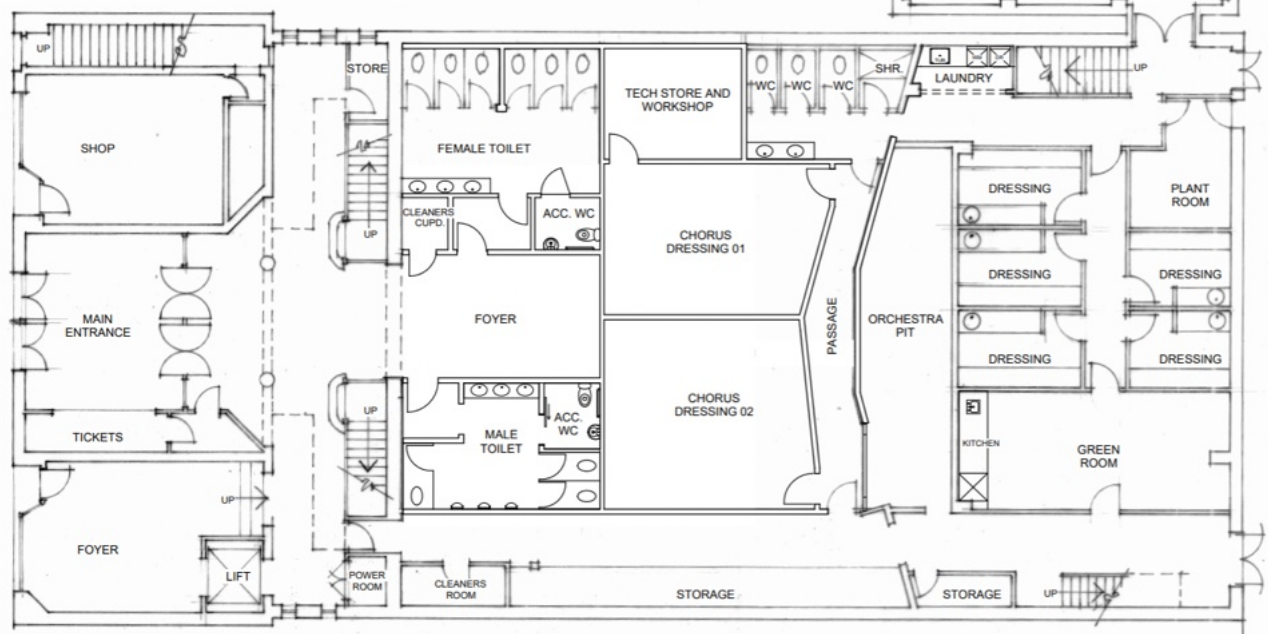
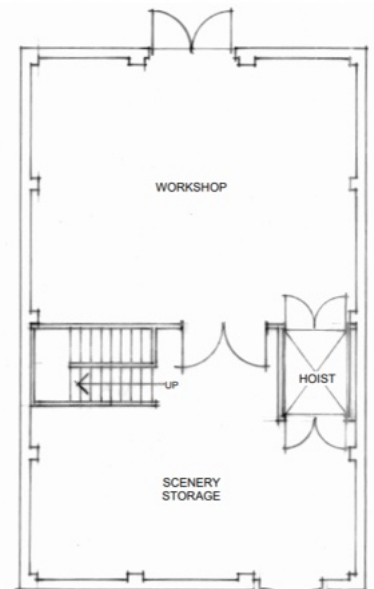
CONCEPT DESIGN SKETCHES

The sketches below have been developed by TEAM architects, with structural advice from WSP Opus. The full size concept drawings are available to view at www.dunedintheatrenetwork.org.nz

GROUND FLOOR



PROPOSED PLAN- INTERMEDIATE FLOOR PLAN
Scale = 1 : 100

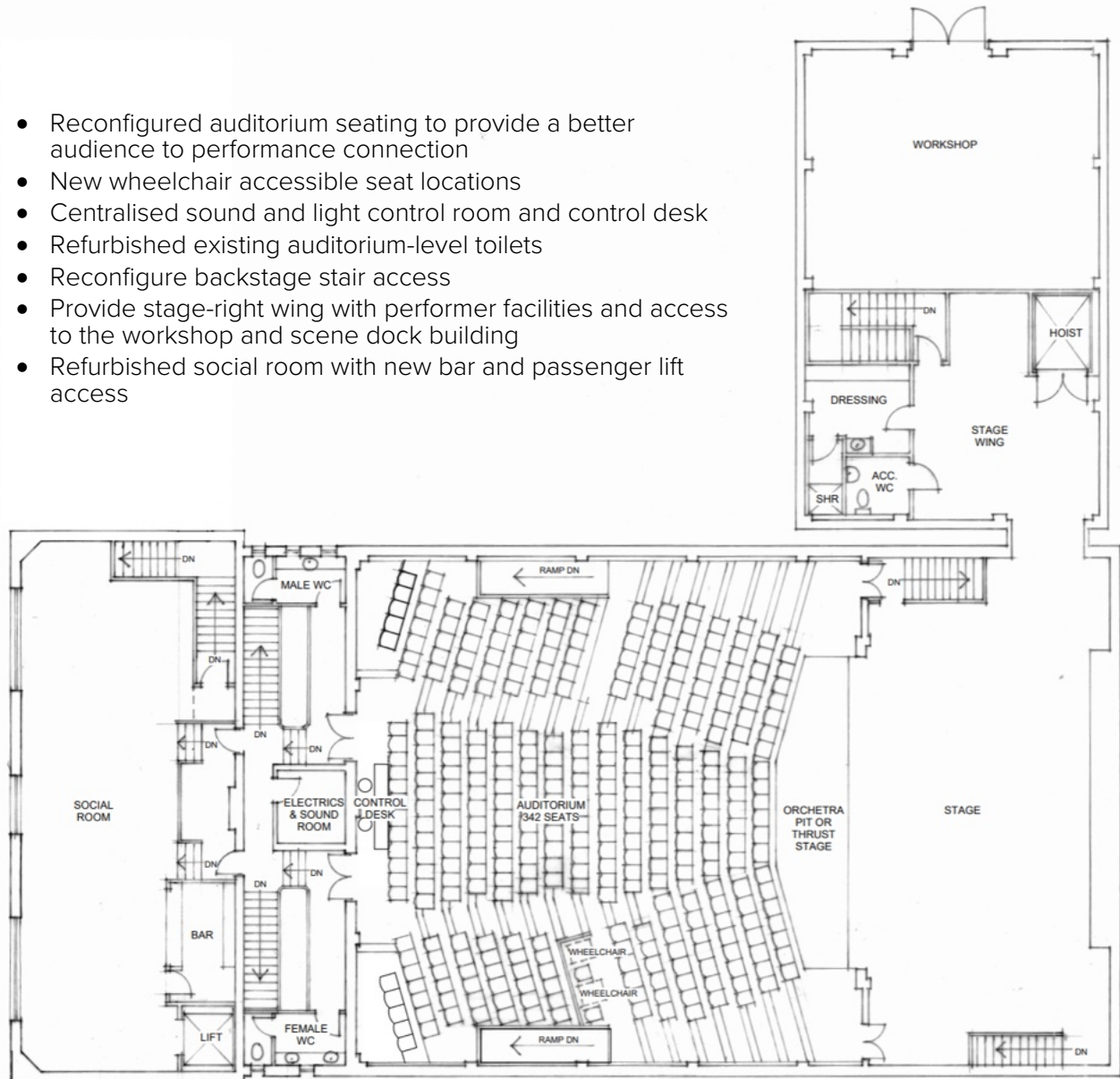


PROPOSED PLAN- GROUND FLOOR PLAN

- Accessible entry and route through to the auditorium, including a passenger lift to an entry foyer providing access to both the auditorium and social room above the main entrance
- New toilet facilities, including accessible toilets, in the area beneath the auditorium (accessed directly from the main entrance)
- Reconfiguring the remaining floor area beneath the auditorium with five small dressing rooms, a green room, 2 larger chorus dressing rooms, back of house toilets and laundry facility
- Space retained for storage, plant, electrical services and a workshop / technician space
- New connection with the adjacent building to the north, providing a workshop and scene store with hoist and stairs to a mezzanine level at stage level

FIRST FLOOR

- Reconfigured auditorium seating to provide a better audience to performance connection
- New wheelchair accessible seat locations
- Centralised sound and light control room and control desk
- Refurbished existing auditorium-level toilets
- Reconfigure backstage stair access
- Provide stage-right wing with performer facilities and access to the workshop and scene dock building
- Refurbished social room with new bar and passenger lift access



PROPOSED PLAN- FIRST FLOOR PLAN

WHY INVEST IN PERFORMING ARTS?

Arts, culture and creativity are central to a thriving city. Investment in arts, culture, and creativity is an investment in people and communities, and their social, cultural, environmental and economic well-being.

Arts and culture help to create vibrant towns and cities that people want to live, work and play in, and tourists want to visit. They foster a sense of belonging and community connection, and support positive physical and mental health outcomes.

As New Zealand's Core Cities research puts it, 'creative industries contribute to the buzz of a city, strengthen brand and identity, and attract talented workers.'

A Massey University-led research project published in November 2024² showed that the live performance sector contributed at least \$17.3 billion in social and economic value to Aotearoa New Zealand in the year to 30 June 2024. It also found that:

- For every \$1 spent on live performance, \$3.20 is returned in benefits to the wider community
- Audience spending motivated by live performance contributes 1.4% to Aotearoa's Gross Domestic Product (GDP)
- Over 2.3 million people attended at least one live performance between July 2023 and June 2024.
- Attending live performance provides an immediate boost to life satisfaction and contributes to a lasting improvement in overall wellbeing.

We believe arts and culture need the same support as other community infrastructure such as transport and schools – particularly in a UNESCO City of Literature.



² Carter, D., Hoad, C., Muller, P., Tappenden, A., Wilson, J., & Wilson, O. (2024). [Measuring and Articulating the Value of Live Performance in Aotearoa](#). Massey University.

OPERATING MODEL

If the Playhouse, Athenaeum and Mayfair were to be refurbished, the operation of the three venues would need to look quite different from today.

We anticipate refurbishment would result in significantly more hire usage, which would need to be managed capably and professionally.

All three venue owners acknowledge that it will make sense to share resources across the three venues to help them operate as efficiently as possible, and to give hirers and audiences a great experience.

At its lightest and lowest cost, this might be a single staff member managing the calendars and hire bookings for all three venues, and maintaining a database of audience members to engage with directly about events. This could be supplemented with a pool of technicians, ushers and fire wardens – volunteer or professional – called in on a casual basis to service hires. This could include collaboration with Otago Polytechnic the University of Otago.

At a more comprehensive level, an operating model could include ticketing and/or marketing support, or other services.

The costs of the operating model would depend on the level of service the city would like to offer hirers, and whether we could collaborate with other venue managers for efficiency.

Hire revenue would go at least some way to meeting operating costs, although this may need to be supplemented annually with external funding (as is the case currently with the Mayfair, for example) – noting our principle that our venues need to remain affordable for a wide range of hirers.

We would like to work on operational costings further with Council, at the next stage of this concept.

Venue owners can confirm we're committed to working together – and potentially with other venues or venue managers – to find the solution that offers the best value for owners, hirers and audiences.

OWNERSHIP MODEL

Some members of the community are curious as to how a partnership project would work, given our three venues are not owned by Dunedin City Council.

We don't believe this is an insurmountable issue. The Playhouse and Mayfair Theatres are owned by charitable organisations and governed in accordance with objectives of community benefit. The Athenaeum is in private ownership, and Zeal Land is pursuing this project primarily with a community focus, rather than a purely commercial objective.

As venue owners, we are open to discussions about how external investment in our venues can be protected to ensure funders' objectives are achieved and appropriately governed over the long term.

COSTS & FUNDING

The table below sets out the QS estimates of the capital costs of the redevelopment concepts presented in this report. The full detail of these estimates and their inclusions / exclusions is available at www.dunedintheatrenetwork.org.nz.

The table sets out two cost options: firstly, a scenario in which all three projects progress concurrently, with design work through 2025 and construction starting in early 2026. The second scenario envisages staging the three projects sequentially (refer the chart below):

CAPITAL COST ESTIMATE BY PROJECT

PROJECT	REDEVELOPMENT COSTS (\$M)	
	Concurrent projects, construction starting early 2026	Staged approach
Stage 1: Playhouse	5.790	5.790 Construction starting early 2026
Stage 2: Athenaeum	15.480	16.270 Construction starting late 2027
Stage 3: Mayfair	13.320	15.000 Construction starting early 2030
TOTAL	34.590	36.920

Potential staged approach sequencing:

Building	2025				2026				2027				2028				2029				2030				2031			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Playhouse																												
Athenaeum																												
Mayfair																												

It's important to note these QS estimates are based on **concept designs**, not detailed designs, so although our QS has allowed for contingencies, there is still scope for some cost movement as plans move through the detailed design process.

FUNDING

The costs outlined above exceed what each venue owner is able to fund from their own reserves.

Each owner is able to access external funding to varying degrees. As registered charitable organisations, the Dunedin Repertory Society and the Mayfair Theatre Charitable Trust are able to apply for philanthropic, community and Lottery funding. Zeal Land has access to private funding. All three venues are also eligible to apply to various heritage building funds.

We have each had initial engagement with several of those sources of funding, as well as an independent fundraising consultant.

We have heard a consistent message that our refurbishment projects align well with funders' objectives and are of interest to them, but that local authority funding is critical.

Jenni Giblin (owner and director of Fundraising HQ) shared her opinion that without DCC funding, our facilities would struggle to secure the required funds. However, if DCC were to contribute, then each facility has a very good chance of securing the remaining funds.

We would therefore like to work with Council on the possibility of the three refurbishment projects being part-funded by Council as a cornerstone investor, with entities raising remaining funding from other sources. This approach could enable Council to make an investment that will leverage a significant further sum of external funds, achieving social and economic benefit for the city.



NEXT STEPS

Since our previous report in 2023, several other ideas for theatre venues in Dunedin have been put forward. We welcome these new ideas, and the growth in the debate over the past 18 months – this is all about moving the city’s performing arts venue discussion forward, after all!

We’re committed to continued constructive discussions about how best to meet the needs of the city.

For us, this work has been about highlighting the plight of our buildings and sharing the potential they offer the city, if the city is of a mind to invest in them.

We’re excited to present the final piece of this project and hope it is of assistance to Council and the community in making a decision about the future of the city’s performing arts venues.



