

Let's Buy the Amulet

Volunteers' Meeting Notes

31 January 2024

The meeting discussed where the project is to date and asked for active engagement from the audience to find out what they felt were the issues to address and activities that could be successful in meeting those needs. Volunteers also came forward to offer their help for different aspects of the project.

Group discussion: What issues / needs would this project address to make it successful and sustainable.

In order to succeed, this plan needs to address:

- deprivation in Shepton and surrounding areas
- Lack of opportunities for learning, training and work for young people
- Low social pride
- Lack of places to put on events especially larger ones
- Increase in mental health issues particularly in younger people
- Nowhere for the whole community to meet and hold larger events
- community groups have little if no access to affordable space
- Lack of focus for regeneration in the centre of town
- Some older people are isolated
- The history of Shepton is not celebrated anywhere
- Lack of rehearsal space
- Lack of shared working space
- The town and in particular the centre is in need of economic regeneration
- Lack of wedding venue

Structure of ownership by Martin Berkeley

The current plan is to create a Charitable Community Benefit Society which is a community business that is owned and run by its members with the dedicated purpose of serving the community. The aim would be to make enough money to be financially sustainable with all profit being reinvested into the project or local community. People would buy shares to become members, with each person only having one vote no matter how much they invest.

You can read more about community benefit societies here:

<https://www.uk.coop/resources/community-shares-handbook/2-society-legislation/21-bona-fide-co-operative-societies/211>

Our next step is to use some of the funding we have been awarded to take professional advice and set up this organisation.

Russell Hepplewhite Introduction

Russell is a music composer who has been looking for a theatre to work with and attended the meeting.

He has worked with music for children and deprived communities, composed musicals, opera and other pieces. He has also been working with the Theatre Trust. His motivation for involvement in this project is to create a community music/ theatre space, possibly with its own company. This is one of several theatre/ music space restoration /development projects across the UK. The Amulet has much potential and is most likely to succeed.

He described his ideas:

- It must be something that puts Shepton on the map and gets people into the building as frequently as possible.
- Create a 'Festival' theatre- 2 festivals a year to fit with school holidays
- Footfall needs to be maintained throughout the year. Outside of festivals, the building must be regularly used by groups, businesses and a programme of events developed.
- A plan should be developed that focuses on sustainability
- Advertising and developing a mailing list is essential
- There are local celebrities that should be engaged e.g. local theatrical producer
- Once up and running it may be possible to apply for Arts Council Funding e.g. to set up the 'Amulet Company'
- Theatres do not make a lot of money however it would impact on the regeneration of local nightlife and the economic benefits that follow

Group discussion: What are all the ways we could use the building to solve the identified issues and who is each use targeted at- local (l), regional (r) or national (n) audience

- Wedding venue with different rates for local and others (l, r)
- Business events (l, r, n)
- Pop up events e.g. creative markets (l, r)
- Weekly covered market (l, r)
- Support for embryonic businesses (l)
- Competitive sports events e.g. UFC fight clubs, table tennis (l, r, n)
- Theatre (l, r, n)
- Leisure and wellbeing classes (l)
- Cinema club (l, r)
- Youth club/ events (l)
- Artist studio space (l)
- Rehearsal rooms – including for Glastonbury performers (l, r, n)
- Exhibition space for national/ regional touring exhibitions (l, r, n)
- Museum / space to highlight the history of Shepton (l, r, n)
- Meeting place for local organisations (l)
- Co-working spaces (l, r)
- Tourist information (l, r, n)
- Performance space (l, r, n)
- Food bank and community fridge (l)
- Lantern festival workshops (l, r)
- Swap shop/ library of things (l)
- Community radio (l)
- Recording studios (l, r, n)
- Gaming events (l, r, n)

Additional thoughts:

- Use of the building must be maximised to make this successful
- The ideas above need to be refined so that the strategic plan and bid for funding is coherent. The bid needs to tell a story
- Is this going to be a community space or theatre? It needs to work and have a focus
- This needs to be part of a strategy for the town
- This must make enough money to remain sustainable
- There needs to be collaboration with other venues in the town so that it provides a different offer and does not compete with existing
- Consider partnerships regionally and nationally
- The space must remain flexible so that we get the maximum out of it and can generate income
- Skills development and learning needs to be part of our thinking, perhaps apprenticeships, opportunities to help rebuild, manage and maintain the building, hospitality and management
- How do we engage young people in this project
- Can we have a competition to get children to design fliers where appropriate
- Accessibility must be in the plans
- How do we minimise nuisance e.g. noise to locals
- Parking will be needed for events especially attracting people from out of town - need to make sure they are not redeveloped
- Commercial services e.g. banking could be provided on specific days
- Offer Amulet visits for those interested (to discuss with owner)

The process of applying for funding - Laura Miller

To access the large pot of funding we need from the government's Community Ownership Fund we have to take two steps backwards and apply for funding from the Theatre Trust and Architectural Heritage Funds to give us the money we need to engage with the experts to assist us with the large COF bid. As we have heard both organisations are supportive of this project and have already sent staff to inspect the building, we have also had several zoom calls to discuss a bid and how we might approach funding. We will know about funding from AHF mid to end February and TT mid to end April, which means we have to approach the pieces of work that need doing in a logical order to put us in the best position to write the very long and complex COF bid.

Learning from other places – Martin Berkeley

A series of visits (with limited numbers) will be set up to relevant examples of other projects e.g. The Red Brick Building in Glastonbury, Wiltshire Music Centre Bradford –on – Avon, Curzon Cinema, Cedar Hall, the Tobacco Factory, Strode Theatre, New Oriel Hall Bath

Visiting groups will provide short presentations back to the next meeting

Call for volunteers to do the following or provide their expertise, for example:

- Bid writing experience

- Collect memorabilia related to the Amulet – this will be developed into a booklet or document to support the bid
- Search and pull together information from other examples
- Talk to different communities in Shepton to hear their views and ideas
- Skills in engaging young people
- Business planning skills
- Theatre expertise
- Marketing
- Quantity surveying
- Building/ renovation expertise
- Other practical skills

There will be additional skills that will be useful not listed above. At the end of the meeting, people offered the following skills:

- Venue research
- music/ theatre production
- help with talking research
- Business planning
- project management
- administration
- Help at the Amulet open day
- experience of book festivals
- contacts in the publishing industry
- Technical Theatre and Stage Management
- Organisational skills
- spreading the word
- managing a team
- Business planning
- fundraising
- Accountancy
- financial business modelling
- property
- Organisational skills
- stakeholder management
- Administration
- production of surveys
- herding cats!
- Collating past stories
- help with tours (other places plus Amulet)
- management experience
- Marketing words/ checking/ layout/ interviewing
- Youth theatre
- media and publicity
- Digital marketing
- event production
- Film making
- General support

- Theatre operations
- Bid production
- Finding young people's voices

The next meeting will be at 7pm on Thursday 22/2/24 venue tbc. We will aim to have a monthly public meeting.